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Mutual Adaptation of International Students and Academics for the Sustainable Development of International Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study that explores how international students from China and Vietnam in different disciplines in Australian higher education interpret and adapt to disciplinary requirements and how academics respond to the diverse needs of international students. The study employed a trans-disciplinary framework for interpreting students' and lecturers' practices within institutional structures. This framework has been developed by infusing a modified version of Lillis' (2001) heuristic for exploring students' meaning making with positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). A prominent finding of the study indicates the emergence of three main forms of adaptation, committed adaptation, face-value adaptation and hybrid adaptation (my prosed terms), that the students employed to gain access to their disciplinary practices. The findings of the study give insights into ways that a dialogical pedagogic model for mutual adaptation can be developed between international students and academics. The aim is to enhance the education of international students in this increasingly globalized environment. The model offers concrete steps towards developing reciprocal adaptation of international students and staff and implementing cultural diversity practices within the overarching institutional realities of the university.

Keywords: international students, academic requirements, adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Australia is one of the three leading countries in terms of exporting education services internationally. The number of international student enrolments in Australian education in 2007 was 455,185, which represented around 25% of the total student population (Australian Education International, 2008). Education is a fast-growing economic business for Australia which has overtaken tourism and is currently Australia's largest services export and the country's third top export overall, only behind coal and iron ore. Spending by international students contributed around AUS12.5 billion to the national economy in 2007. Within the competitive environment of the current education export market, a number of strategic policies and considerable marketing efforts have been focusing on increasing the proportion of international students in Australian universities. Consequently, exploring ways to effectively respond to the academic, social and financial needs of international students from a diverse range of countries has become a growing focus for Australian higher education. This is particularly important due to the increasing dependence of Australian tertiary institutions on international students' tuition fees, which is largely driven by the decrease in direct funding from the Commonwealth Government. This is more critical given the fact that potential international students have an increasing number of options for their higher education destinations. Apart from the options of study in other English-speaking countries, the major threats to the current Australian share of international student market are coming from some Asian countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. This is evidenced in the campaigns of these countries to optimize their policies of internationalizing higher education and become competitive Asian education providers in attracting international students, who may currently see Australian institutions as their best option. On top of this, other Asian countries such as China and South Korea have also focused more on developing their own higher education sector, which has the potential to stem the flow of students from these countries seeking to study overseas. So, a more and more competitive worldwide market is developing and Australian

tertiary institutions need to understand where they are now and how best to respond to those challenges.

Drawing on students' writing, student and lecturer interviews, and the twin constructs of Lillis' (2001) heuristic and positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) for data analysis, this study explores how international students from China and Vietnam in different disciplines in Australian higher education interpret and adapt to disciplinary requirements and how academics accommodate the diverse needs of international students. This study documents the complexities and multi-layered nature of the adaptation process that the students go through in their efforts to mediate their academic writing, a key practice in higher education. The analysis of the international students' practices shows the emergence of three main types of adaptation that individual students make in their process of participating in disciplinary practices. These are described in this study as: *committed adaptation, surface adaptation* and *hybrid adaptation*. It will be argued in this paper that reciprocal adaptation from international students and academic staff rather than the onus of adaptation being placed on international students is paramount to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the sustainable development of international education. The findings of the study give insights into ways that a dialogical pedagogic model for mutual adaptation can be developed between international students and academics. The model offers concrete steps towards developing reciprocal adaptation of international students and staff, which has been argued to be increasingly important to the sustainable development of international education.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

It has been argued that the rapid expansion in the international student cohort in Australia has seen little change in higher education teaching and learning (Marginson, 2002; Webb, 2005; Marginson, 2007). Although the Australian education export industry has been successful in business methods and 'economic terms' in general, there seems to be less scope for the development of the relevant academic and research capacities in response to the changing student population and demands in the global context (Marginson, 2007). In practice, many institutions appear to be struggling with internationalizing their curriculum (Webb, 2005). At the same time, the general decrease in the direct government funding for higher education has resulted in an increased ratio of staff to students, increased teaching loads and larger tutorials and lectures, thus making it even more difficult to respond to unfamiliar and diverse student characteristics. Academics seem to be under more pressure to meet the needs of international students, yet many are unclear about how to do this. In particular, many lecturers are dealing with the dilemmas of how to address international students' needs while at the same time keeping up with what they perceive to be institutional academic expectations and standards (Ryan & Carroll, 2005).

Problems facing international students in higher education in English-speaking countries have often been assumed to be largely related to language proficiency levels and to cultural differences (Samuelowicz 1987; Elsey 1990; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas 2000; Lacina 2002; Holmes 2004; Parks & Raymond 2004; Andrade 2006). Too often, international students have been seen only from a 'deficit' frame. This frame tends to locate international students' challenges as emerging exclusively from their cultural backgrounds and consider their different ways of constructing knowledge as being problematic in the English medium institutional context. There has been extensive research into international students' learning styles, language proficiency, challenges and expectations. Nevertheless, little has been documented about what is actually involved in the process or processes that these students must undergo to adapt to the academic culture of the disciplines they are studying.

An emergent stream of literature has problematized the common stereotypes about the cultural learning styles and experiences of Asian students (see, for example, Biggs 1997; Rizvi 2000; Doherty & Singh 2005; Kettle 2005; Koehne 2005). Highlighted in these studies is the need to avoid simply attributing learning styles to cultural backgrounds. Instead, these studies suggest the significance of exploring more adequately the complexities in students' processes of unpacking, interpreting and

adapting to various disciplinary practices. This study attempts to contribute to this growing area of knowledge. It acknowledges that international students bring distinctive cultural resources and literacy backgrounds with them into their courses in Australia. It also highlights the complex factors which affect how international students exercise personal agency in mediating academic writing and gaining access to their disciplinary discourse. By focusing on 'personal agency' of international students, the study offers a change from the dominant approaches on 'problems', plagiarism and policing of standards often circulating about international students. The study also explores the possibility for reciprocal adaptation, where international students adapt to academic requirements and academics attempt to modify their teaching approaches in response to the changing needs of the relevant student population for sustainable academic development.

Academic writing is a key practice in higher education and plays a critical role in students' academic success. Hence, capturing international students' practices in participating in disciplinary written discourse has become an area of increasing significance. This emerging research stream moves beyond past research which emphasized on exploring the writing problems international students experienced. It has focused more on viewing international students as individuals attempting to enter a community of practice and become fully fledged members of their discipline area. As a result, issues concerning the cultural values and disciplinary beliefs surrounding student writing are now being taken into account in an increasing number of studies (Connor 1996; Ferguson 1997; Phan 2001; Morrison, Merrick, Higgs, & Le Mactais 2005). Despite these developments, students' agency and personal factors, which tend to represent what may lie behind their attempts to mediate their writing and adapt to academic expectations, remain largely invisible across various studies on student writing at the tertiary level. Also, the comparison of international students' experiences of disciplinary writing in high-stakes areas, such as the assessment for a Masters degree, and academic staff expectations, is potentially critical. Insights into this aspect of the academic life of international students may contribute to working out ways to facilitate students' participation in higher education through disciplinary writing. Regrettably, this issue has been largely unexplored in past studies. The study reported in this paper attempts to respond to these gaps in the literature.

Reciprocal learning development is related to the ways students attempt to accommodate institutional requirements and the ways academic staff adapt their teaching to assist international students in their participation in the disciplinary community. Research, in recent times, has focused on how teachers mediated between different sensibilities in terms of culture, politics and religion in their pedagogic practices of teaching international students (Singh & Doherty 2002). The need for academics to adapt their teaching practices is therefore in part rooted in the emergent needs of diverse student population. Their adaptation is also viewed to be embedded in the reflective teaching practice. This practice involves academics in continuous critical evaluation, modification and transformation of their own teaching (Prescott & Hellsten 2005:91). As suggested by Ryan (2000:5), 'Universities need to respond to the needs of international students by opening not just their doors for them, but once in, making sure that the curriculum is also accessible'. She argues that amongst a variety of factors, understandings of the learners and the learning context help to make the curriculum accessible to students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Central to staff awareness of international students as learners in the new discourse community is their understanding of prior learning experience of international students, including the writing conventions associated with their prior learning. This also links to the understanding of alternative approaches and interpretations of academic traditions (Cortazzi & Jin 1997). The understanding of differences from international learners, as Ryan (2000:5) argues, should aim not only to 'tolerate' differences but to 'respond positively' to them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study reported here focuses on Chinese and Vietnamese international students in Education and Economics due to a number of reasons. China is one of the leading sources of international students for Australian institutions (AEI 2008). At the university where this was conducted, international students from China comprise the largest proportion of international students. In addition, recent

analysis has revealed that at this university, there has been an emerging postgraduate student growth from Vietnam. Chinese and Vietnamese students from two disciplines, Economics and Education, were selected for the study. Economics is the biggest faculty and it has the largest enrolment of international students at this Australian university. Education is one of the disciplines in the university, which has recently seen a rising trend in the international student cohort.

The students in this study were required to meet the cut-off IELTS score of 7.0 and 6.5 in order to gain the entry to their Master course in Education and Economics respectively. These seven students have been selected because they meet the research criteria of this study. They are Chinese and Vietnamese students enrolled in Masters of Education or Economics. They volunteered to participate in the study and were willing to reflect on their experiences of writing their first text at the Australian university as well as on how they participated in disciplinary writing as they progressed through the course six months later. The lecturer participants selected are those who lectured in the disciplines in which the student participants were enrolled and who volunteered to participate in the study. The data was a combination of students' assignments, the lecturers' comments on these students' texts, two rounds of interview with the students and two rounds of interviews with the lecturers. All respondents presented in this study have been given pseudonyms.

The study reported in this paper draws on a trans-disciplinary framework (Figure 1 below) for exploring students' adaptation and lecturers' views on student practices. The investigation framework drew on two interpretive tools, a modified version of Lillis' (2001) heuristic for exploring student meaning making and positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove 1999). The integration of these two analytic models represents a trans-disciplinary approach for social analysis of student writing practices, lecturers' views and discourse. Lillis' (2001) heuristic offers insights into the real accounts of the students as the 'insiders' or 'producers' of their own texts and for uncovering students' individual reasons and intentions as their hidden logics in the construction of texts. This framework enables an exploration of not only the reasons underpinning their specific ways of writing but also their potential choices in constructing disciplinary knowledge, which Lillis (2001:51) refers to as "what the individual student-writers might want to mean in a transformed socio-discursive space".

Positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove 1999) has been used to enrich Lillis' model for the analysis of students' voices within institutional context and how they may shift their perceptions of academic writing as they progress through their courses. Positioning theory is concerned with aspects of dominant discourse rules and conventions, rights, duties and obligations in discursive practices (Harré & van Langenhove 1999). This theory highlights students' positions within the institutional structures and how they may reposition their ways of academic writing over a period of time. It thus allows an exploration of how the Chinese and Vietnamese students exercise personal agency through making choices among different ways of meaning making, accepting, accommodating or rejecting dominant conventions within the institutional realities of the university. Positioning theory is also adopted to interpret students' writing and the institutional practices from the lecturers' perspectives, which are not addressed by Lillis' (2001) *talk around text*, thereby adding an important layer to the analysis.
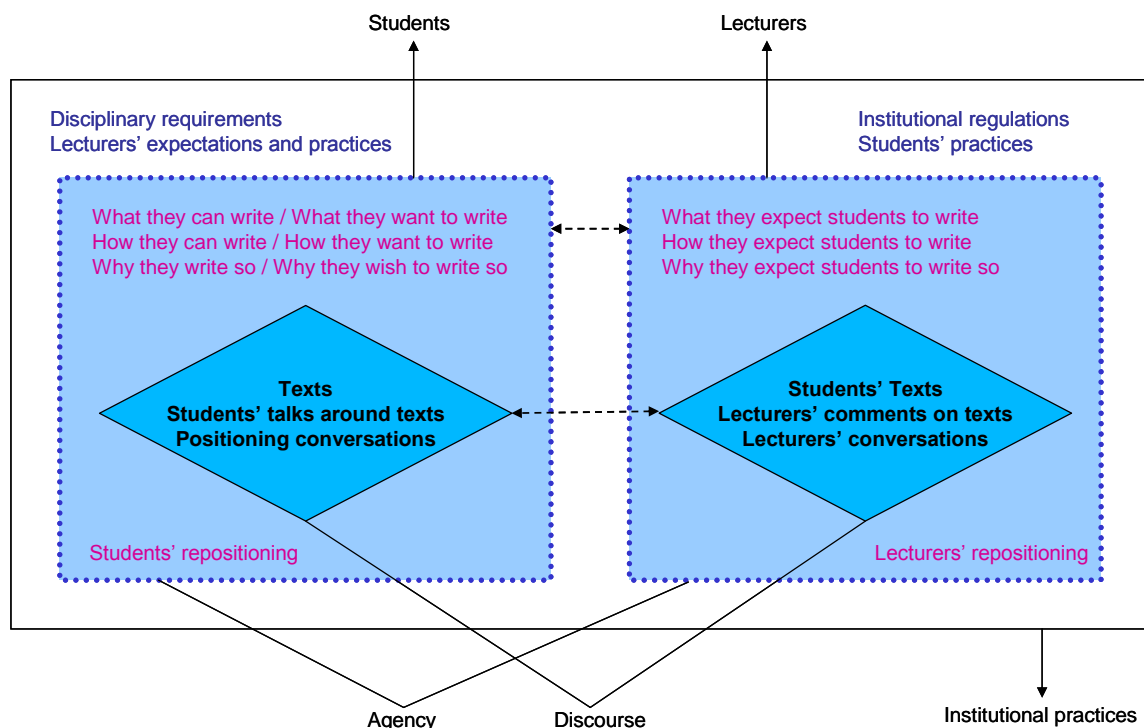
Students   **Lecturers**

Disciplinary requirements
Lecturers' expectations and practices

Institutional regulations
Students' practices

What they can write / What they want to write
How they can write / How they want to write
Why they write so / Why they wish to write so

What they expect students to write
How they expect students to write
Why they expect students to write so

Texts
Students' talks around texts
Positioning conversations

Students' Texts
Lecturers' comments on texts
Lecturers' conversations

Students' repositioning

Lecturers' repositioning

Agency   Discourse

Institutional practices

Figure 1: An integrated framework for interpreting students' academic writing practices and lecturers' views (Source: Tran's PhD Thesis 2007)

The framework presented in Figure 1, which represent three categories inherent in positioning theory: discourse, agency and institutional practices (Nellhaus 1998:18-19). The three dimensions of Lillis' *talk around text* are embedded in the second level of the framework, which is centred on the issue of agency. Level 1 of the framework refers to discourse. In this study, discourse for the students is considered to be related to their written texts, their accounts of writing these texts and their later positioning conversations on their writing practices. With regard to the lecturers, discourse is tied to the students' texts and their comments on the students' texts, their discussions about their expectations and their disciplinary values. Discourse offers the context for the students' agency, the lecturers' agency and the institutional practices to emerge. Level 2 of the framework deals with the aspect of agency. Within this study, students' agency is understood as their intentions and personal choices in relation to meaning making in academic writing. The students' ways of constructing their texts can be bound to their awareness of their lecturers' expectations and the disciplinary requirements, their distinctive Chinese or Vietnamese writing tradition, their personal preferences in meaning making and their negotiation of these different interpretations of academic writing. The lecturers' agency emerges from the reasons underpinning their comments on specific instances of students' writing as well as their views on students' writing experiences, their own teaching practice and the disciplinary values in terms of academic writing. Within positioning theory, individual agency operates within social structure but also helps to form social relations. The institutional practices, which are addressed at level 3 of the framework, can be interpreted in relation to the lecturers' expectations, the course guidelines, the disciplinary as well as institutional requirements for academic writing and the students' practices. The structures of the disciplines can shape students' writing and at the same time offer the possibilities for the students to reproduce or transform the disciplinary practices.

There are three main forms of positioning which arise from the students' accounts of writing within the institutional structures in this study: situations of *self-positioning*, situations of *forced-self positioning*, situations of *positioning of others*. *Self-positioning* arises when one wishes to express his/her personal agency in order to achieve a particular goal in discursive practice (van Langenhove & Harré 1999:24). With regard to *forced-self positioning*, van Langenhove & Harré (1999:26) propose that it is different from deliberate self-positioning in that 'the initiative now lies with somebody else

rather than the person involved'. In the case of this study, *forced-self positioning* is related to how the students position themselves in the ways they think they are required by their lecturers or their subject disciplines. *Other positioning* is that one's intentional positioning of oneself in a certain way can lead to the positioning of someone else in the correlative position (van Langenhove & Harré 1999).

THE STUDY

The analysis of the findings shows different forms of adaptation emerging from the ways the Chinese and Vietnamese international students exercise personal agency in writing their first essays at the Australian university. These have been identified within this study as *surface adaptation*, *committed adaptation* and *hybrid adaptation*. Initially, the students have attempted to accommodate the writing approaches which they think are expected in their disciplines. This process of adaptation arises from their intrinsic motivations to be successful in their courses and to become fully fledged members of their disciplinary community. Where they differ is however in their internal struggle related to what they really value amongst the possible disciplinary writing requirements they adopt in constructing their texts.

Surface Adaptation

The accounts of Xuân and Hao seem to involve *surface adaptation,* or changes at the face value, which enable them to gain access to their academic discipline and ensure good returns on their investment (Norton 2001) in the courses. These students disguised their beliefs (Lillis 2001) and only accommodate themselves to the changes required as a coping strategy in order to engage in their academic community. In other words, they restrain their agency and feel an obligation in response to the requirements of the disciplinary practice. In particular, the new ways of writing they follow are sometimes not what they believe and feel positive about. Their accounts of constructing their own texts indicate a conflict between their desires to communicate meaning in a way which accords with their values and their desire to be counted as a member of their academic discipline. Students may also display *surface adaptation* when they do not feel comfortable or positive about responding to what they think they are expected to write. Xuân, the Vietnamese student, for example, demonstrated strategic agency through making *surface adaptation* in writing her first text for her course at the Australian university though she longed for some space for being creative in academic writing. For her, writing this assignment was like a struggle between different values and in order to be present in the disciplinary discourse, a sacrifice of her personal aspiration in writing had to be made at some points.

Xuân commented on her way of writing for her course in Education:

> I start with something very general and then the next sentence will be less general and the next sentence will be more specific and then I come to the thesis statement. But I mean sometimes when I wrote something, I want to put an anecdote to it but I think is it safe to write this way?... But then in academic writing, they always structure, because when I learn IAP, they tell us like this is the way you write it, like for example this is the introduction, you start with something very general and then it's like a triangle with the point to the bottom. So usually we think it's safe to go with that way rather than try something different and you don't know how your lecturer is, whether she is very strict, for example very conservative, and then he or she think okay this is a piece of formal assignment and he or she did it like an article on a magazine or newspaper. Yeah, many many times I also think that why do I just keep to the old style, I like to change, I like to be creative but I think okay then... Yeah, sometimes I want to write in a different way... I wish it [the academic writing convention] were not so structured like this

In the above quote, Xuân implied that she actually followed the disciplinary convention and went from the general background to the specific idea she wanted to focus in her essay. Despite her adaptation, she showed her desire to go beyond the convention, for example, to include an anecdote in academic

writing. Xuân chose ways of constructing meaning in light of new interpretations in the attempt to gain access to the academic world. That was reflected in the surface of her writing through her choice of a 'safe way' which aimed to satisfy her lecturers' expectations but what seemed invisible from the surface of her text was her desire for having space for being on her own: 'be creative' as she referred to. The application of the *talk around text* model in interpreting Xuân's account highlighted that what she understood to be the disciplinary expectation (what she could write) and what she personally desired to write (what she wanted to write) did not appear to concur. In other words, her preference for being creative in ways of meaning expressions appeared to be challenged and contradicted by her new interpretation of academic writing she learnt from the IAP course. This was an instance of forced self-positioning, which van Langenhove and Harré (1999) refer to as how an individual self-positioned in a particular way, which is initiated by an obligation from an outside force. Unlike Wang, who was willing to adapt to the new requirements and happily shifted her former beliefs, Xuân still cherished her preferences even though on the surface, she forced self-positioned (van Langenhove & Harré 1999) as a student who conformed to what she perceived as being required of her in terms of academic writing. She thus seemed to adapt to the disciplinary requirements at the superficial level.

What made Xuân's account more compelling was her awareness of the significance of the lecturer's personality to the evaluation of her assignment. She appeared to position her lecturer as someone whose expectation and personality were powerful in shaping international students' writing and in order to gain entry into her disciplinary discourse, she needed to be able to interpret these. Within the moral order of the institution (Harré & van Langenhove 1999), Xuân's positioning and overriding concern about the safe way of writing in her academic community illustrated how the institutional practice was represented with its regulations as a gatekeeper to student academic writing. This issue has been raised in related research (Clark 1992; Ivanic 1998). These authors have also called for the need to question and tease out ways of grounding knowledge embedded in the dominant ideologies or conventions in higher education in order to create space for the implementation of inclusive practices.

Xuân's experience in the above specific instance of meaning making indicated that students' personal voices about specific ways of meaning-making need to be taken into account more as part of the university's agenda to develop inclusive practices. Her account also revealed that the agency and power she could be allowed to exercise within the institutional practice was quite restricted.

Committed Adaptation

By contrast, Wang, Vỹ and Bình mainly demonstrated *committed adaptation*. This involved a profound transformation in their writing replacing their existing writing practice with the new one which they judge to be superior to their former one. These students also showed their agency, however, which they did by deliberate self-positioning as consciously choosing to fully accommodate what was required of them. These students feel positive about their shift because the ways of writing which they think they need to respond to the institutional structure are in harmony with what they value and their aspiration to achieve their academic acquired values. *Committed adaptation* occurs when students exercise personal agency and deliberately position themselves as wishing to accommodate what is required of them. In this case, the students value the new ways of constructing knowledge they have adapted to and feel positive about their shift.

Wang, one of the Chinese students involved in this study, for example demonstrated a committed adaptation to her Education disciplinary practices in Australia. When confronting different ideas about academic writing in her discipline, Wang shifted her former belief and negotiated ways of writing the introduction in light of the new belief in an attempt to satisfy the lecturer's expectation and take control of her academic practice. She revealed that she valued those changes: "I am more than happy to change to the way to write like this" and "I think there is certainly, the Western and Chinese ways are different but I prefer the Western one." The dimension of the *talk around text* model (Lillis 2001) embedded in the questions how/what Wang can(not) say; how/what she (doesn't)want to say in her disciplinary writing helped to reveal that the voice she felt she needed to respond to the institution,

which seemed to be in conflict with her Chinese voice, turned out to be the voice she now valued. In light of positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove 1999), she actively reshaped her interpretation and positioned herself in a more powerful position through employing the accommodating strategy as *committed adaptation*. Wang's changing interpretations and changing positions in the drafting process of this specific instance of writing reflected her negotiation of different identities, being Chinese as she referred to herself and being an international student who was aware of the disciplinary requirement and determined to achieve her academic goal. These two identities seemed to be contradictory in this episode of her account and she adhered to the latter one as it enabled her to be empowered in the new community. The analysis of Wang's positioning through her talk about her actual practice of writing her text (Harré & van Langenhove 1999 and Lillis 2001) indicated that this was a strong case of cultural positioning. She was trying to break free from the Chinese stereotypes that she positioned herself in by making references to her struggle through the process of drafting and redrafting. She shifted quite quickly to position herself as a member of the Education discourse community.

Hybrid Adaptation

The students can also engage in *hybrid adaptation* to their new written discourse through attempts to create a hybrid space for meaning making, like in instances of Lin's and Ying's texts. Ying for example exercised her personal agency by self-positioning as someone who is able to create a blend of the linear way of writing, which she interpreted to be conventional in her discipline, and her personal preference for using metaphors. Within this form of adaptation, the students engage critically and creatively with the disciplinary requirements and treat their first language and culture as a resource rather than a problem.

Ying gave explanations to her way of writing for her assignment in Management:

> That's my understandings, that's my original. I'll use metaphors to explain things to people. It's my personality, my personal preference... Because without this, the content is very dry. Maybe I didn't start it well, so I want to make it interesting and I need to use words with imagination. This is really my understanding of things... Maybe the lecturer will only like facts, very scientific, not imagination, not artistic or anything like that in writing.

Ying employed metaphors to make her writing mode vivid and lively. Talking about her interest, Ying revealed she enjoyed expressing things in the poetic form and she loved music. Embedded in Lillis' (2001) framework is the notion of voice as experiences, which she refers to as aspects of personal life experiences students embrace in their writing. Ying thus brought her voice as personality and personal preference into her disciplinary writing. For Ying, using metaphors and writing with imagination were the ways she showed her own original understandings. Otherwise, as she revealed, she often felt she was repeating someone else's ideas: "You find out everything you wanted to write was written by somebody else, so I mean no real original thought from mine, so that's not a good feeling." In commenting on her writing, Ying other-positioned her lecturer as someone who favoured facts and scientific ways of communicating ideas rather than what she referred to as "artistic" and imaginative expressions. She also self-positioned as someone who attempted to show her original understandings of the issue and to add flavour to her writing even though she guessed that they might not be welcome by her lecturer. Kettle (2005) suggests the need to investigate how international students can be viewed as "agents" who may be capable of transforming their own situation. Ying's self-positioning showed that even though she felt forced to conform to linear writing, she used her own agency to write poetically. The ways she exercised agency signalled the complexities of her process of gaining access into her disciplinary practices. In communicating ideas in her essay, Ying seemed to display *hybrid adaptation* and reconstruct a hybrid site of subjectivity, which was shaped by the external force embedded in her disciplinary practices as well as her internal voice and preference.

The study highlights challenges for international students such as their unfamiliarity with some of presumed common ways of accessing disciplinary requirements, the assessment criteria coded in

abstract wordings and inconsistency in lecturers' expectations on ways of constructing and representing knowledge. However, the positioning analysis (Harré & van Langenhove 1999) of the students' practices indicates how they exercise personal agency by drawing on various strategies to facilitate their understandings of disciplinary expectations. The discussion of the students' interviews shows six ways of learning about the academic expectations which individual students mainly draw on: through the writing guidelines, through dialogues with the academics, through support services at different institutional levels, through the writing model, through the reading of materials in the field and through the lecturers' personal preferences.

The Lecturers' Expectations and Practices

The positioning analysis (Harré & van Langenhove 1999) of the four lecturers shows that they appear to understand the needs of international students and are determined to accommodate them in many ways. Yet, the lecturers also highlight the need for international students to explicitly communicate ideas and develop a logic argument in accordance with the 'Western style'. For example, Andy explained why he expected international students to conform to the 'Western' ways of constructing knowledge:

> I recognize the diversity but I insist on the Western style of logics and arguments. I am afraid that I would say "No you come to a very Western style University... and you need to learn to see the world as these people see it"… I do not mark people down to a fail when they have errors like what I call the mechanics of English... But I would give them a fail if they were not attempting to explain and make a logical connection in your argument and if *you do not play that game, then you can get a fail grade.*

Andy showed his agency through reinforcing an unmediated view of the 'Western' academic practices to which he expected his students to conform. He acknowledged that he recognised the diversity or the resources previously possessed by international students from diverse cultural backgrounds with regard to their ways of constructing knowledge. However, Andy's discussion about disciplinary discourse requirements stressed the issue of being for the 'Western' discourse practices and rejecting the 'non-Western' ones rather than the matter of creating meaningful opportunities for new understandings and new practices within his discipline. This view did not enable students to negotiate ways of constructing knowledge and moving creatively between different discourse practices (Canagarajah 2006). Instead, international students here seemed to be treated as passive and conditioned by the requirements in the new leaning context. This deterministic view seems to be contrary to the aspect of nurturing inclusive supportive teaching and learning environments, which is central to the institutional agenda to internationalize the curriculum.

Andy's statement indicates his positioning of international students as 'Other' and the Australian institution as 'Self'. He constructs the Australian institution as 'our' Western style university where the international students as the 'Others' who 'need to learn to see the world as these people see it'. His positioning implies the superiority of the Self or the 'Western' ways of thinking while viewing international students as being deficit and need to conform to these 'desirable qualities' that 'we'/the Self possess at the Australian university. In addition, through employing the metaphor of international students as those who played the academic game within the institution, Andy again highlighted their duties and obligations to accommodate the 'Western' logic to make sense of the world and develop arguments. This accommodation allowed them to get access to the academic world at the Australian university. Otherwise, they would be marginalized with the risk of not passing the course, which negatively affected the returns on their personal investment (Norton 2001) in studying overseas.

Once international students are positioned in this way, the quality and effectiveness of teaching is less problematized and the students' conformity to the existing practices is more emphasized. Thus, this may restrict possibilities for transformation in terms of pedagogical practices among the academics and within the curriculum. Some lecturers also position students from China and Vietnam as having

'deficits' in the new learning context, based on their English language competency and their different ways of constructing knowledge. Students' different experiences and ways of learning are not viewed as 'different' but rather as 'limited' by the academics. Even though the lecturers attempt to find ways to facilitate students' understandings of the conventions, there is little mutual transformation occurring in terms of negotiating different ways of constructing knowledge.

In line with their other-positioning of students as those who have to conform to the taken for granted institutional conventions, the lecturers self-positioned as being dynamic in seeking ways to facilitate students' understandings of what was required of them. Lisa, the Economics lecturer, for example tried to give students assignments in the beginning weeks of her course and offered feedback on them within a week so that students could learn from this experience. Andy attempted to link the abstract concepts to specific examples to make the theories more understandable for international students. Positioning theory includes the possibilities that individuals can reposition their views and take action to transform institutional practices when encountering new challenges (Harré & van Langenhove 1999). In light of positioning theory, these actions were examples of how the growing number of international students offered possible conditions for the lecturers to transform their teaching and the institutional practices to be restructured in order to make the curriculum more accessible for students from diverse backgrounds. However, as revealed by the academics, these good practices remained largely at the individual level rather than becoming common at the disciplinary or institutional level. Also, these good practices were mainly aimed at making lectures and academic requirements more accessible for international students rather than creating opportunities for them to negotiate academic resources and thus engage more meaningfully and productively in academic practices.

Interaction between Students and Academics Dialogical Pedagogic Model for Mutual Adaptation and Sustainable Academic Development in International Education

All students in the study perceive the interaction they establish with their lecturers to be imperative in enabling them to enhance their understandings of the academic expectations and facilitate their adaptation to academic practices. Three main forms of dialogues, which the students established with their lecturers, have emerged from this study: face-to-face consultation with the lecturers, emails to the lecturers and discussion with the lecturers in class. In particular, the students transform their own practices through seeking ways to contact their lecturers, either through written forms or direct dialogue, to deepen their understandings of the disciplinary expectations, ask for feedback on draft versions of writing assignments and go through the redrafting process. They are quite successful in using different ways to increase their understandings of the disciplinary expectations and even found the process rewarding. The academics also reveal that through conversations with international students who actively discussed their needs, they increase their understandings of the needs of international students and how to accommodate these needs. This illustrates how student's agency may have impact on staff's positioning of their views, which leads to the changes in their teaching. In other words, students' ability to exercise personal agency through taking the initiative to communicate with staff helps to create the conditions for transformation of individual lecturers' practices. Below are some quotes which illustrate the value of interaction perceived by the students and academics:

> Because in my particular case, I feel a lot of repetition all over the place and I feel a bit worried about that because I don't know whether I understand the case correctly and I had to go to the consultation to ask my lecturer and what she told me is that yeah it's the nature of the theory and you applied different theories in different situation, so your case is still appropriate, so it's not like I think because if you read the case, you see I repeat a lot about the humour aspect (Vy - student).

> Yes, I feel ambiguous about the expectations in the other course like Language methodology and curriculum design, about the creation of the unit of work. Most of my classmates don't understand what we are expected to do and we discuss with the lecturer again and again and he is also confused and finally I think he has to ask Rachel again about how to write up those units of work. She designed the whole course. If you don't understand the expectations or the assessment criteria,

you cannot write up the assignment, this is very important to know what you are expected to do (Wang - student).

I remember one of our graduates some years ago told me that the difficulty he found there were no equivalent words in Mandarin for a lot of concepts we are using and students struggles because of the nature of the Chinese economy, that word has not come to their language, it makes it very hard for international students. So how do I deal with this, it changes the ways I teach, I often speak too fast but I do try to slow it and I try to find different words   that I try to explain a concept but I can't always do that because sometimes there is a term or word I must use, so I try to find different ways of explaining them in terms of example, what do I mean to make it as simple as possible (Andy - lecturer).

Again I had conversations with students over a year, it sounds crazy but an academic essay in English, I can see why some students can get repetitive or redundant because you have to start off by saying what you are going to say and then you say it and then at the end you say what you have just said and it seemed crazy because you have to have those signposts very clear there. Otherwise we tend to think that it's loosely constructed or not logical or not coherent. The marker, the native speaker, starts thinking that this is not coherent (Kevin – lecturer).

The findings of the study offer some insights into ways that mutual adaptation can be developed between international students and academics rather than the onus being on total adaptation from the students. The findings highlight student's agency embedded in their communication with staff as the point where the two groups, students and lecturers, can interact so that the possibility of changes may occur in terms of pedagogy and curriculum. A dialogical pedagogic model for mutual adaptation for both students and teaching staff for sustainable academic development has been developed by modifying Harré's two-dimensional conceptual space (van Langenhove & Harré 1999), the public/private and the individual/collective. This model is presented in Figure 2. Drawing on Vygotsky, van Langenhove and Harré (1999) use the public/private dimension to represent the degree to which the display of the attributes of academics and international students is public or private. The individual/collective axis refers to the degree to which "some attributes can be realized as the property of the discursive interaction of one or many persons" (p.131).
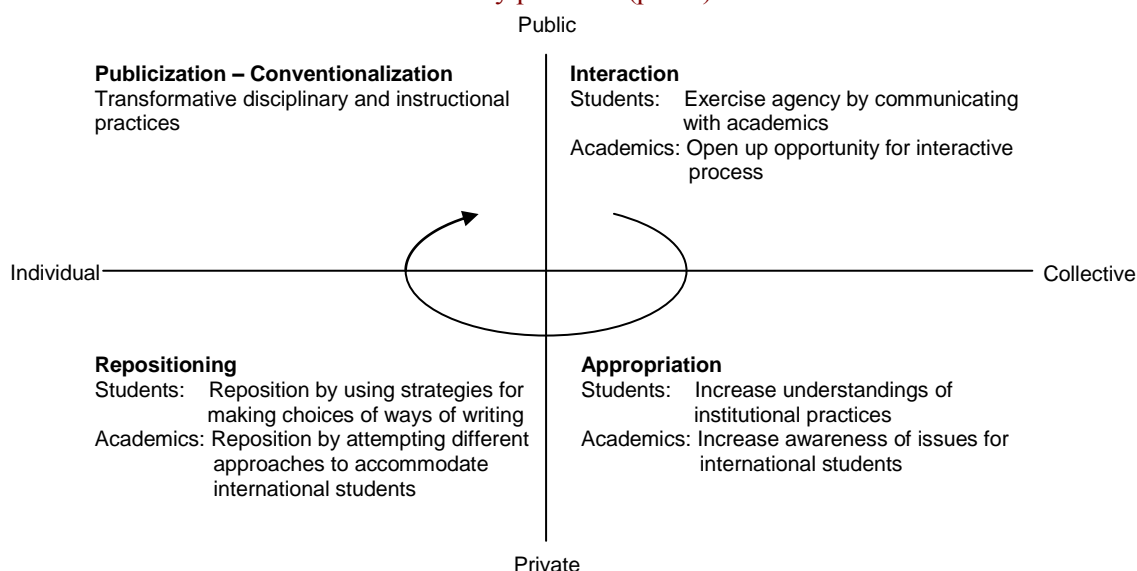
Public

Publicization – Conventionalization
Transformative disciplinary and instructional practices

Interaction
Students: Exercise agency by communicating
                  with academics
Academics: Open up opportunity for interactive
                   process

Individual ———————————————————————— Collective

Repositioning
Students: Reposition by using strategies for
                  making choices of ways of writing
Academics: Reposition by attempting different
                   approaches to accommodate
                   international students

Appropriation
Students: Increase understandings of
                  institutional practices
Academics: Increase awareness of issues for
                   international students

Private

Figure 2: The dialogical pedagogic model for mutual adaptation

The model includes four quadrants: *interaction, appropriation, repositionin*g and *publicization*. The first process, interaction, is illustrated in the upper right hand side corner of the model. The *interaction* quadrant represents how knowledge and experience may be shared between academics and

international students. Interaction occurs when lecturers create opportunities for international students to communicate with them and students exercise agency through their attempts to communicate with academics. This interactive process is collective and public.

The second process is *appropriation*, which is represented in the lower right hand side quadrant of the model. The appropriation of knowledge of the discursive practices of academics and international students within the institutional structure can be represented as the transition from the *interaction* quadrant to the *appropriation* quadrant. This appropriation is reflected in how knowledge gained from the interaction with each other would enable academics to deepen their understandings of the issues related to international students and would assist international students to increase their awareness of the institutional practices. This process marks the move from the public to the private quadrants.

The third process, *repositioning*, is represented in the lower left hand side quadrant of the model. Transition to the *repositioning* quadrant links to the privatization and habituation shift in which academics would rethink and critically reflect on their teaching practices. This goes along with their attempts to change their practices and adopt teaching approaches to better address international students' needs. In this process, international students would exercise strategic agency to facilitate their participation in institutional practices based on their insights and understandings. International students can transform their own practices if they are provided with the resources and opportunities to make changes. Different types of relationships and interactions will enable different ways of appropriating knowledge and different responses to be made. This process highlights how the expectations and needs of academics and international students can be included and addressed.

The upper left hand side quadrant represents the *publicization/conventionalization* process. When academics and international students have internalized the new understandings and transformed their own practices, this leads to the transformation of disciplinary and institutional practices. Appropriated and privatized knowledge and experiences thus become publicized and even conventionalized in the institutional discourse. This model is not a one-way cycle. It can go back and forward between quadrants before it leads to publicization. These interactive processes appear to be fundamental toward enhancing the quality of learning and teaching within the current trend of internationalization of the curriculum and need to be nurtured by the university.

CONCLUSION

The case study reported in this study explores the adaptation of seven international students from China and Vietnam in two disciplines, Education and Economics, at an Australian university. A prominent finding of the study indicates the emergence of three main forms of adaptation, *committed adaptation, surface adaptation* and *hybrid adaptation,* that the students employed to gain access to their disciplinary writing practices. The findings of the study also give insights into how students' skills and capability to interact with lecturers can possibly lead to the opportunities for lecturers to reposition their views and practices. This occurs when lecturers attempt to modify their writing instructions and make them more explicit and work out what to do to assist international students in terms of academic writing and how to refine their teaching in general. Seen in this light, the students' participation in disciplinary practices and their actions can nurture the potentials to change and transform individual and institutional practices. Interaction between the international students and the academics also helps to develop mutual understandings between students and lecturers. These steps may contribute to facilitating the participation of diverse student population in higher education and making them become truly valued members of the institutional communities. Within the context of the internationalization of Australian higher education, reciprocal adaptation of academics and international education is critical to the process of sustaining the reputation and standards of the higher education sector for high quality education. The mutual changes are even more critical given the current institutional responses and policies which have focused more on international education as an export industry and commodity and less on the aspirations of international students and the enhancement of academic pedagogies which cater for the needs and acquired values of international students. This imbalance may threaten the sustainable development of international education, which

is becoming increasingly important to the long term economic, academic and social benefits to Australia.

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