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Writing at the Intersection:

Understanding International Student Writers

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by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In U.S. colleges and universities, non-native English speaking international students are generally described in terms of their challenges with the English language. Even after the focus of scholarship has recently shifted to these students' strengths as "multilingual" writers, their challenges and strengths in other areas of their development as writers are still overlooked. This thesis addresses the need to inform and influence teaching/learning practices about international multilingual students by using multidimensional frameworks. Considering that international students' challenges (and strengths) of language intersect with a variety of other academic skills and also their motivation to learn, I argue that in order to truly account for their process of learning to write, we must consider these three dimensions: language proficiency, academic skills, and motivation. Building on recent scholarship, this work also advocates for shifting focus from static terms of identification to approaches that can account for complex and fluid identities. I conclude by recommending teaching strategies that take multiple aspects of writing and their constantly changing intersections into account as international students develop as writers.

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Chapter One: Introduction

International students are often described with one characteristic: their language identity. More recently, the focus on language deficit is being countered by a much more complex discourse; they are increasingly viewed as "multilingual" learners, as "resources" to US academe, and as individuals who bring knowledge and experience from different societies and cultures. Scholars in the field of writing studies have written persuasively about the need to view the English composition classroom as a "globalized" space rather than in traditional monolingual terms (Cox et al.; Khadka). And yet, administrators, teachers, and students continue to describe them with one-dimensional, language-focused terms such as ELL (English Language Learners), NNES (non-Native English speakers), and ESL (English as Second Language) students, or even LEP (students with limited English proficiency). This thesis addresses the need to further inform and influence teaching/learning practices about international multilingual students using multidimensional frameworks. Writing teachers and program administrators need convenient ways of describing different bodies, but it is essential to remain aware of the potential blind spots that uni-dimensional descriptors can create.

While there is a lack of multidimensionality in the discourse about international students, the scholarship is certainly useful toward constructing multidimensional frameworks, like the one I will present in this thesis. For instance, through their edited collection of articles *Reinventing Identities in*

Second Language Writing, which is a critique of labels such as ESL, Michelle Cox et al. recommend cross-disciplinary understanding about those writers. They also urges us to consider these students' linguistic identity and its development as constituting their evolving social identity. She further argues that the "language learner as having a complex social identity must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day interaction" (75). In this way, recent scholarship implicitly or explicitly promotes the idea of both the complex and shifting nature of these students' linguistic, social, and intellectual identity.

In this thesis, I take the arguments of complex identity one step further to show that writing teachers can simultaneously consider multiple sides in international students' development as writers. To further advance the scholarship that has shifted focus from language deficits to multilingual resources and from viewing students in static terms to focusing on their shifting identities, we need to develop theoretical models that consider multiple facets and factors. Doing so can help us best understand and support international students' writing needs and strengths. Considering that students' challenges (and strengths) of language intersect with other academic skills and also their motivation to learn, I will also argue that in order to truly account for their process of learning to write, we must account for at least three dimensions: language proficiency, academic skills, and motivation. I will show that these dimensions intersect with each other, while the intersection also constantly shifts as the students adapt to US higher education.

We certainly should not overlook the linguistic challenges faced by many international students. But we need effective frames of analysis for accounting how much of a student's writing challenge is actually that of language. Second, we also need effective ways of recognizing academic skills in terms of writing and rhetoric that international students lack, as well as what they bring from their home countries. For instance, if students from private, English-medium school systems from India have learned how to write academic essays, writing teachers here can help those students build on that skill. However, ultimately, if a given student views a required writing class and its assignments and activities as burdens imposed by the institution, then that student poses a unique challenge to the writing teacher, in spite of whatever language and academic skills he or she may have. Thus, by drawing from the recent scholarships that focus on practical teaching strategies, I later propose teaching methods that we can use in order to account for the constantly changing intersections that each student goes through. I include the third dimension, motivation, because I believe that we cannot value the importance of the student's own role and responsibility in learning to write without accounting for this factor. As Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells have argued, students' dispositions, such as motivation, play a significant role because they are intrinsic qualities that indicate whether learners are able to make practical use of the knowledge they acquire (para. 1). That is, because writing well requires language and academic skills and also motivation, I will illustrate the importance of all these dimensions in the context of international students.

I will argue that even though current scholarship has separately focused on the different dimensions of language proficiency, academic skills, and motivation, it has not addressed them together or focused on the intersection of those dimensions. I emphasize that international multilingual students' identities in terms of language, academic skills, and motivation are mutually influencing and constantly changing. For this reason, how well a given international student writes in a particular class is a function of interactions of the different factors that are changing. In order to understand students' needs and challenges, writing teachers need to consider factors like this simultaneously.

My own experience as an international student seems worth mentioning at this point. Even though I studied English grammar and syntax since early childhood and also acquired genre knowledge of academic writing in college and university in my home country Nepal, I found it challenging to adjust to the new academic culture when I first entered a US university. Because I had studied in an exam-focused education system, I had had limited experience of doing independent research, not to mention writing papers by making original arguments. I also did not easily adapt to the practice of coming to class with my own reactions and responses to texts written by established scholars. Here I also had to read, research, write, and develop and present ideas in a new social and cultural context that I did not know much about. In some cases, I understood the text but when political or cultural issues were involved, I felt as if I were reading texts in a social vacuum. It took time, which I spent with great commitment, to develop comfort and confidence in new ways of reading, discussing ideas, using

existing scholarship, and organizing and presenting ideas in writing. After a few semesters, when I developed the skills to write effectively, it was not because I had improved my language. It was because I had started using a gradually improving academic language while performing academic tasks that I could carry out increasingly successfully and with growing motivation and excitement. That is, I went through shifting intersections of language ability, academic skills, and motivation to write. One aspect of my writing could only be measured in relation to the others. Clearly, my English language fluency alone could not be a marker of my identity. There were several other factors like academic skills and my own confidence and dispositions to learning in a new academic context that played equally important roles in my development as a writer.

Many students like me come from countries where "English was taught as a colonial legacy in conjunction with their native language or where English was infused into their native culture through the American media" (Zawacki and Habib, "Will Our Stories" 58), so they may not struggle with general communicative skills in English. Additionally, their general language fluency develops quickly with more exposure to the native speakers here in the US. What takes more time and needs more support is the complex language and discourse of different disciplines that students need to learn, thereby gradually building confidence as writers. In contrast to common belief, development in one area serves as the context of the others, instead of happening in a linear order. Hence, a theory of intersection is necessary for understanding how to teach writing to international students because such an approach allows us to

recognize any strengths that students have even while they struggle with other aspects of writing. Scholars have pointed out that international students, as multilingual writers are able to use "strategic competence," or the ability to use whatever language skills they have to achieve the linguistic goals, in order to bypass some of the constraints they face in US academic writing. In her article "Breaking the Constraints of Silence: The Stories of International Students," Joan Karbach describes the writing of two international students who use "strategic competence" to engage in expressive writing, a type of writing that they are not familiar writing in. While a Japanese student changed the focus of the assignment from "I" to "we," a Chinese student invented a first person narrator to write the same assignment (6). International students often use past academic writing experiences from their home countries while adapting to the new demands of US academe.

Writing teachers and administrators have to follow the structures of their institutions, but doing this does not necessarily conflict with understanding international student writers' ability and strengths by positioning them at the intersection of language proficiency, academic skills (such as reading, writing, researching, critical thinking abilities), and motivation for learning. In fact, such a framework would allow writing teachers and administrators to teach and serve international students better than they are when the primary focus is on language. Isolating any one of the three components to define the students' identity (such as categorizing them as ESL students by focusing on language alone) can lead to partial or unfair understanding of these students as writers.

Because second language writers are "remarkably diverse" (Cox et al.),

accounting for just one component and creating labels for single dimensions will

not realistically describe these students' proficiencies and needs. By drawing on

the theory of "intersectionality" which I elaborate below, I will first highlight the

problem of continued focus on international students' deficiency. Then I will

discuss a number of practical pedagogical strategies on the basis of the review of

relevant scholars within the framework of my arguments.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Different bodies of scholarship in Writing Studies address the different dimensions of international students' growth as writers. So, let me briefly review relevant works in order to situate my argument in the context of the scholarship and highlight the importance of developing multi-dimensional strategies rather than addressing the issues in isolated, linear, or hierarchical fashion.

The first area of scholarship that I find relevant for my thesis is related to language. As I indicated at the beginning, the focus on language in isolation has been problematic in teaching writing to international students. In the past, writing scholars also thought of language proficiency as a great barrier for many international students' performance. However, more recently, writing scholars have shifted their focus from language as a deficit to language as a resource.

Established scholars like Suresh Canagarajah, Michelle Cox, Paul Kei Matsuda, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper and many other scholars have suggested, new approaches in the teaching of writing to non-native speakers, criticizing deficit-focused models of the past. One of the strategies suggested by these scholars is to allow second language writers to "mesh" different kinds of Englishes and features influenced by other languages within their writing. By doing so, students can use their language skills, rather than being treated as deficient by focusing on Standard English alone. While these scholars strongly advocate for new strategies of effective teaching, they are also aware that focusing on strengths alone cannot guarantee success for all students. While discussing the effectiveness of codemeshing, Canaghrajah says, "We must

however, emphasize that codemeshing is not a strategy guaranteed for success"
(126). Canagharajah suggests that because it is hard to communicate ideas to
different audiences with codes that are unfamiliar, writers use language
strategically to convey their ideas. He discusses how Geneva Smitherman
strategically used Black English Vernacular in her own writing. While we cannot
compare international students' use of language variation with that of an
established scholar like Smitherman, it is possible for them to use features of
World Englishes in systematic or deliberate ways; when they do so, writing
teachers should be willing and able to recognize as such. Thus, the idea of
fostering students' language and writing by building on their strengths means
helping them to "agentively develop new meanings and values for their codes as
they pluralize dominant norms and literacies" (126) instead of offering them only
one option of standardized English and writing strategies. Accordingly, whenever
students want to deliberately deviate from the norm, they should both be aware
and make their readers aware of the deviation.

The discourse on international students as "multilingual" individuals who
bring a rich set of linguistic resources with them is useful in the context of this
thesis because focusing on those strengths and resources can help writing
teachers in all three dimensions in my teaching approach. First, focusing on
students' linguistic strengths can help teachers start with the skills that students
already possess (such as writing in whatever English variety they use). Second,
the approach can help teachers in the same way if they recognize the academic
skills that students bring from their previous academic culture even while they

learn new academic skills. For instance, if an international student starts an essay with a long background, writing teachers have the power to judge the essay as stylistically different rather than as evidence of bad writing, at least as they help the student develop other ways of writing introductions. Also, if the student means to provide the background for a reason, it is enough to make him or her aware that the approach is not always appropriate, rather than to teach the "correct" approach in a subtractive way. Ultimately, focusing on students' strengths can boost their interest and engagement in writing.

The second area of scholarship that I draw on in this thesis is about academic skills that college writing requires. In a basic writing class that I am teaching to a class of all-international students this semester, I find myself backtracking to teach students basic academic skills like reading carefully, taking notes to develop a response to reading, and distinguishing between factual statements and arguments. These issues are addressed in another body of work that views language proficiency differently than in the scholarship of multilingual and translingual issues. Especially based in the UK, the scholarship on "English for Academic Purposes" (EAP) defines the language and communication skills that students need for academic writing as "academic literacy skills." For example, in their article "The 'Academic Literacies' Model: Theory and Applications," Mary Lea and Brian Street discuss this model in contrast to the individual- and cognitive- focused study skills model and also in contrast to the academic socialization model that assumes genres and discourses to be stable. The academic literacies model, Lea and Street argue, "is concerned with

meaning making, identity, power and authority" (368) and also views the social process of learning to write as including power relations among people and institutions, and social identities. This approach can greatly enhance writing teachers' shift from language-focused and deficit-foregrounding approaches to focusing on international students' linguistic abilities because it allows them to pay attention to student diversity, the complexity and constantly changing nature of their identities, and the specific differences of institutions and writing programs and courses. For instance, focusing on academic literacies can help writing teachers better identify which student struggles with what type of writing. They can also address unique needs of students when they arrive from other countries, which can be vastly different from the needs of students who have become familiar with US academe. And when teachers are more aware of the uniqueness of their courses and writing programs, that can help international students the most.

In addition to the general process of learning the academic language and socializing into the academic practices underlying academic writing, some scholars have also written about the influence of gender, race, and culture in academic socialization. As I use the theory of intersection in my theoretical discussions below, I will not only focus on the intersections of the three aspects of writing but also consider how students' identity factors may also influence the process of their learning to write. How do these students in the new academic culture create their identity as writers? There are not many studies that focus on these identity issues of international students, but as Patricia Duff reviews in her

article "Language of Socialization into Academic Discourse Communities," there are at least two studies that have done this. Naoko Morita presented a longitudinal case study of a Japanese student, focusing on gender, language, and culture as the student developed knowledge and confidence as a student at a Canadian University. Similarly, Morita conducted a larger, longitudinal study of six Japanese students, showing how they socialized into academic discourse of both undergraduate and graduate programs. In both studies, a number of general and specific factors of the students' identities, interests, and motivations influenced their academic socialization and learning of academic skills. Morita's research participants revealed that international students can be active agents and that their unique "histories, aspirations, and resources" have a critical role in the shaping of their positionalities and identities as writers. As she further highlights, the evolving identity of international students is the result of negotiation with the new context and culture, rather than a static phenomenon.
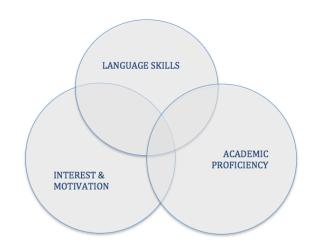
Within Writing Studies, there is seemingly relatively limited scholarship about the third dimension that I address in this thesis: interest and motivation in the case of international and second-language students. Fortunately, the issue has been addressed in some books and articles in other fields such as applied linguistics, with some direct focus on written language and academic literacy in higher education. For example, drawing upon the rich and decades-long research on motivation for learning a second language, an edited collection titled *Motivation, Language Acquisition, and the L2 Self* includes a number of perspectives about this issue, including some on academic writing. While this

book often focuses on younger ages than college students, some chapters are relevant for teaching college-level writing. In the introductory chapter subtitled "A Theoretical Overview," the editors, Ema Ushioda and Zolian Dornyei state that even though discourses about L2 writers focus on linguistic and sociocultural diversity and fluidity, scholars have just begun to examine what the "changing global reality might mean for how we theorize the motivation to learn another language. . . . L2 motivation is currently in the position of being radically reconceptualized and retheorized in the context of contemporary notions of self and identity" (1). By addressing a range of factors that motivate students to learn foreign languages—including psychological, social, economic, and geopolitical—the authors provide a framework that could be adapted to the study of how and why international students invest their time and energy in learning to write.

I also draw upon the insights of writing scholars who have studied knowledge and skills transfer among undergraduate students in general, from scholars like Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells, in order to discuss how writing teachers could help international students transfer their prior writing skills. Driscoll and Wells describe four qualities of student disposition toward transferring writing skills. I think it is important to account for international students' interest if writing teachers want to make the shifting focus from deficits to positive resources a productive rather than an idealistic move and if they want to reinforce these students' motivation and confidence as writers.

Chapter Three: Intersections – A Theoretical Discussion

In this section, I develop a theoretical approach in order to account for the diversity and complexity of international students' language proficiencies by building on their prior academic skills and by addressing their interests and motivations with writing courses. In order to account for the multiple dimensions of international students' process of learning to write successfully in US academe, I draw on the theory of "intersectionality." Using this term in the context of power relations and social inequalities, Patricia Hill Collins in her article "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas" defined it to refer to "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena" (1). The concept can be used in order to highlight the "intersection" of language proficiency, academic skills, and disposition toward learning that international students go through as writers. This concept helps to emphasize that when we consider international students in terms of one identity marker at one time (such as nationality, ethnicity, language, gender, and so on), this does not account for the fact that their identities are fluid and dynamic especially when they adapt to new academic and sociocultural communities.

It is important to consider the diversity and complexity of international students' identities, proficiencies, and motivations because limited understanding of who they are can be unproductive or even counterproductive. For example, national and cultural backgrounds may play a role, but these factors may not help us determine where they stand in their academic language proficiencies. Similarly, those backgrounds do not help us understand how skilled they are in academic writing conventions in US higher education. Their age, gender or ethnicity may or may not have anything to do with how active or passive they are in class. Thus, in all three areas mentioned above, instead of labeling them by their backgrounds and assuming that students from the same backgrounds will have similar needs and strengths, I argue that each student is, at any given time, at the intersection of three main factors: language proficiency, academic skills and motivation to learn in their new academic environment and they are continuously changing.

International students are increasingly viewed as individuals with multilingual and multicultural abilities, and this is good news in terms of boosting their confidence, as well as helping them build on the knowledge and skills that they bring with them. However, overly positive views can also create blind spots of their own kind. In the past, when international students were labeled with limiting language terms, writing teachers often failed to see them as a diverse group with a wide range of abilities. The focus on the positives can take the necessary attention away from the real struggles that some students do face with language proficiency, academic skills, and interest in their particular situations. At

meetings and listserv conversations, I have noticed writing teachers concerned about the seemingly decreasing proficiency of some students coming from the expanding middle classes in countries like China and India. US universities, the argument goes, seem to be lowering the traditional language proficiency standards for recruitment because they are looking to increase their revenues, making it increasingly harder for writing teachers to focus on teaching writing. There seems to be no research yet on this concern and hypothesis, but if we are receiving larger numbers of linguistically and academically underprepared students into US colleges and universities, there is research showing what difficulties these students face. Using observations data on the academic socialization of Chinese students at the University of British Columbia, Yun Tao and Renjie, scholars from Southeast University of China, discuss the impact of low language proficiency on academic success of the students. Using Patricia Duff's five issues of academic discourse socialization, Tao and Renjie state that

> students being socialized into new, multimodal, intertextual, heteroglossic literacies and repartee find themselves more difficult to comprehend or engage in that strictly academic language and topic due to their low proficiency in classroom language or lack of necessary background cultural knowledge. (732)

While the correlation between low proficiency in academic language and academic performance seems obvious, it is not enough for international students to have a general proficiency in English. Instead, they must be competent in "academic English" required by the level of their study and the disciplines where

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they are enrolled. For example, a student who is able to write personal essays may not know the "language" of academic articles of particular types.

In another study conducted with 372 international undergraduate and graduate students from 77 different countries, Christine Yeh and Mayuko Inose found correlations between language proficiency and "acculturative stress"—or the stress during adaptation to a new society and culture—among the students, meaning that students who were better adapted to the university community when they had the language to communicate and participate in class. Their results indicated that "international students from Europe experienced less acculturative stress than their counterparts from Asia, Central/Latin America, and Africa" (15). In addition, academic difficulties of these students were also intricately related to the difference in values, assumptions, and conventions underlying academic writing in their old and new academic cultures. It is for these reasons that I believe that a theory of intersectionality must include language proficiency as an important component, defining language as a complex and situated means of academic communication rather than a general communicative ability in English. A situated view of language allows us to focus on the academic level and complexity of subject matter in relation to individual students' language abilities.

Many international students come from countries that have different academic systems and cultures compared to that of the US. Consequently, these students face a range of challenges in the new academic culture of the US. In fact, what look like challenges in language proficiency may only be the outward

manifestation of the lack of more important skills, such as reading, researching, developing and presenting ideas, engaging with peers and instructors, and many more. Similarly, these students face challenges not because they are linguistically incompetent but because they may not get enough time to learn the basic skills required by the course. As Maria Scordaras notes in her article "Just Not Enough Time: Accelerated Composition Courses and Struggling ESL Writers," international students tend to be taught "intensive" or bridge courses in language and writing in accelerated summer and winter intersessions; situations like this creates tremendous pressure for them to catch up and perform well (270). If the students do not yet have necessary skills and understand the new set of assumptions and value systems, they can struggle in their writing. Also, they struggle if they do not get enough time "to absorb, apply, and practice the copious skills needed to become proficient in writing" (Scordaras 271). This second dimension is often masked by challenges with language but it must be recognized as a distinct challenge and treated accordingly.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to describe what academic skills international students have on the basis of national backgrounds, simply because students from a given nation do not bring the same set of academic skills. Academic systems within the same countries are often very diverse, being affected by forces like class and culture, geographical settings, access to education, and so on. For example, I went to a private school in Nepal, which gave me the opportunity to learn all subjects other than Nepali in English, but this is not the case for the majority of Nepali students who go to public schools. Furthermore, a

number of other emerging issues like the influence of information technologies,

adaptation of American educational models around the world and also the

influence of American popular culture around the world complicate the

conventional use of national and cultural backgrounds as the basis of

understanding international students' academic support needs. Thus, it is hard to

determine what academic skills to teach a diverse group of international

students. For example, discussing the heterogeneity of ESL students in general,

Kristen di Gennerao states that

> it seems that as more results from empirical studies investigating
> difference across Generation 1.5 [or students who came to the US
> when they were very young] and international L2 learners emerge,
> it becomes increasingly difficult to state with precision the types of
> writing difficulties each group will exhibit. . . . While results from
> recent studies differ in terms of specific findings and
> recommendations, one point at which much of the research
> converges is the need for L2 learners of all types to learn features
> of academic writing and to note how such writing differs from other
> forms of language interaction. (63)

As such, it is necessary to use flexible approaches that can help all students

learn to write. International students may pose additional challenges in terms of

understanding the academic terms and conventions of US higher education, but

because of the difficulty of generalizing the student body, we must ultimately

consider the possibility of each student being at a unique stage and intersection

in terms of his or her academic skills. Fortunately, as writing teachers, we are

able to work one-on-one with students, assess students' unique needs, and help

them where and when they need our support.

The third dimension of my model has to do with how each individual student may approach a writing class and its assignments and activities. While this does not mean that writing teachers need to cater to each student's whims and preferences, I believe that it is important to understand and promote their interest and attitude toward writing. The more students understand and value the function of writing in their academic career and the more they can see where and how they can use it to their advantage, the more they can be motivated. Thus, international students' disposition toward learning and doing writing can be a significant challenge against developing effective writing pedagogies.

A given student's motivation and engagement, beliefs and attitudes, confidence and willingness about learning to write can negatively or positively impact any pedagogy. Regardless of language proficiency and academic skills, different international students (like any other students) view writing skills in different ways; that view may be influenced by the discourse of their discipline, priority and time available, personality and confidence, and so on. In fact, viewing international students with an undue emphasis on their "deficiency" in language and related academic skills can devalue their strengths and motivation. Also, sometimes students with "limited proficiency in their first language" and literacy "usually have the most problems" in the new academic system (Fu 38); students with limited proficiency may or may not view the opportunity to learn writing positively depending on a number of psychological and pragmatic factors. For example, international students from science and engineering who view their study abroad in exclusive relation to their major may view writing as a required

burden rather than an opportunity to learn a useful skill. When this is the case, assuming that all students who are in our classes are interested in learning to write can create blind spots in our teaching. Instead, if we know the different motivations of students in class (or lack thereof) can prompt us to educate students about the importance of writing for whatever major they are pursuing.

Writing teachers often romanticize international students as committed and motivated to learn everything they have the opportunity to learn. This view may be generally true because, indeed, most of them have made sacrifices and achieved success just to join a foreign university. However, when they are struggling to adapt to a new society and education system, faced with many demands of school and life, and often going through stressful times in their personal lives, their motivation may dramatically drop with certain courses. Writing courses could easily be one of those courses where these students invest the least time and energy. Writing is labor-intensive, as well as demanding different skills that writing teachers may not know international students do not have. International students may struggle "to acquire proficiency in the language along with proficiency in academic and disciplinary discourses" (Zawacki and Habbib, "Will Our Stories," 65) because they are new to the academic convention and discourse community. Thus, if a student is struggling to write a research argument, what looks like weak language could be the result of not knowing how to develop and present an argument-based discussion. Others suffer because of the lack of vocabulary necessary to communicate their ideas through their writing. They need to master the content, context, genre, convention and the

rhetorical strategies all at the same time when they are struggling to overcome the major barrier, the homesickness. While emphasizing the importance of learning communicative competences of other groups of students who are emerging rapidly in the US universities, Mary Ellen Daniloff-Merrill in her article "Nenglish and Nepalese Student Identity" describes the challenges the newly arrived Nepali students face. Challenges outside school, such as traveling long distances to practices religious activities or to buy food items to cook the food of their culture, can affect their academic performance. Daniloff-Merrill states that "[f]eelings of isolation cause a large number of newly arrived Nepalese students to experience cultural shock and to have difficulties acclimating to their new surroundings" (247). All of these demands could make writing less inspiring and encouraging than they may tell us it is. Thus, it is important to not only consider language proficiency and academic skills in a new context but also to understand how these students view and approach writing in the first place and how they work to perform better.

Viewing international students' status and process as learning to write as a constantly changing intersection also allows us to account for external factors. What they are able and motivated to do as writers depends on what teaching, support, resources, and inspiration they are receiving from their colleges and universities. Teachers', peers' and academic supervisors' influence can help (or hinder) them as they learn to write better. For example, many writing scholars have cited cases of international students who were encouraged or discouraged by their instructors' or even peers' feedback. In "Strangers in Academia: The

Experiences of Faulty and ESOL Students Across the Curriculum," Vivian Zamel reports a survey of faculty from across disciplines to show that a majority of faculty viewed language challenges of ESL students as indicators of "deficient and inadequate [preparation] for undertaking the work in their course. . . . language use was confounded with intellectual ability" (4). Similarly, Michelle Cox uses the case study of a student named Min whose identity as a second language writer was a major factor that undermined her confidence as an English language user and also her vision to see herself as a novice professional because her supervisor would constantly correct her English as a feedback (89). But a second advisor saw Min as a strong writer. Min also became successful working off campus. "Her accented written English did not receive the same kind of close scrutiny… and she did not feel identified exclusively as a second language writer" (90). Cox suggests that prejudice toward second language learners can undermine students' confidence, making them internalize weaknesses and overlook strengths.

Moreover, the intersection is fluid and dynamic and is also shaped by other less visible factors. These factors include students' interest to figure out some of the significant works that help them to build their confidence as writers. These works include class presentations, writing workshops, conferences with instructors, and peer group collaboration that can ensure their strengths as competent writers in culture that has different academic values and assumptions. Referring to Zappa-Hollman's emphasis on oral discourses that help students in their academic socialization, in their article, "Challenges and Problems of

Overseas Chinese Students Socializing into International Academic Settings,"
Tao and Renjie claim the importance of oral academic presentation (OAP) that
"play the crucial role to position [students] in the accepted communities to
articulate their opinion and learn to negotiate their identities" (733). In contrast,
Tao and Renjie use evidence from another research claim that those students
who resist group work or oral presentations as an intimidating experience will
resist this kind of academic socialization although they have realized the
importance of OAP. They further state that psychological factors hinder these
students from reconstructing their identities and positionality in the AOP context
even when they have good instructors, favorable classroom environments, and
supportive academic. Tao and Renjie's add that there are certain factors like
"negotiating competence, identities and power relations that hinder students from
successfully being involved into alien discourse communities" (733). Therefore,
these authors highlight the importance of L2 socialization as a complex dynamic
process of reconstructing identities to compete in the globally internationalized
academic circumstances (731). But L2 socialization alone cannot guarantee
students as competent in all-around academic performance. They need
motivation and interest to transfer their knowledge and skills from "high school to
college, from course to course, and from university to workplace setting" (Driscoll
and Wells n.p). By citing an educational psychologist David Perkins, Driscoll and
Wells emphasize that "dispositions are not knowledge, skills, or abilities—they
are qualities that determine how learners use and adapt their knowledge."

Understanding students' dispositions is important because doing so allows us to account for the very force that drives students growth as writers and scholars.

Thus, intersection as a metaphor allows us to consider whoever and whatever students encounter in the academic community, each of the supports will serve as part of the changing dynamic of their learning and growth as writers. Instead of labeling students by picking one component of their identity and ability, it is important that we see their development as a complex process. This changing process in turn complicates their identity as multidimensional, fluid, and ever-changing. Today's hesitant student who does not know how to respond to a reading or write a well-organized argument could be a confident scholar who can do the same far better in a few weeks; given favorable conditions and inputs, international students tend to make rapid progress, as I have seen in my own classrooms. Describing their identities and proficiencies is a difficult task without accounting for the dynamism and change that they are going through. Whereas the term intersectionality is conventionally used for foregrounding issues of power relations and social inequalities (Collins 1), I use it as a framework to discuss the overlapping and ever-changing nature of language proficiency, academic skills and motivation to learning. If the theory is used to discuss intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, and age, I have used it to highlight intersecting components of ability and success.

Chapter Four: Recommendations for Writing Teachers

Considering the complexity and fluidity of international students' identity and proficiency as they pass through the shifting intersection of language, academic skills, and motivation, writing teachers need to adopt thoughtful approaches to teaching these students. Some of these students face great challenges with their language proficiency and it is essential to help them with linguistic challenges in writing; other students need more help with various other skills that writing demands. Others may be linguistically and academically proficient but need to be more engaged. Often, students need support in all these areas. So, instead of trying to find generalized solutions for all international students (or even students from particular backgrounds), writing teachers need to develop flexible and adaptable pedagogical strategies for helping students as necessary. By nature, writing courses allow teachers to adapt support to individual students, and it is also important that we maximize this approach for international students. While we do so, we need to attend to the complexity of international students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding writing.

Language support is necessary because most international students are non-native English speakers who come from countries that are linguistically and culturally different from the US. These students struggle in the beginning to participate in new discourse communities of different disciplines and classrooms. Although "second language writers bring rich linguistic and cultural resources among other assets, a growing number of students also face serious challenges because of their English language proficiency" (Matsuda 142). So, teachers need

to adopt thoughtful teaching strategies to help these students catch up and perform well in writing courses. However, helping students with their language challenges should not be limited to identifying their weaknesses and trying to fix them. Paul Kei Matsuda shares an anecdote of a conversation with a colleague in his department that highlights the persistence of problematic views about language proficiency of international students. The teacher said that her "student whose writing looked 'different' from other students she was used to working with was failing because he had numerous and persisting errors in his writing… [although] the student had great ideas and interesting details" (141-142). The teacher went on to add: "I suppose I could be more lenient… [b]ut you know, his biology teacher isn't going to be as forgiving" (142). While the teacher did not teach language, she assessed it and did so quite strictly. Instead of using a rubric or assessment criteria, she also overvalued the student's deficit in relation to other components of writing where she said the student was doing fine. When weaknesses are identified, they need to be addressed effectively. Thus, writing teachers can best help international students by balancing between support with English language while helping students tackle other challenges.

One specific strategy of teaching language as a means to develop effective writing skills is to teach the students "image grammar," as described by Harry Noden in his article "Image Grammar: Painting Images with Grammatical Structures." Noden describes the teaching of grammar through techniques of image painting, or using visual descriptions of words that construct grammatical patterns. By using simple brushstroke of the participle, the absolute, the

appositive and adjectives, he taught his eighth graders about how they could create similar stylistic patterns of grammar. He gives an example of how he first created a projected image of a cat climbing a tree, then a sentence ("The cat scrambled up the tree."), and finally added two absolutes as brush strokes to add more visual details to the sentence, such as "hair bristling, claws digging into the bark, the cat scrambled up the tree." Moreover, his students not only created their own sentences on the basis of the original pattern that he provided but also painted paragraphs, and, interestingly one of his students created a beautiful poem. Also, by encouraging his students to imitate the grammatical patterns of well-constructed paragraphs of other writers, he helped his students develop writing skills and foster their interest to learn practically. Although Noden's teaching strategy is related to the idea of empowering and encouraging his eighth graders to develop familiarity in playing with grammatical patterns, they can be equally useful to teaching international students because they need special writing support from their teacher before they become familiar with the new linguistic convention necessary to develop writing proficiencies.

To be encouraging, writing teachers need to go beyond just pointing issues concerning language fluency. Engaging students in learning objectives that go beyond language can, in fact, help them learn language more effectively. By focusing on different problems that individual students face, teachers can help them learn language while they also grow as writers in other dimensions. For example, most international students in my class are fluent in English but they struggle with basic ideas and skills related to researching, developing their own

ideas and arguments, and following simple genre conventions. Since writing involves a complex process with a number of skills, writing teachers need to pay attention to which students are struggling with what stages and processes of writing.

As writing teachers, we need to see our students as a resource who bring "varied linguist, cultural, and educational backgrounds" (Zawacki and Habib, "Internationalization," 651) and create a support mechanism until they are familiar with the new linguistic, cultural and educational systems. While focusing on language-related concerns of teachers working with international students, Terry Myers Zawacki and Anna Sophia Habib in their article "Internationalization, English L2 Writers, and the Writing Classroom: Implications for Teaching and Learning" emphasize the "need for more explicit attention to language in our teaching, not just as a problem for L2 or basic writers but as rhetorical tool that all students can use to move beyond the formulaic, overly generalized 'rules' for academic writing…" (651). This means that one of the best ways to empower them linguistically is to help them "internalize the words of others" until they develop their skills to transfer it to their own, as Paul Butler suggests in his article *Reconsidering the Teaching of Style* (81). Helping them apply stylistic strategies like imitating other writers can be particularly helpful for new international students.

Naoko Morita has pointed out international students' communication skills as a challenge to effectively display knowledge and competence in class presentations (449). As beginners and second language learners, these students

struggle because they have to devote most of their time and energy to successfully involve in "alien discourse communities" (Tao and Renjie 731). Moreover, they find it quite difficult to meet expectations of the teachers who demand them to develop their all set of academic skills right from the beginning when they enter the class. In order to address problems and challenges of international students, we need to explore different teaching strategies that help to accelerate these students' learning in a new academic culture. Since each individual challenge is so complex and difficult to access, we need to focus on other factors like arousing interest and creating learning environments, motivating and engaging students in various intellectual activities, conferencing or individual counseling, and providing positive reinforcement through feedback and comments. Accounting for all of these factors and selecting some based on individual needs will help writing teachers to understand international students who go through the shifting intersection of many factors.

To address the needs of growing number of international students every year, it is necessary to update and invent effective approaches. It is also necessary to develop strategies to help students prepare "to work in an increasingly global market" (Cochran 21). By emphasizing the relevance of Matsuda and Silva's curriculum that focuses on the needs of cross-cultural composition in the writing class to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, Cochran suggests that traditional placement practices that used to place students into the mainstream of ESL writing courses turns out to be problematic (21). She suggests that designing cross-cultural composition courses

with native English-speaking and ESL students and focusing on the research-based academic writing on their own linguistic and literary experiences can help writing teachers to derive successful outcomes. First, the students would learn from each other while doing peer review activities and second the students would get the opportunity to be globally aware and sensitive to the diverse experience of others.

When international students are new, they are likely to write differently because they have not yet learned new rhetorical patterns of US academic discourse. When this happens, rather than trying to help them eliminate the difference and conform to the new standard, writing teachers should try to educate themselves about the different rhetorical patterns in students writing, even as they teach new patterns. Appreciating difference and allowing more time before students can show a command of standard academic English can help teachers avoid undermining their confidence. In fact, international students don't need to give up old patterns in order to learn new ones; instead, they could learn to draw on the repertoire of rhetorical patterns from different cultures. In "Using Contrastive Rhetoric in the ESL Classroom," Janet Quinn suggests that contrastive rhetoric can help students develop both L1 and L2 writing skills. She argues, "contrastive rhetoric studies the writing of second language learners to understand how it is affected by their first language culture" (31). Quinn borrows this idea from Robert Kaplan who wrote the article "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education" in 1966, which gave rise to research on contrastive rhetoric. Quinn found contrastive rhetoric helpful to read her ESL students'

papers because it helped her understand organizational patterns of their culture. Because Kaplan's theory is based on the idea "that differences in writing conventions are not difference in thought pattern but in writing patterns that have been learned" (Quinn 31), learning this rhetorical theory can help writing teachers to understand other cultures' rhetorical techniques and help international students accordingly. The multidimensional approach of contrastive rhetoric is useful as a teaching strategy especially to address the complexities of second language writing.

To effectively teach writing to international students, we should also try to learn about how they experienced and performed writing before they arrived in our classrooms. Some students may have enjoyed writing while others may have viewed it as a burden. For instance, if writing was part of a stress-inducing examination system that required students to memorize vast amounts of reading, then that kind of experience may not inspire students; the experience may neither transfer nor motivate students to write. One of the strategies (positive reinforcement) for fostering interest and motivation is described in Donald Daiker's article "Learning to Praise." Daiker states the fact that the writers who suffer from writing apprehension need praise. Starting feedback with appreciation can be an effective teaching strategy for international students because for many of them, as for any apprehensive writers, "anxiety about writing outweighs the projection of gain from writing" (105). By helping them to overcome the fear of writing, we can boost our students' confidence and thus, reinforce positive attitude toward writing. Our

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positive and genuine feedback, constructive criticism and praise to highlight their strength help these students to transfer their previous knowledge and experiences in order to learn in a new academic culture.. Thus, one of the strategies for promoting students' learning is to help them develop positive attitude by genuinely praising their strengths, even as we help them overcome their weaknesses and meet high standards.

Another strategy for teaching international students would be to use visual aids and different modes of expression. One such innovative writing practice is described in Helen Lepp Friescen's essay "The Photography and Writing: Alternative Ways of Learning for ESL Students." In the essay, Friescen shows the benefit of teaching visually "to engage students of different backgrounds and experiences." She encourages the students to use photo and haiku to play with visuals and words in order to express their experiences creatively. She says that her new teaching strategy inspires "the otherwise quiet students speak up, enthusiastically participate and feel comfortable in contributing to class discussions and sharing their work" (40). International students can especially benefit from a variety of teaching strategies that are encouraging and engaging.

Writing teachers' intervention is also necessary when students view writing as a discouraging challenge. Especially new international students are anxious about not being able to write fluently. Thus, "[t]he job for the teacher is to start from where students are at the beginning of the semester, and to bring them to where they need to be" (Matsuda 144) rather than failing or reducing the grade by focusing only on language issues. They should teach them about different

genres and their purpose and different rhetorical skills that they need to use in their writing. If teachers appreciate students for sharing their experiences in class, students will be encouraged to speak and write better. Writing teachers are the best persons to intervene and support because they teach basic communication skills in college. Instead of too much focus on grammar or language issues, these students need to learn language that serves rhetorical purpose of communication.

> Pausing to listen to our IL2 (International English-second-language) students, in our teaching and our research, as they puzzle over how and whether the styles, forms, genres, and rhetorical concepts we're teaching are translatable to other linguistic, social, cultural, and professional contexts they will be entering, compels us to acknowledge and adapt to their growing presence in our writing classrooms, which, by extension, moves us to rethink the language and writing needs of all of our students for the diverse contexts they will enter. (Zawacki and Habib, "internationalization" 656)

Writing competence develops faster if students gather content knowledge as a source of invention strategy. It is important to learn content, context, and convention of different genres. Moreover, transfer of this knowledge into their particular discipline is the most essential skill that these students need to gain from their writing teacher.

Paying attention to students' motivation and interest does not mean that it is teachers' sole responsibility to engage students. As Matsuda notes, pedagogical goals "cannot be achieved without the students' good-faith effort" (144). Students' disposition is what truly allows them to transfer knowledge to

new contexts. However, teachers can and should pay attention to this dimension

and foster it in any way they can.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

International students are a very diverse group and each of them go through shifting intersections of language skills, academic proficiency, and motivation; addressing these two realities can help writing teachers account for differences and changes, minimizing the need to generalize and allowing us to effectively adapt teaching. It is important to use analytical and pedagogical frameworks that account for diversity and change in order to move away from traditional approaches of trying to find better labels. While pointing out problems with using labels like ESL and ELL, Christina Ortmeier Hooper in her article "The Shifting Nature of Identity: Social Identity, L2 Writers, and High School" discusses the frustration of a student who "was convinced that he could do well in Level 3 classes if given the chance. But when it came time to register for classes, he was continually encouraged to remain where he was" (13). Teachers need to recognize constant change and progress among their international students, instead of viewing them in terms of the challenges they had or have.

Traditional categories such as ELL "not only mark difference" but they also suggest the sense that some students are always "learners" who are "at considerable distance from English language norms" as set by institutions and regardless of years of study in English and language proficiency (Cox et al. 14-15). This stereotypical way of labeling can intensify other challenges that the students need to overcome; labeling students in terms of language alone also can onbscure many other challenges that are either reflected in language or have nothing to do with it. For example, challenges with academic skills may be the

cause or effect of low language proficiency, motivation to invest time and energy in a writing class, or the assignment may or may not be related to language challenges. Similarly, even without a high proficiency in language, students may be able to use "strategic competence" to enhance their understanding of content, context, convention, genre, and other rhetorical skills in order to be successful. Teachers must pay attention to these complexities in order to target their support with language, basic skills of writing, participation in class, and so on.

The three dimensions that I have used in this thesis are essentially a sample set. In other words, I am not suggesting that these three are the ultimate terms of analysis. Rather, by using these kinds of terms, we can and should account for diversity and change. Accounting for differences among groups, individuals, and their changing situations will allow us to go beyond the attempt to find the perfect labels and perfect pedagogy. It will allow individual institutions, writing programs, and teachers to adapt their practices to be adapted to their students.

As our classrooms become more and more "globalized," it is important to not simply try to assimilate students into local US conventions alone; the conventions themselves are constantly reshaped by changing realities. While we need to acclimate international students to the US academic convention, we also need to prepare them to compete as informed global citizens. We should draw on different rhetorical traditions, read and write about global issues, and let students use linguistic awareness from other languages. Drawing on different rhetorical traditions can make writing classes more effective, while engaging

students from different backgrounds. Students are more motivated when they read and write about significant issues about the world at large, whether they are international or domestic. Letting students utilize the resources that they bring from different languages, such as idioms and expressions translated into English, can also inspire students to write more. These are not mutually exclusive goals – we can try to achieve all goals and use all resources. Dangling Fu, in her book "An Island of English: Teaching ESL in China Town" describes how the teachers in CLA (Chinese Language Arts) class helped their students to learn about new places, cultures, wars, epidemics, and many more global issues and how they could make connections between historical events and incidents and how fast they were learning as informed citizens. She notes: "International students are increasingly viewed in terms of the knowledge, experience, and perspectives that they bring into US education" so teachers need ways to help them "translate the resource into success" (36). However, these students not only need to master new academic skills here, but they also need to negotiate their changing identities at the intersection of language, academic skills and interest.

As writing teachers, we must understand how international students go through complex changes. The changes are not only related to becoming successful in the college or university they are studying; they are also related to changes happening in a world that is rapidly changing and increasingly complicated. It is only by accounting for the many dimensions and dynamics of what international students go through that we can best help them tackle their challenges in and beyond our classrooms.

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