

Beyond 'Baby English': Stories of writing and the emergent writer identity of a first- year business studies undergraduate student

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Abstract

Despite its contributions to conceptualisation of a writer's identity in academic writing, Ivanič's (1998, 2005, 2006) concept of discursive identity tends to foreground the synchronic development and background the historical development of a student-writer. Drawing on the increasing number of studies informed by narrative analysis in second language acquisition literature (e.g. Benson & Nunan, 2004; Coffey & Street, 2008), I will examine the stories that appear in my interview with one business studies undergraduate student about his writing experiences before and after university. I will show that the learning trajectory of the student-writer displays a change from a notion of writing associated with an overemphasis on the surface features, such as syntax and grammar, prior to university, to an awareness of the importance of collaboration in group projects in business studies. Closely related to this changing notion of writing is the changing self-identification of the student-writer, as the collaborative nature of business studies group projects allows the student-writer to move beyond his identification as a poor writer to a competent writer/group member.

Introduction

Researchers' interest in the university students' writing coincided with the increasing number of non-traditional students in higher education in the UK since the 1990s (e.g. Ivanič 1998; Lillis, 2001; Leung & Safford, 2005) and the growing population of bilingual or multilingual students in English-medium universities in other countries (e.g. Angéil-Carter, 1997; Thesen, 1997; Canagarajah, 1997, 2002; Casanave, 2002). These studies aim to address the exigencies experienced by these students in their socialisation into the academic discourse community. Among the studies, Ivanič's (1998) seminal research on writer identity shows that writing an essay is more than the mastery of the academic register but is also an identity project in which student-writers position themselves in relation to different discourse communities. In this paper, I will suggest that the historical aspect of a student-writer and the characteristics of specific academic disciplines can be further explored in research on student writing.

This paper will focus on changes of writer identity of a first year business undergraduate student Sam.¹ By examining Sam's three stories about writing, I will explore (1) the overall trajectory and turning points in Sam's writing experience, and (2) the way Sam constructs his writing experience and the identifications available or denied to him in the stories. The stories reveal that for Sam, writing before university was associated with assessments and was related to his access to a particular community such as the workplace. However, the business school curriculum, with its emphasis on group work, provides a context for Sam to develop new writing practices that are beyond the textual aspect.

Changes, however, will not come without a student-writer taking the initiative. In this paper, I will draw on narrative analysis and the concept of the imagined community, developed by Norton (2001) and other researchers (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007), to examine the ways Sam positions himself in his stories about writing that emerged in my interview with him. I will also explore how Sam's image of an idealised business community triggers changes in his writer identity, and show that in Sam's story about a management group project, the group project setting provides a space for Sam to negotiate not only his identity as a student-writer but also membership of his imagined community of the business world. In other words, Sam's imagination of the idealised team work dynamic in the workplace enables him to negotiate writer identity. Furthermore, I will discuss how narrative provides Sam with a fluid medium through which he can contextualise his writing experiences in specific time and place and thus make sense out of his experiences.²

¹ The names of the student and other institutes are all pseudonyms.

² I use the term 'the student-writer' to emphasise a student's institutional identity and his/her role as a writer who can draw on different linguistic devices and subject knowledge in accomplishing his/her disciplinary writing. The term 'business disciplinary writing' is inclusive of the different genres (case studies, recommendation reports, essays, individual assignments and group projects) that are assigned to business students.

Theoretical Framing

Ivanič's Framework of Writer Identity

Ivanič's framework of writer identity (1998) is informed by Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor that distinguishes the character, defined to represent a certain type of human characteristic, and the performer, who evokes a particular human characteristic in a performance. This distinction of character and performer leads to Ivanič's classification of four aspects of writer identity: (1) the autobiographical self that is associated with a writer's representation of his/her past experiences (writer-as-performer); (2) the discorsal self that refers to the self-portrait the writer presents in writing and is related to the notion of a writer's 'voice' (writer-as-character); (3) the self-as-author that refers to the student-writer's sense of ownership of the discourse of his/her academic discipline; and (4) possibilities for selfhood which is concerned with the possible positionings available to the writer in a literacy event. Ivanič, however, states that the 'main focus' of her research falls on the writer's discorsal self (1998: 14).

In her later articles, Ivanič shifted her focus from the textual, represented by the discorsal self, to the contextual dimension of writing. For instance, Ivanič (2005) introduces the concept of relational identity which is concerned about the writer's anticipation of the reader and how this perceived reader-writer relation can have an impact on a writer's textual production. This concern with the contextual becomes more salient in an article published in 2006, in which Ivanič draws on the sociocultural theory of learning (primarily Activity Theory) and identifies five dimensions of identity for investigation: (1) identity is relational; (2) identity is discorsally constructed; (3) identity is not so much a state as a process of identification; (4) identity is networked; (5) identity is continuously reconstructed. Although the discorsal identity is preserved from the earlier framework, the new framework accentuates the ongoing construction of identity (points 3 & 5) and the situatedness of learning and writing (points 1 & 4). The changing framework implies Ivanič's attempts to capture the contextual elements in writing and finally to demonstrate how the textual is mediated by the contextual. This interest in contexts is symptomatic of the research agenda of the social theory of writing (e.g. Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lillis, 2001, 2003) that points out that studies of writing need to include the social contexts in which a text is embedded.

In the following section, I will identify two directions to pursue in my study of Sam's writer identity in order to capture his development over time and the impact of the uniqueness of business disciplinary writing on a student-writer.

Beyond a synchronic notion of identity: Historical development and the notion of change

The term 'synchronic' suggests a snapshot of a process at one particular moment in time. Although in Ivanič's framework the concepts 'autobiographical self' and 'possibilities of selfhood' show an interest in the historical development of a writer, Ivanič's analysis

emphasises one particular stage of a student-writer development. This can be explained by Ivanič's research objective which aims at explicating the tension between privileged academic discourse and other less privileged discourses; however, this focus on multiplicity and the associated identity negotiation in a single literacy event leaves the temporal dimension or change relatively underexplored in her analysis. For instance, Menard-Warwick (2005) calls for a more thorough theorisation of the historical development of a writer's identity and suggests that a study needs to capture both the institutional constraints and ongoing identity project over a period of time in order to further understand the continuity and changes in a writer. I would add that a formulation of identity about a writer's historical development should not only look at the past and present experiences of a writer, but also the writer's aspiration and his/her desired membership of any particular community. As Section three will show, Sam's attempt in constructing the practices of the business world is one factor that leads to change in his writer identity.

Beyond the essayist tradition: Business studies assignments as group project

Although the essay genre is still the dominant genre for undergraduate students in social sciences and humanities departments (Hyland, 2009), in my interviews with six business studies undergraduates in my university at the pilot stage of my research project on students' writing practices, I was told that essays were rarely assigned in their business courses. However, all of my participants needed to complete one or two 'group projects' each semester. This finding is similar to that of Zhu (2004). In his study of 242 business course assignments at both undergraduate and graduate levels over five semesters at one American university, he finds that 67% and 65% of the 'business discipline genres' (case analysis, business reports, business proposals, and design projects) of graduate and undergraduate levels, respectively, required team work (2004: 122-3). Furthermore, the purpose of assignments was mixed. On the one hand, the assignments showed 'a strong problem-solving and decision-making orientation' and yet the assignments also fulfilled institutional purposes and tutors expected the students to demonstrate how well they understood the concepts of their courses. As Sam's story about his management group project shows, this ambiguity about the purpose of the assignment means that students need to negotiate with their tutors about the purpose of their group projects.

My interest in the historical development of writer identity and the unique characteristics of business disciplinary writing led to two questions I will examine in this paper:

- 1) What is the overall trajectory and what are the turning points in Sam's literacy history?
- 2) How does Sam construct his writing experiences and what are the identifications that are or are not available to Sam in the stories?

To answer these questions I will examine related questions such as what writing means to Sam in the stories, what purposes writing serves and Sam's orientations towards his experience and his evaluation of his experiences.

But before my analysis of Sam's stories, I will first discuss the use of narrative analysis in social sciences and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature in order to show the importance of the stories that Sam gave spontaneously in the interview.

Narrative Analysis

'Narrative Turn' in social sciences and educational research

Narrative, advocates of narrative analysis argue, has been considered a means for humans to make sense of and interpret their experiences. For instance, Bruner (1990) writes that narrative provides an 'organising principle' by which 'people organise their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world' (1990: 35). In social sciences, the narrative turn signals a change in research interest, which according to Brockmeier and Harré (2001) shifts from 'a futile search for universal laws of human behaviour' to 'the problem of accounting for the dynamic patterns of human behaviour' (2001: 39). Researchers have also recognised the importance of narratives or stories in interviews. Cortazzi (2002) states that 'narrative analysis gives a researcher access to the textual interpretative world of the teller, which presumably in some way mediates or manages reality' (2002: 385). Similar observations are also made by other social sciences researchers who suggest that impromptu stories in interviews usually render rich data and contextualised insights into the life experience of the researched (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993; Rubin & Rubin 1995), even though they may not fit into the researcher's predetermined coding system.

Narrative analysis has been used by SLA researchers in recent years to investigate how social and institutional factors contribute to or do disservice to language development (e.g. Norton, 2000; Block, 2005; Coffey & Street, 2008; Ros i Sole, 2007). Narrative analysis is also used to explore topics in SLA such as motive, affect and age, because narrative is regarded to shed light on the contextual elements related to these topics (Benson, 2004). These foci in SLA are accompanied by a growing interest in learners' stories and also signals researchers' concern about language learners' identity development (e.g Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

The use of narrative in my study

The significance of narrative emerged during my interviews with the student-writers. Although stories did not appear very frequently in the interviews, they usually emerged in two points in the interview: when I asked my participants how they learned to write since childhood and whether anything particularly challenging happened when they worked on their business studies assignments at university. Narrative, it dawned on me, allows the

participants to situate their experience in specific time and community and to make sense of the different factors, such as schools, family members and peers, had an impact on their writing. These are moments when institutional constraints as well as power relations become salient.

Although Brockmeier and Harré (2001) argue that the term narrative 'has become rather inflationary' (2001: 40), they suggest it is generally agreed that the basic elements of narrative contain characters, a setting and a plot that develops over time (see also Riessman, 2002). More than a recounting of events, narratives also involve the teller's perspective that makes the story worth telling (Bruner, 2001; Cortazzi, 2002). When identifying narratives in my studies, I focus on the basic elements of character, setting and plot. To examine the significance of the stories, I will focus on two elements that will be discussed in the next section, learning trajectories and the turning points.

Learners' trajectories and the role of turning point in narrative

Narrative analysis enables a researcher to examine a learner's development, one common focus in SLA research, through tracing a learner's learning trajectory (e.g. Norton, 2001; Murphy et al., 2004; Ros i Solé, 2007; Coffey & Street 2008). Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) point out that the focus of the learning trajectory is to provide a contextualised view of learning, taking into account the social and institutional factors:

In a sociocultural approach, the focus of learning and education is not children, nor schools, but human lives seen as trajectories through multiple social practices in various social institutions. If learning is to be efficacious, then what a child or adult does now as a learner must be connected in meaning and motivating ways with 'mature' (insider) versions of related social practices (1996: 4).

Since narrative is a medium that allows the teller to locate his/her experience in time and space and illuminates the questions such as who was involved and what purposes the writing event served, it is not surprising that the medium can provide the researcher an entry point to the situated experiences of a learner.

When tracing a learner's learning trajectory, a researcher in particular pay attention turning points in a learner's narrative, which refer to experiences of change as a result of the teller's perspective or change as the consequence of some unexpected events. For example, Riessman (2002) refers turning points to moments 'when the narrator signified a radical shift in the expected course of a life' (2002: 705); Bruner (2001) defines turning points as 'those episodes in which, as if to underline the power of the agent's intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist's story to a belief, a conviction, a thought' (2001: 31). In the case of Sam, I will argue that the turning point regarding to his changing notion of writing becomes salient when comparison is made between his stories of writing before and after university.

Data and the researcher's roles

The data is drawn from the pilot study I conducted from December 2008 to June 2009 at one university in Hong Kong with a student population of about 10,000, and about 1,000 undergraduate students being business majors. The goal of the research project is to explore how the contextual aspect of writing mediates business students' textual production. Six business undergraduate students were invited. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the six participants and writing samples were collected. The data of this paper is from the first interview, which included six questions about the participants' literacy acquisition history (the questions can be found in Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted in Cantonese, and the translation is mine. Although the translated transcripts may not be able to capture in full the student-writer's meaning in Cantonese, the transcripts aim to preserve the important elements of narrative as well as Sam's evaluation of his experiences.

I worked as a language tutor in the university for three school years and conducted English discussion groups, participation in which was on a voluntary basis and no assessment was involved. It was through the discussion group that I came to know Sam. My role as a language tutor he met in an extra-curricular setting has two impacts on the researcher-researched relation. On the one hand, I might have been placed in a higher institutional status by the student-writers and this might have made the student-writers self-conscious of their institutional identity as good students. But the fact that I met them through a non-credit bearing extracurricular activity where the participants were encouraged to express their own ideas in a more relaxed setting could have a leveling effect on our relationship. I would say that Sam joined the interview because he is a serious student and I was curious about the kind of research postgraduate students do.

Sam's stories were selected in this paper because they show that writing is a great challenge even for hard-working students who are willing to accommodate institutional conventions. Second, the stories shed light on how changes in writer identity involve active negotiation of the context of writing. A study of Sam and his stories thus share the purpose of heuristic case studies, which are used to stimulate the researcher's imagination and to develop theory (Mitchell, 1983: 193).

Sam's writer identity

Sam is a year one Business Studies student who transferred from the Mathematics Department, where he studied for one year, since his public examination results did not let him go to the highly competitive business school. To get permission for transfer from the university, students need exceptionally good grades (straight As in fact), and so for the whole year as a Mathematics student Sam got up at six in the morning, stayed in the library apart from going to lectures and tutorials and went home at eleven in the evening, the closing hour of the library. Perseverance as well as an awareness of and willingness to

accommodate the ‘rules of the game’ are characteristics of Sam, who needed to overcome all the hurdles to get into the business school.

Despite his good work ethics, Sam seems to show a sense of ambivalence towards his peer community in business school. For instance, since students at the Mathematics Department wear jeans most of the time and pay little attention to fashion, Sam feels uncomfortable about business suits, which form part of the norm for presentations in business courses. Further, Sam thinks some of his local Hong Kong students are slightly elitist as these students usually got good grades in public examinations and tend to think highly of themselves. It can be said that in order to get into the business school, Sam is willing to learn and adopt the ‘rules’ but to blend into the community of local Hong Kong business students is another question. As the stories unfold, I will show how business disciplinary writing is a site for identity negotiation for Sam.

Stories of writing before university

In the interview, Sam told two stories about writing before university as shown in Figures 1 and 2. At first glance, the two stories seem to suggest very different orientations towards writing. In the first story, Sam won a writing competition when he was a primary school student. The happy ending seems to suggest a positive orientation towards writing and Sam said that after winning the competition he was more motivated to read books to improve to his writing. In contrast, what is salient in the second story is the face-threatening scenario in which Sam was criticised by the manager of a theme park in front of all of the other job applicants for making a mistake. A mistake Sam described to be ‘silly’, in the job application form. However, although these two stories seem to show opposite feelings towards writing, I will argue that they share a few similarities.

1	Eleanor: Here comes more or less the end of part 1. Do you want to add anything to
2	what you have said? Do you have some important experience [about writing] you
3	want to talk about?
4	Sam: About learning [to write] from other people. Once, I read a book, I highlighted
5	one particular sentence. I was in primary school and my composition was bad. We
6	had a composition competition at primary school. I copied the sentence in my
7	composition, and I won the competition. It’s like everyone who read the composition
8	remembered that sentence.
9	E: Alright.
10	S: It’s like it didn’t look like I could write that well, but the sentence was really good.
11	The sentence had a parallel structure [Sam tried to replicate the sentence structure
12	for me but he could not remember the exact wording]. Because I won the prize, my
13	teachers changed their opinions of me. This is a special experience.

14	E: They changed their opinions of you or of your writing?
15	S: I think both, because I felt more confident of my writing. And I found that reading
16	is useful. So I read a lot even when I was in primary school. I think it is an effective
17	way to improve writing.

Figure 1: Sam's story about the Chinese writing competition³

1	Eleanor: Have you had any summer jobs or part-time jobs [that involved some kind of writing]?
2	Sam: Yes, I even needed to fill in an application form. I worked in a theme park [in
3	the summer] before I started university. I made a silly mistake in my application
4	form, and other applicants and I went to a room like this [Sam pointed to the room
5	where he and I had the interview]. The manager was standing in the middle and he
6	was surrounded by other applicants. He read each of the application forms. He
7	would say 'There is a mistake in this form' and he would put the form in one box
8	[the box for rejected applications]. He would make criticisms in front of the whole
9	group. Then it was my turn. He said to me 'you studied at Sir Edwards' School. Do
10	you know I also graduated from that school? Do you know that you made a
11	mistake?' But he put the form in the box where the applicants would get an offer. It
12	was a really memorable experience, someone speaking in front of everybody that
13	you made a mistake in the form in front of so many people and by an alumnus of my
14	secondary school.
14	E: But that was the application process?
15	S: Yes, there were 200 applicants and they took only 40 applicants.
16	E: It was like a recruitment day.
17	S: A lot of students who finished their public examinations would apply because it
18	sounded fun.

Figure 2: Sam's story about filling in an application form for summer job

Writing is associated with assessments and embedded in institutional settings

In both stories, writing, whether in the form of school composition genre or form filling, is assessed by someone who has more institutional power than Sam, and the results of the assessment can affect Sam's access to a particular community, no matter whether it was about his membership to the community of good writers at school or his access to a job. In

³ In the transcripts in Figures 1, 2 and 3, brackets ([]) are used to insert additional information to preserve coherence in meaning.

the first story, the power differential between Sam-the-assessed and the assessor is obscured by the fact the judge acts like a benevolent authority who favours Sam's writing over other students'. But power differential is more obvious in the second story about Sam's theme park application, which is also registered by Sam's use of reported speech to imitate the manager's comments and thereby separate the manager's words from his own (lines 6 to 10, Figure 2). In fact, that was the only instance of direct speech Sam used in a one-hour interview. Sam also tried to describe the physical setting of the scene by using gestures to compare the room where the story took place and the room we had the interview; this again reveals how vividly Sam remembered the experience.

In the story, the theme park manager draws his authority on his institutional status and, instead of talking to the applicants one by one, asks them to form a circle so his criticisms can be heard by everyone. Furthermore, the manager's criticism of Sam's mistake suggests that a mistake is considered to be a stigma and the writer deserves criticism even in front of the other applicants. Although it can be argued that a mistake on an application form made by a fresh graduate from high school who is unfamiliar with job application forms is not surprising, the point is that the manager's criticism reflects the impact of the deficit account of literacy.

Since writing is institutionalised and is related to assessments, it is not surprising that for Sam writing is something he does not like very much, although Sam is a writer who is willing to accommodate the expectations and rules of the different writing games he has encountered. Sam told me that the writing he enjoys is the thoughts he scribbled on newspapers, and the notes he made when studying. In Sam's own words:

'A pleasant experience, there was one or two. As I said, I will write down my thoughts when I study. If I feel that I can write down a logical argument, I feel very happy because I feel that I understand the material' (Sam interview, January 2009).

Sam considers himself to be a good, logical thinker but this quality was not assessed in these two stories. So Sam's investment in his identity as an analytical person who likes to read and has his own thoughts is not recognised in these stories.

The surface features of writing are used to index other qualities of the writer

In the story about writing composition, Sam attributed his success to the use of an intricate sentence that showed a parallel structure. When I asked him if he could remember where the sentence came from and the topic of the writing composition, he told me that he could neither remember the original contexts in which the sentence was from nor what he wrote in his composition. What remained of the piece writing is the formal, surface feature of the sentence, decontextualised from the original context or the new contexts in which it was transplanted.

The textual, however, has great indexing power. In the two stories, although what is assessed is the textual dimension, it is the other qualities of the writer that writing is supposed to evaluate. When talking about his writing composition, Sam said that his teachers changed their opinions of him (see lines 12 and 13, Figure 1). This shift in focus,

from surface features of writing to the qualities of a good student, confused me and made me ask a clarifying question during the interview. However, Sam did not make any distinction in his reply.

The second story (about Sam's job application) shows that the manager judged the applicant's competence for the job based on whether the applicant made any mistake on the form. The textual, associated with form-filling skills, is used by the manager to identify general competence in the workplace. It would be understandable if the job involved a lot of administrative work, but the only form Sam filled in during the whole summer was to write a few sentences to explain why a visitor slipped on the floor.

The writer of simple style could be infantilised

Although Sam got an overall mark of 8, out of 9, in IELTS⁴, which is considered a very good mark for university students in Hong Kong⁵. Sam attributed his good mark to his understanding of the test's instructions. He thought that there are students whose English is better than his but they got average grades because they were mistaken about the rules. In fact, one repeated expression Sam uses to describe his English is 'Baby English', which is characterised by simple lexis and sentence structures:

'But starting in form 6⁶, more logical thinking was required. We started to write argumentative essays. This came with more stringent requirements for formal language use and vocab and sentence variety. At form 7, I tried not to use Baby English in my writing, like "lots" and to find some words to substitute it. My teachers and tutors also told me not to use Baby English' (Sam interview, January 2009).

The expression (Baby English) suggests that a user of simple English is infantilised; furthermore, since we do not tend to attribute intellectual rigour to babies, this expression again shows the indexing power of the textual and how a person's intellectual qualities could be undermined by the textual aspect of his/her writing. The expression thus best captures Sam's anxiety that his identification as an analytical person would be denied because of his use of relatively simple style.

In short, Sam's two stories about writing before university show that although he is willing to accommodate institutional conventions, writing is still an unpleasant and onerous task because it is associated with assessments. Sam considers himself an intelligent person by emphasising his logical thinking and his habit of jotting his thoughts down when reading the newspaper and during revision. This identification might allow room to

⁴ IELTS stands for International English Language Testing System. Although the test is usually used as an entry test by universities in English speaking countries, many Hong Kong universities encourage their students to take the test during their university years and will finance the students who are willing to publish their scores on their official university transcripts.

⁵ For instance, in 2007 the average IELTS mark scored by university students in Hong Kong was 6.67 out of nine (Jiang, 2007).

⁶ In Hong Kong, forms 6 and 7 are the final two years of secondary school study before university. Students have to sit in the Advanced Level Examinations for about four to five subject areas, with English and Chinese as mandatory subjects.

negotiate identity. Unfortunately this does not happen in the stories. What becomes salient is that the surface, mechanical aspect of writing has huge indexing power. The use of complex sentence structure is used to index a good student, and a mistake is used to index the general competence of a job applicant.

Before talking about Sam's third story of writing however, I will explore Norton (2001) and other researchers' (e.g. Kanno & Norton, 2003; Murphy, Chen & Chen, 2004; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) discussion of the imagined community. The concept shows that imagination plays an important role in a learner's investment in a language, and I will show how Sam's imagination of the business community triggers changes in his writer identity.

The imagined community

The concept of the imagined community is about what we can be, what we would like to be and what we do not want to be affiliated with, and how these questions become constituting factors of our identification. Although this concept may seem rather commonsensical, this notion is intended to contribute to an understudied area in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), that of the learner's imagination. The concept was first used by Norton (2001) borrowing from Benedict Anderson (1991), a political scientist who attempts to explore the development of individual members' affiliation with their nations. The concept has later been further developed by other SLA researchers (e.g. Kanno & Norton, 2003; Murphy, Chen & Chen, 2004; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

The concept of the imagined community, these SLA researchers argue, points out that in studies on language learners' motivation and participation in the target language community, factors regarding the learner's sense of their future and aspired identities are often overlooked. For instance, Pavlenko and Norton (2007) write that:

[S]o far it [SLA literature] has focused predominantly on learning that takes place as a result of the learners' direct engagement in face-to-face communities. Learning that is connected to learner participation in a wider world has been little explored. Yet we humans are capable, through our imagination, of perceiving a connection with people beyond our immediate social networks. Our orientation toward such imagined communities might have just as much impact on our current identities and learning as direct involvement in communities of our everyday life. We argue that the notion of imagination as a way to appropriate meanings can create new identities (2007: 670).

In Norton's and other researchers' formulation of imagined communities, several characteristics can be seen. First, the concept of imagined communities, instead of referring to a learner's fantasy, involves active pursuit on the learner's part to align to the 'rules and regulations' of the imagined community (Kanno & Norton, 2003: 246), even though the learner's construction of the imagined communities may not reflect the reality (e.g. Kanno 2000). Second, this active pursuit of the rules and regulations of the imagined community usually does not leave the learner's sense of identity unchanged; Kanno and Norton (2003)

argue that a learner's imagined identity 'may compel learners to seek certain kinds of educational opportunities they might otherwise not seek' and therefore 'imagined identities can reframe the learning experience of a given student' (2003: 246). Third, a learner usually constructs an imagined community when there is a problem of access to the community, such as the case of immigrants whose professional degrees and work experiences are not recognised in their countries of adoption (e.g. Norton, 2001).

The concept of imagined community helps to further extend Ivanič's framework (1998, 2005, 2006) because of its emphasis in a learner's participation both in the immediate learning environment and in the 'rules and regulations' of the imagined community. These characteristics also provide an analytical lens for me to examine Sam's group project experience.

Sam's story about a management group project at university

Like other vocational oriented subjects at higher education, business disciplinary writing is different from more traditional academic disciplines. Business disciplinary writing usually shows a strong problem-solving orientation, and the tutor may see assignments as sites for students to examine real business phenomena; furthermore, group projects are common and are supposed to facilitate collaboration among members, a workplace skill that students are encouraged to learn (Zhu 2004). However, based on my interviews with six business students in one university, collaboration is variable across groups. Some groups prefer to divide the project into equal parts and each member works on his/her own; the parts are combined and submitted right before the due date.

1	S: Yes, one thing, in this project, we had a presentation and a report. Usually, Hong
2	Kong students divide the project in equal parts and put them together at the end. But
3	I did something different. Because there were two exchange students, and they don't
4	know Cantonese. So I asked questions for them [during the interview with the
5	university security centre] and the security centre people were Hong Kongese. So I
6	gave the exchange students the data. And we all needed to do the write-up. I know
7	that my English is less proficient than theirs. So I wrote a draft, using "Baby
8	English", and gave it to the exchange students to proofread. I could make sure that
9	my write-up was grammatically correct and it saved us time. That was a great
10	experience. That is synergy.
11	E: So the distribution of work, would the local Hong Kong students be responsible
12	for drafting ...
13	S: No, only me used this strategy [i.e. asking the foreign students to proofread his
14	draft], the other two local Hong Kong students just did their own parts. But I
15	thought it was an opportunity to have exchange students in the same group and why
16	don't we try to learn more from each other? The other two local students know each
17	other very well. They had all the classes together last semester. And the other three

18	members, including me, spent more time talking to each other.
19	E: So the distribution of work was like... you were responsible for asking questions...
29	S: It was more like we three students distributed the work among ourselves.
30	
31	S: The dynamics among the three of us were good. But the other two [local students]
32	I didn't pay much attention to. I would say the collaboration is more at the group
33	level rather than the team level, because every one did the same thing [responsible
34	for different parts of the project in an individual manner] but I think it would be
35	better if work was assigned depending on the strength of individual members. I
36	think it is what management is about, but I hope next time my team members are more open-minded. There weren't many troubles. It's just that the collaboration could be better. Actually we got an above average grade for our project.

Figure 3: Sam's story about his management group project

The background of the story is Sam's management group project, as shown in Figure 3. The project asked each group to investigate the management culture of an organisation by drawing on ethnographic methods such as site visits and interviews. Sam's group asked the tutor to clarify whether theoretical discussions would be important and Sam's tutor reply was that he wanted the students to focus more on their observations of the organisation than theories. I will argue the story reveals how Sam makes use of the group dynamics to negotiate his learner and writer identity.

Identity project and the construction of the business community

In the story, Sam positions himself in different relations to two groups of students, the exchange students and other local (i.e. Hong Kong) students. Sam disaligns himself from the two local students. For Sam, although local students may have good public examination results, they do not know how to collaborate or communicate with people from different cultures (lines 91-4, Appendix 5). On the other hand, Sam positions himself as a person with international outlook by highlighting his good collaborative relationships with exchange students from other countries. One particular student with whom he has a good friendship is from Israel and had served in the army for two years before he came to Hong Kong for business school. Sam's affection with this friend is shown in the interview when he told me he was glad to hear that his friend had returned safe from Israel after a Christmas marked by intensifying tensions between Israel and neighboring countries.

Sam's alignment with the exchange students in the group is a way for him to resolve his ambivalence towards the peer community of local Hong Kong students. For Sam, the peer community of local students might have represented the business community up to this point in his life since this peer group represents more or less the kind of people he will work with after graduation. Dissatisfied with the elitism shown by the members of this

community, Sam explored other student groups in the management class. The group setting can be considered a site for Sam to explore and to construe the business community, which for him is still a remote concept.

Writing means more than the surface features

Unlike the writing competition story that centers on one intricate sentence structure and the job application story that focuses on a single 'silly' mistake, in this story about the management group project, the role of the textual is downplayed and Sam's relationship with other team members instead forms the focus. The term 'Baby English' reappears in the story (line 7, Figure 3) but is no longer an issue for Sam because he trades duties with other team members and so his writing will be edited by team members whom Sam regards to be more proficient in English. Sam does not seem to consider this strategy to be a compensatory strategy for his shortcoming in writing. Rather he considers his initiative contributes to team building and knowledge exchanges among members; for instance, he uses the word 'synergy' (which Sam said in English; line 9, Figure 3) to describe the collaboration between him and the other two exchange students. If Sam is a poor writer in the technical sense, he is a 'good' writer in the sense that he is able to mobilise the 'human resources' in the team. And I would add that he is also a good writer because by asking other students to edit his writing for him, Sam is able to focus on the logical flow of the writing, something he feels he is good at.

Use of management terminology in the story

In his evaluation of his management group project experience (lines 29-36, Figure 3), Sam makes the distinction between 'group' and 'team' (Sam again uses English for the two terms) and suggests that a team shows greater member cohesion than a group. This use of management terminology can be considered attempts in constructing the workplace practices. Whether Sam is correct in his distinction is beside the point; the point is that Sam is trying to imagine how things should be done in the workplace and uses this as a benchmark to evaluate his and other local Hong Kong students' current practices. Again, Sam's focus is more than the textual but the writing practices of the (imagined) business world.

A trajectory can be drawn from the three stories. Before university, Sam's stories show that writing tends to center on the surface features. Writing is associated with assessments which regulate Sam's membership to any particular community. After university, the group project seems to liberate him from this notion of writing since Sam takes the initiative to collaborate with members from other countries. The group project experience can thus be considered a turning point for Sam who draws on the management discourse about the importance of synergy to exchange tasks with other members and by doing so positions himself not as a writer of simple English but as an innovative team member.

Sam's identification has also changed. Before university, although what is assessed is the textual, it is usually other qualities (such as job competence) of the writer that are at stake. This point demonstrates the indexing power of the textual and also explains Sam's

lack of interest in writing. But Sam's self-identification as an intelligent person is available to him in the management group project when he could exchange job duties with other members.

Conclusions and future directions

This analysis of Sam's stories about writing shows how the historical development of a student writer's identity can better capture change in a student writer's identification, and how this historical development is shaped by the institutional requirements at different stages of the student writer's life. This analysis also shows how a student writer's sense of affiliation with an imagined community enables the student writer to negotiate his writer's identity. Furthermore, the use of narrative analysis is part of a project investigating how business students construct the business disciplinary writing as participation in the academic and/or business communities and how their writer identity as well as textual production is mediated by the way they construct the context of their writing. This analysis suggests two areas for further exploration: Sam's concern about his simplistic writing style and desire for a sophisticated writing style is also the concern of other participants in my study. It would be interesting to further understand students' notion of 'a sophisticated style' and the indexing power of the style. Sam's story also reveals that business disciplinary writing may not only serve the institutional purpose of the academe but is also a space for Sam to negotiate his identity as a sensible, business-like person, as reflected by Sam's use of management discourse in his evaluation of his business project experience.

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Appendix 1: The section of interview guide about writing experience

1. Can you describe how you first learned to write English? Chinese?
2. Since you were a small kid, you have learned how to read and write in English. Now, after so many years, you have a good command of the language. Could you tell me 2-3 things that have helped you to learn writing and reading? (It can be people, material things, or some other activities that you have participated in.)
3. Could you describe one experience of English writing that you enjoyed and one experience that you disliked a lot?
4. Could you describe one experience of Chinese writing that you enjoyed and one experience that you disliked a lot?