

Influence of Text Mediation Upon the Academic Identities of Novice EAP Authors: Review and Prospect

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Abstract

In order to provide an overview of the research on the influence of text mediation upon the academic identity of EAP authors, this paper reviewed the available literature on academic identity, identity construction in academic writing, text mediation and its influence upon academic writing. It was found that different mediators indeed play roles in the drafting or publication of manuscripts by English for Academic Purposes (EAP) authors, especially novice ones. The final version of a manuscript was thus formulated by both the named author(s) and many unnamed others, which covers the metadiscourse employed in the very manuscript. Since metadiscourse helps to shape the identity of the author, the mediators correspondingly exert influence upon the identity construction of the academic authors. However, little attention has been paid to the impact of text mediation upon the author's identity. In view of this, this paper proposed the prospects for further research.

Keywords: academic identity, text mediation, metadiscourse, novice EAP author, influence

1. Introduction

Academic writing has become a common practice among Chinese postgraduates, which involves the construction of identities in order for these novice authors to be recognized by relevant academic communities. Whereas, the establishment of academic identities in the process of academic writing not only requires a good command of linguistic expressions of relevant disciplinary knowledge, but also depends on the understanding and application of such disciplinary habitus as patterns, norms and regularities, the familiarity with the frame shaping the academic practice of specific disciplinary communities, and the mastery of academic writing genres in different disciplinary fields (Minsky, 1975). Unfortunately, according to the observations in daily EAP writing teaching, the requirements mentioned above constitute a great challenge to such English as an Additional Language (EAL) academic writing novices as postgraduates. When tackling EAL academic writing tasks, they frequently turn to supervisors, specialist teachers, English teachers, senior graduates, and/or commercial academic agencies for help. Thus, it is of necessity to review available research on identity construction and text mediation in the field of EAL academic writing in order to define the gaps requiring further research.

2. Review on Previous Research

This chapter will summarize and evaluate the previous research on identity in academic writing, multiplicity and dynamicity of academic identity and text mediation in EAL academic writing.

2.1 Available Research on Identity Construction in Academic Writing

Writing is central to the process of developing an authorial identity. In addition to presenting her/his own views, the author uses a series of means to interact with the reader to establish who s/he is. Since academic writing is deemed as a means of establishing an identity and a place in academia (Ivanic, 1998), there has emerged extensive research on the identity construction in academic writing.

The influence of voice upon authorial identity in various academic writings has been a continuous concern (e.g., Stapleton, 2002; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Stapleton & Helms-Park, 2008; Yigitoglu, 2013; Peng & Xu, 2018; Zhao, 2019; Langum & Sullivan, 2020). The relationship between the use of personal pronouns or self-references and authorial identity construction has also attracted widespread attention from English as a Second Language (ESL) researchers at home and abroad (e.g., Tang & John, 1999; Hyland, 2002; Xu, 2011; Yang, 2015; Ju, 2016). Besides, the role of such sociocultural factors as gender, social class and

ethnicity in the formation of identities of academic authors also aroused great interest of some scholars (e.g., Applyby, 2007; Preece, 2018; Thomas & Reinertsen, 2019). Other research explored such ethical issues of academic identity construction as text ownership and plagiarism among novice authors (Phan & Baurian, 2011) as well as such political issues as how to balance the global and local identities of English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) authors (Gao, 2017). By comparison, most of the available studies focused on the authorial identity construction of EAL academic authors (Hyland, 2002; Phan & Baurian, 2011; Xu, 2011; Yang, 2015; Rahimivand & Kuhi, 2014; Ju, 2016; Gao, 2017; Preece, 2018; Wang & Xu, 2019; Langum & Sullivan, 2020; Wang & Parr, 2020).

Whereas, despite abundant studies on identity construction of EAL academic authors, the longitudinal research on the same specific group is far from enough. Additionally, Hyland (2004) has confirmed the important role of interactive and interactional resources of metadiscourse in writing for academic authors to represent themselves and access distinctive disciplinary communities. Thus, it is of great necessity to track over time the influence of such factors as metadiscourse upon the identity construction of novice EAP authors, especially considering the multiplicity and dynamicity of identity.

2.2 Available Research on Multiplicity and Dynamicity of Academic Identity

Like identity of any other kind, academic identity is multi-faceted and dynamic in the process of construction.

According to Gee (2000), identity is composed of four dimensions, that is, genetic, historical, institutional, and affinity. Gee (2000) claims, except for the genetic dimension, it is possible for individuals to shape the discourses they depend on, the institutions they perform in, and the affinity groups they belong to. In this case, identity is far from something endowed to or selected by an individual, which is instead multifaceted, dialogic and dynamic (Bakhtin, 1981). Thus, the construction of academic identity should be the shaping of institutional, discourse and affinity dimensions based on genetic one.

In addition to its multiplicity, the dynamicity of identity has been explored as well. One of the representative explorations was the identity-trajectory framework proposed by McAlpine and Amundsen (2017), which covers “an aspect of an individual’s course or progress through life or part of life” (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2016). Within such a framework, identity is “a continuity of stable personhood” of an individual over time, which is subjected to “ongoing changes” (McAlpine, Amundsen, & Turner, 2014). That is, identity is not viewed as something static, instead, it alters along with one’s changes in emotions, perceptions, knowledge and abilities. The identity-trajectory framework consists of networking, institutional and intellectual strands (McAlpine, Amundsen, & Jazvac-Martek, 2010). As for academics, the networking strand refers to academic networks of different scope they attend, through which novice authors have the chance to develop their linguistic and academic literacy; the institutional strand incorporates different accessible relationships, roles and opportunities existing in the institution where academics work or study, which may vary greatly from one individual to another (McAlpine & Emmioğlu, 2015) and thus exerts quite different influence upon one’s academic writing progress, which may impact their writing progress; the intellectual strand involves the work of conceiving, drafting and producing such academic writings as research proposals, conference papers, journal articles, technical reports, etc.

Both the multiplicity and dynamicity of academic identity require a systematic and longitudinal exploration into the shaping factors and their influences.

2.3 Available Research on Text Mediation in Academic Writing

Text mediation, also known as “literacy brokery”, refers to “all the different kinds of direct intervention by different people other than named authors, in the production of texts” (Lillis & Curry, 2010, p. 88). Those different people, usually addressed as academic mentors (Flowerdew, 1999), shapers of research articles (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003), literacy brokers (Lillis & Curry, 2010), or text mediators (Luo & Hyland, 2016), cover academic professionals, language professionals, and nonprofessionals (Lillis & Curry, 2006). In this research, text mediation/mediator proposed by Luo and Hyland (2016) is suggested to be adopted due to its irrelevance to commerce and due respect for the manuscript shapers other than the author.

2.3.1 Necessity of Text Mediation for EAL Academic Authors

Scholars in many EAL countries such as China have found it is critical for their career development to publish in international journals, especially those indexed by SCI, SSCI and A&HCI (Flowerdew, 1999; Cho, 2009; Burgess, 2014; Gea-Valor, Rey-Rocha, & Moreno, 2014; Luo & Hyland, 2016). The similar situation is also encountered by EAL doctoral postgraduates, especially those of sciences, who have to publish in SCI journals for diploma and graduation (Li, 2005; Li & Flowerdew, 2007). However, the vast majority of these journals are

published in English, which constitutes a great challenge for many EAL scholars, whether experts or novices (Flowerdew, 1999a, 1999b; Benfield & Howard, 2000; Burrough-Boenisch, 2003; Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005; Benfield & Feak, 2006; Belcher, 2007). In this case, they have to resort to language assistance for drafting, revision, translation and/or polishing. Over 20 years ago, Flowerdew (1999) has figured out the preference of Hong Kong scholars for “one-to-one tailored writing supervision” in their ERPP practices. Later research has also documented the importance of text mediation in the EAL academic writing by Asian and European scholars (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003; Li & Flowerdew, 2007; Burrough-Boenisch & Matarese, 2013; Willey & Tanimoto, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable so far to view text mediation as a universal and indispensable practice in EAL academic writing.

2.3.2 Sources and Roles of Text Mediators in Academic Writing

Apprenticeship, with text mediation as one of its forms, has long been found necessary for novice scholars to access their disciplinary discourse communities (Dudley-Evans, 1991; Belcher, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). When it comes to ERPP writing by such academic novices as postgraduates, three main sources of mediation are normally involved: supervisors, peers, and language professionals.

The role of supervisors in shaping the manuscripts of doctoral graduates for publication has been widely analyzed (e.g., Li & Flowerdew, 2007; Kamler, 2008; Catterall et al., 2011; Larivière, 2011; Maher et al., 2014; Lei & Hu, 2015; Martinez & Graf, 2016). Larivière (2011) found that the supervisors of disciplines outside humanities and social sciences tended to act as mediators when the postgraduates and their supervisors cooperate to write and publish papers, which perhaps leaves space for the probe into disciplinary differences in text mediation. Another interesting discovery (Catterall et al., 2011; Larivière, 2011) revealed that although their postgraduates indeed turned to them for help, some supervisors interviewed did not think they were competent for mediation because they themselves had not received clear and systematic guidance. Feedback from these supervisors is very likely to be true. According to a disappointing finding (Lei & Hu, 2015), less than 20% of the postgraduates interviewed responded they had got sufficient guidance from their supervisors. The supervisors also realized the necessity for more guidance, but they thought it was the experts in the field of academic writing that should be responsible for guidance because they don't know how. This embarrassing situation invokes at least three further considerations: first, it is necessary to investigate how the supervisors perceive their mediating roles; second, how much and what kind of guidance from the supervisors is conducive to the cultivation of postgraduates' academic writing literacy; third, should such language professionals as EAP teachers take over part of the guiding tasks and how?

Actually, language professionals such as English teachers, editors and reviewers do play pivotal roles in the academic writing of EAL authors (Körner, 1994, p. 44). Luo and Hyland (2016) have studied the mediating role (making direct textual interventions by way of corrections, changes, or suggestions in texts for publication) of English teachers in the review and publication process of papers written by Chinese EAL scholars (college and university teachers). Unlike what Lillis and Curry (2010) referred to as powerful straddlers, Luo and Hyland (2016) found that Chinese scientist authors and English teachers acting as their text mediators constitute an interdependent and complementary duality (Giddens, 1984) by exercising the individual agentive power.

In addition to supervisors and English teachers, senior peer students, especially senior doctoral students, also frequently serve as the candidates to whom academic novices turn for help improve their manuscripts before submission (Li & Flowerdew, 2007). If taking publication process into account, editors and peer reviewers are very likely to play vital roles in the publication of papers written by novice and even expert EAL authors. It is revealed that editors and reviewers tend to mediate the language, content, organization, scientificity and format of the submitted manuscripts (Najmeh & Nasrin, 2015). And their roles have been examined and divided into such positive ones as impartial readers, time-devoting revisers, responsible commenters and such negative ones as manuscript manipulators, unreliable critics by available studies (Thomas, 2011; Lipworth, Kerridge, & Carter, 2011; Harrison, 2004).

2.4 Summary

In view of the above, different mediators indeed play roles in the drafting or publication of manuscripts by EAL academic authors, especially novice ones. Of them, the role of language assistant, polisher, and/or revisor is almost throughout the whole process of academic writing and publication. That is, the final version of language in the paper is formulated by both the named author(s) and many unnamed others, which of course covers the metadiscourse employed in the very paper. According to Hyland (2004), metadiscourse helps to shape the identity of the author, and correspondingly it is reasonable to speculate mediation from these language helpers exert influence upon the identity construction of the academic authors. However, little attention has been paid to

the impact of text mediation upon the author's identity. Even if it was proposed that text mediation in the revision of papers may complicate the author's identity (Xu, 2021), no specific research has been conducted. Thus, the future research is expected to answer the following questions: what is the influence? How does the influence work? Whether the influence changes, and if yes, how does it change over time?

3. Prospects for Further Research

The further research is suggested to explore the longitudinal influence of text mediation upon the identities of novice EAP authors. The following research procedure can be adopted: (1) to establish the theoretical framework; (2) to investigate the longitudinal changes in resources of text mediation in the academic writing of the novice EAP authors through questionnaire survey; (3) to analyze longitudinally the intervention of text mediation in academic discourse used in the novice EAP authors' academic writings based on data from interview and narrative inquiry; (4) to verify the longitudinal changes in metadiscourse through text analysis of academic works written by the novice EAP authors over the two years; (5) to clarify the longitudinal influence of text mediation upon the identity construction of the novice EAP authors by linking the intervention of text mediation in metadiscourse with the influence of metadiscourse upon the identity construction.

According to the above research procedure, five issues are expected to be addressed:

(1) Text mediation existing in the English academic writing of the novice EAP authors

Text mediation is found to be a common practice in EAL academic writing (e.g., Burrough-Boenisch, 2003; Lillis & Curry, 2006; Li & Flowerdew, 2007; Willey & Tanimoto, 2013; Luo & Hyland, 2016). So, first of all, it will be indispensable to ensure whether there exists text mediation in the EAP writing of the selected postgraduates. If yes, what are the resources of text mediation? And how do the frequency, intensity and emphasis of text mediation change over the two years? These confusions may be cleared up with the help of data from the questionnaire survey.

(2) Intervention of text mediation in the academic discourse

Only when we are fully aware of the roles of mediating resources, can we better understand the extent to which the published papers reflect the author's own voice (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003). So, the following doubts should be eliminated: How does the assistance from different mediators help shape the academic discourse of the postgraduates? Does the respective intervention vary temporally? If yes, how? These questions may be answered based on analysis of data from semi-structured interviews and narratives.

(3) Impact of the discourse intervention from mediators upon metadiscourse

According to Hyland (2004), metadiscourse, the linguistic devices employed to shape target-readers-oriented arguments, widely exists in diversified languages and genres, and there is no exception to academic writing. If text mediation intervenes in academic discourse adopted by the postgraduates, it is quite likely to facilitate the shaping of metadiscourse as well. Then how does the intervention influence the metadiscourse development of the novice EAP authors? Data from narratives should be pertinently (for example, focusing on data relevant to progress in acquisition and application of evidentials, hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, self-mentions, etc.) analyzed to answer this question.

(4) Verification of the metadiscourse development of the novice EAP authors

In order to validate the authenticity and accuracy of data from narratives about the longitudinal development of such metadiscourse as transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, code glosses, hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, self-mentions under the influence of text mediation, academic works, especially research papers written by the novice EAP authors, should be collected to establish a corpus and then analyzed with corpus analysis software.

(5) Influence of text mediation upon the identities of the novice EAP authors

Metadiscourse is used as the resources to represent the author's personality with the purpose of attaining a better communication between the author and the readers. That is, metadiscourse helps construct the author's identity. Thus, if text mediation shapes the metadiscourse employed by novice EAP authors in their academic writings, it must exert influence upon their identities. Then, how does text mediation shape the metadiscourse and correspondingly influence the identity construction of these postgraduates over the two years? Typical cases from the previous narrative inquiry need to be interviewed for further information to answer this question.

4. Conclusions

This paper reviewed the previous research on academic identity, text mediation and the roles of text mediation in

academic writing. It was found that there has been little attention paid to the influence of text mediation upon the academic identity construction of novice EAP authors. Thus, it is recommended, taking Chinese postgraduates as research subjects, to conduct further research on the influence of text mediation on the academic identity of novice EAP authors in the whole writing process. The suggested research is expected to clarify the intervention of text mediation in metadiscourse and its corresponding influence upon the academic identity of the novice EAL author, which is of the possible methodological and pedagogical implications for not only how to conduct longitudinal research on the influence of text mediation upon the authorial identity but also how to utilize text mediation rationally by adjusting teaching strategies and methods.

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