CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Studying of the self in social and academic contexts is a current issue in studies on identity. Who am I when writing this thesis, how do I identify myself in this process? I certainly have different roles, different identities; I am a MA student, a university professor, a researcher, a writer, a linguist, a bilingual professor/person, a daughter, a sister, a woman in her late twenties, among many other roles that I surely own too. However, how would you see me as the author of this thesis? Which of these identities will be part of this work? How do I want you to perceive me as you read this thesis? What identity do I need to take while I write this thesis? Can I choose one particular identity or are they all mingled conflated as part of me as a whole? Due to all these different identities, I consider myself a person with multiple social identities who determines which identity emphasizes the most into the different situations and contexts.

Hence, defining the identity I want you to perceive from me I first, clearly need to ask, why am I doing this? And, for whom I am writing this? The answer to the first question may be simply answered by claiming that writing this thesis responds to the requirement in order to get my master degree, but it is not actually my ultimate purpose. I am indeed doing this thesis because I have a professional and personal interest in writing which to me is one of the greatest tools of expression of the self. I believe that the *persona* is reflected in their writing, and one's identities are expressed and exposed in one's writing (Clark and Ivanic, 1997). Analyzing writer's identities is not an exploited research topic (Ivanic, 1994; Atkinson, 2001), and it is challenging due to the subjectivity of the nature of the data (Ivanic and Camps, 2001). Identities are unique (Ivanic, 1994) and may also be perceived differently by others about oneself. Having these points in mind explains the subjectivity and challenge of the issue.

Knowing the persona by means of their writing can be beneficial in many aspects (Clark and Ivanic, 1991). It could help to recognize and analyze writer's internal dimensions: strengths and/or weaknesses and raise consciousness about them in order to help them in their writing process and they gain control over it; explore writer's beliefs and values to be a more critical and autonomous writer; analyze the process and/or strategies writers use to express their identity and analyze how people socialize and identify themselves into given social contexts. All this is important and contributes to different areas such as literacy studies (Ivanic and Simpson, 1992; Ivanic and Roach, 1990, cited in Ivanic, 1994), discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1991), psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics (Nystrand, 1990, cited in Ivanic, 1994), as well as to the understanding of one-self (Clark and Ivanic, 1991; Ivanic, 1994) by tracing one's own writing development and awareness of it. As seen, the topic is interdisciplinary; and it will depend on the writer and/or reader and the purpose they have when approaching it.

I have pointed out some possible reasons for a person to explore the area, and as a potential writer and researcher that I would like to be seen, I turn to consider the people who are reading or will be interested in reading these lines. This thesis is then primarily addressed to all professionals who have an interest in writing. It includes linguists, language teachers, students who are engaged in the area of writing, discourse analysis and related areas, researchers who are doing research on writing, genre and/or discourse analysis. Secondly, it is also of interest for people who work in writing centers and in university writing departments since advice and shared experience may be found. This thesis is also addressed for researchers who are interested in developing a framework for studying and analyzing thesis conclusions (a detailed explanation of this will follow). These possible readers could be people in contexts of

English as Foreign Language (EFL), as well as readers of other speaking foreign (FL) or second languages (L2). These readers with similar interests and/or constraints can benefit from this thesis and find it useful in their own situations and purposes.

For a clear understanding of the situation and purposes of the present study, this introductory chapter is divided in five sections. The first section presents the general and specific areas of research as well as the research problem. Secondly, it describes the purpose of research which is followed by the research questions. The research questions detail the research concerns that I address and discuss along the thesis. Afterwards, this chapter presents a section on the assumptions made in the research. A section on the significance of the study follows the assumptions, and finally, a section of the general organization of the thesis closes this chapter.

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

A piece of discourse, written or spoken, implies the conception of self representation. Ivanic and Camps (2001, p. 5) argue that "lexical, syntactic, semantic and even the visual and material aspects of writing construct identity just as much as do the phonetic and prosodic aspects of speech". Self representation is actually an integrative element in every human since everything we do, say or think we incorporate our world view, culture and personality; it is part of out identity. The study of identity can be approached by analyzing *voice* and *gender* as expressions of self representation in the production of language (Ivanic, 1998) and which are defined and discussed in section 2.5. The main interest of this thesis is to analyze the students' identity by means voice in academic written production.

Academic writing is a complex cognitive process (Troyka, 1990; Raimes, 1983; White and Arndt, 1991; Trzeciak and Mackay, 1994). In the writing of a foreign language, the cognitive and critical process of writing is even harder than writing in the mother tongue since the writer deals with other language systems different from their own language (Schoonen, van Gelderen, de Glopper, Hulstijn, Simis, Snellings and Stevenson, 2003). When someone writes in a foreign language, the goal is to achieve communication in another language, so the adoption of a new language system as their own takes place (Kroll, 1990). Owning this system will permit the writer's ideas flow easily and in this way they will produce coherent, logical, and smooth writing.

Academic writing in English as Foreign Language (EFL) involves far more than students producing appropriate and grammatically accurate language and mastering composition skills (Kroll, 1990; Trzeciak and Mackay, 1994). Writers need to develop their EFL communicative competence (CC) in written discourse. That is, they need to express themselves in terms of grammar, discourse, strategies, and society which are the CC components (Canale and Swain, 1980). These CC components or sub-competences are individually constructed based on the person's cognitive schemas (Smith, 2004) and their social relation within the context in which they interact (Gilyard, 1991). Since every person builds their own CC, its development is to a certain extent an individual process in which the person expresses him/herself and thus, constructs their own identities. Identities understood as the "people's sense[s] of who they are" (Ivanic, 1994, p. 4) can be studied by analyzing writer's voice (Ivanic, 1998) which differs from person to person (Pennycook, 2001). In the search of one's voice expression, a whole process is involved. Writers need to master literacy and academic skills as well as academic

writing and institutional conventions of the genre to write since the writing takes place in an academic context (Clark and Ivanic, 1997).

Constructing writer's identity and expressing voice in a FL context is a challenging task. As pointed out by Schoonen et al. (2003) and Kroll (1990), writing academically in a FL is a complex process due to the CC of the second language needs to be mastered and writing conventions need to be respected. In addition, Ivanic (1998) claims that every writing piece contains voice, in which the writer's identity is reflected. Considering this view, Canagarajah (1999) maintains that writers need to show their identity and find their own 'voice' in the target language (TL). Voice in writing permits the writer to express themselves in the text, socialize and find a place in the academic community (Ivanic and Simpson, 1992). This identity construction is, however, a difficulty for EFL writers since they are dealing with other language system different from their mother tongue, and L1 rhetorical conventions interfere with L2 writing (Kaplan, 1966). This has been indeed an issue pointed out by Kaplan and largely discussed since then. Taking into account these points, this research analyzes students' EFL academic writing voice. Since thesis writing is seen as one of the most challenging tasks which integrate content knowledge, academic writing, researching skills, and the arguments of the writer to express their posture (Bunton, 2005; Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006), it is an ideal writing piece to analyze the expression of the student's identity. Hence, this research analyzes voice in the thesis writing at an undergraduate level.

Studies in identity have also researched differences on identity according to gender (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). In fact, gender is another marked feature to express one's voice (Ivanic, 1998), and it is also part of the analysis of this study. Addressing this issue, this thesis covers the comparison of the analyses on voice in two male and two female case studies. This

study takes place in a BA program in a prestigious public University in a central State of the Mexican Republic. It is specifically carried out in its Modern Languages BA program which has existed for over 25 years.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is threefold. It first proposes a framework for developing research on genre-discourse analysis on conclusions of BA thesis. This study is done by analyzing the conclusions of four BA theses, and looking for common elements among them and their particular genre communicative purpose(s). The framework will contribute to the analysis of such genre and suggest some research as well as teaching implications. Secondly, this thesis seeks to analyze writer's identity by analyzing their EFL academic writing voice. This inquiry is done by analyzing the writing of the participants' BA thesis conclusions. Finally, the research seeks to identify and describe gender features in written voice expression comparing two female and two male writers as these finish their BA thesis and present their professional examination. This analysis is done by interviewing the participants and analyzing their written thesis chapters.

1.3 Research Questions

This thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. What elements should be included in a framework to analyze BA thesis conclusions?

This first research question seeks to analyze the general characteristics of the functional elements considered in an undergraduate thesis conclusion in the humanities field which will permit to suggest a framework for conclusions genre analysis. The data for this

question is obtained from the collection of the thesis conclusions of four case studies. Thus, the conclusions will be analyzed, and generic elements included in the four conclusions will be considered and with help of theorists and writing researchers, a framework will be designed. This framework will benefit discourse analysts as well as teachers and writers searching for a tool to analyze, write and evaluate an effective conclusion at a BA level.

2. What are the features that writers use the most to express their voice in academic writing, in thesis conclusions in particular?

This second research question gathers relevant information regarding identity and voice expression in an academic paper, and if the identity is or not actually reflected on the students' writing. Thus, the frequency, or lack of voice features, and loss of identity in order to socialize academically could be observed and analyzed. Data collection will also consider data from the same students' thesis conclusions as mentioned in the first question. The results are complemented with the students' actual opinion about their voice reflection in their EFL academic writing. Interviews gather this type of information which helps in the analysis of the identity development a conscious process in the writers' academic life.

3. Is there any difference between genders' voice expression? If so, what are the factors?

Another important and necessary question for the research lies on the premise on gender differences at the level of voice expression. Studies on gender have shown that there are differences in language use among males and females (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). This also deals with their identities and how they perceive and socialize themselves in different social groups. Hence, since the area where this study is developed considers an academic environment where males and females are active participants, I intend to compare those, voice

features characteristics of each gender. Thus, I can compare and contrast cases of more identity expression, or repression and see if this deals with gender differences. For this point, I will consider my participants to be two male and two female writers.

1.4 Assumptions

Research on studies in discourse and writing suggests that the writer's identity is reflected in their writing (Ivanic, 1998; Ivanic and Camps, 2001, Norton, 1997). Yet, little is known about the development and limits of expression of their identity in academic writing tasks (Atkinson, 2001). Voice and gender are some aspects to analyze when considering identity (Ivanic, 1998; Fairclough, 1995; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000; Pennycook, 2001; Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). Considering these two identity components, this research analyzes the features writers use more to express their voice in an academic situation. In an attempt to answer this, I assume that the most common features that students use to express their voice in an academic context could relate to issues of generic referent in writing: *impersonal*, or *personal* the use of *I, we, or he, she, they* (Stapleton, 2002; Ivanic and Simpson, 1992; Ivanic, 1994).

Another assumption regarding writing features to express voice is related to writer's grammatical choice, whether they write in active or passive voice, and tense usage, which permits the analysis of how they place themselves in the text as outsiders or insiders (Ivanic, 1998; Ivanic and Camps, 2001). In addition, I assume that by analyzing the conclusions and the data obtained from the interview I can analyze the extent voice is controlled or influenced externally by the thesis advisor, the writing task–content, and/or internally by the writers

themselves in terms of what they want to or think they should do (Ivanic, 1998; Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006).

One more assumption is that my research participants may not be aware of their identity as writers. However, I expect that when the interviews are applied, they could probably notice and comment on the way they perceive themselves as writer and how their thesis writing helps to identify themselves with the academic community.

Regarding the concern of a framework for analyzing conclusions, it is done based on the assumption that it is in conclusions where students express their view, and conclude with what they think after doing the complete research and writing the rest of the research parts (McKinlay, 1984, Peng, 1987, Dudley-Evans, 1986, all cited in Paltridge, 1997). Thus, it is assumed to find not only voice and gender features, but also similarities in their conclusions format as an academic genre.

Concerning the conclusion genre analysis, as the existing agendas (Bunton, 2005; Hopkins and Dudley-Evans, 1988; Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006) focus on master thesis and doctoral dissertations, I assume their framework is different from a BA thesis. Then, it is necessary to develop a framework exclusively for undergraduate thesis conclusions analysis. Thus, I assume that the framework I am proposing will serve for the analysis and development of BA thesis conclusions.

Since the samples of thesis to be taken are from two females and two males, a gender study on voice expression is done. The assumption here as pointed out in the writing features is to find out differences in writing voice expression. These differences relate to generic referents, the way to write things, complexity of structure, being direct or using wordiness, the

types of arguments presented to let the writer's voice be listened (Talbot, 1992). These are the general assumptions influencing the arguments made in the thesis.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The proposed framework in this thesis is expected to serve both writers who face the situation of writing a conclusion at this level, and those who write any conclusion for a research article so they achieve a clear idea of the genre to write and its function. The framework will be beneficial for writing instructors and thesis advisors at the moment of explaining such task. Besides, I believe, such framework will contribute to genre studies and trigger research on that direction. It is then a significant theoretical contribution to genre analysis as well as to literacy practices and writing instruction.

I am also studying students' identity development by means of voice and gender analyses in their EFL academic writing because I want to find out what the characteristics of written identity in an academic community are and how they differ when considering gender. I am doing this in order to analyze whether students express their voice or not and how the academic environment influences this and/or shapes their academic written identity. This benefits writers in their academic life as current students, as well as in their professional development if they want to continue studying a higher degree or publishing a research article. The study also helps the students in their jobs once they graduate as well as to other writers who are in the search of becoming more critical and independent writers in any writing task after school. Writers may need to write a paper to be accepted in a job, or actually write a paper required in their jobs. Therefore, with the results obtained from the thesis, suggestions

on building up identity and voice expression in students' academic writing can be given and shared to contexts where English, or any other language, is taught as a foreign language.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

After introducing the topic and laying out the problem, Chapter Two of this thesis presents a theoretical discussion on how the general and specific areas underlying this research relate to each other. In it, I first discuss the theoretical approaches to writing and identity by reviewing key concepts such as discourse, literacy and their relation with identity. I later discuss some issues of identity in academic writing in order to provide a solid base to build on the present research.

In Chapter Three, the methodology chapter, I describe the researcher's philosophy, the data collection as well as the frameworks for analysis, participants and instruments that delineate the research. I also describe the procedure followed and include a section on limitations.

In Chapter Four, I analyze the data gathered with the instruments and discuss the results obtained from that. I organize it by responding to each research question, and by each case study of the four participants considered.

The main findings and conclusions of the research are presented in Chapter Five. This chapter also discusses the implications for the field of Applied Linguistics (AL) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Finally, I suggest some directions for further research and keep exploring this area of discourse and academic writing.