An autobiographical narrative inquiry of academic identity construction of PhD candidates through L2 authorship development

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ABSTRACT

In two recent decades, academic authorship and construction of (academic) identity, more specifically in graduate bilingual/multilingual writers, have drawn attention in second language (L2) writing studies. From ‘social identity’ framework, the interconnection between bilingualism/multilingualism and academic writing has played a very critical role in construction of their academic identity. Regarding this topic, autobiographical narratives proved a valuable methodological approach to understand deeply graduate bilingual/multilingual writers’ insights about their academic authorship identity in their own words. There are very few studies that have examined the insights of individual graduate writers from their own words in narratives. More specifically, this issue has been less examined in English PhD programs which play a critical role in writing education. Thus, the present study, through Tajfel’s (1978) social identity framework and autobiographical narratives, aims to create an effective platform for future graduate bilingual/multilingual writers’ studies, in particular PhD candidates in English programs. To this end, the insights of two PhD bilingual/multilingual graduates in an English program have been examined to explore their insights about the interconnection between their bilingualism/multilingualism status and academic writing. This study also explores possible affordances and potential difficulties in constructing their academic authorship identity. The findings revealed that bilingualism/multilingualism status has influenced and constructed multiple identities for the two participant narrators in their academic writing education. Moreover, the findings readdressed the very significant role of higher education, and teaching profession that influenced and constructed academic identity of graduate writers. Finally, the current study offers some suggestions for future studies of graduate bilingual/multilingual L2 writing; it ends with implications for L2 writing education development.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the field of applied linguistics has witnessed renewed conceptualizations in rhetoric and composition, conceptualizations which have brought about what Canagarajah (2011, 2013, 2014) has referred to as ‘translingual multilingualism’. A paradigm shift such as this, is grounded in the premise that people who speak more than one language possess the knowledge of an additive language and that knowledge plays a contributory role in scholarly textual productions (Canagarajah, 2011, 2014; Horner et al., 2011). The importance of translingual multilingualism is further stressed given its potential to be a powerful transformative force in shaping writers’ identity, a finding which has put a renewed emphasis on the significance of how multilingual writers’ identity is constructed in various academic and professional settings (Cox et al., 2010).

1.1. The relation between bilingualism/multilingualism and academic identity: a social identity perspective

Research on bilingualism/multilingual composition has raised the issue of interconnection between academic authorship and construction of (academic) identity, particularly in graduate writing studies (e.g., Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Dressen-Hammouda, 2014; Flowerdew and Wang, 2015; Hanauer and Englander, 2011; Matsuda, 2015; Tardy and Matsuda, 2009). The significance of studies regarding the graduate writers’ academic identity was primarily pointed out by Ivanić (1998) who vehemently argued that the construction of such an identity can

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significantly be influenced by exploration of academic writing, in particular within higher education. The other factor in writing studies that social theorists (e.g., Block, 2006; Goffman, 1959; Kramsch, 2000; Schiffrin, 2006) argue about is the very nature of writing as a social action and a social performance. The application of the social identity framework in examining the linguistic aspect of identity through spoken and written discourse has drawn the central attention of most social identity studies (e.g., Blommaert et al., 2005; Bucholtz and Hall, 2008). In the social identity (construction) perspective, “Multilingualism is not what individuals have or lack, but what the environment, as structured determination and interactional emergence, enables and disables them to deploy” (Blommaert et al., 2005, p. 213). In addition to the influence of the social contexts in identity construction, recent studies (e.g., Flowerdew, 2008; Li and Deng, 2019) have also paid attention to the situation of English as Additional Language (EAL) writers, an issue that needs further research (Morton and Storch, 2019). Therefore, paying attention to the analysis of multilingual texts written by EAL writers and how they construct and negotiate their identities in different institutional settings are worth investigating (Canagarajah, 2015; Crawford et al., 2016; Dressen-Hammouda, 2014; Morton and Storch, 2019). Crawford et al. (2014) elucidated that:

What appears to give rise to the internal conflict in the writing process appears to be associated more with emotional or internal aspects of the individual rather than issues of knowledge about the conventions of writing…….. that shows that bilingual writers do not experience identity in exactly the same way as do monolingual authors. (p. 98)

1.2. Bilingual/multilingual writers’ autobiographies and negotiation of their multiple identities

In line with the above paradigm shift has come a call for reform in reporting, utilizing, and applying the lived experiences of bilingual and multilingual students, a development which has highlighted the crucial role of autobiographical narratives in second language (L2) writing scholarship (Cox et al., 2010; Norton, 2006; Pavlenko, 2007; Schiffrin, 1996). As Hansen and Liu (1997) state, the employment of some methodological approaches including interviews, questionnaires, and observations were not appropriate for revealing dynamism of voice or writer identity among their research participants. For instance, Crawford, et al. (2016) showed that “it is possible for an underlying linguistic conflict to be present that is not visible in the participants’ academic writing (scholaric), but only in their personal narratives” (p.123).

Therefore, collecting lived experiences of L2 individual writers has highlighted narrative inquiry as a fundamental approach in L2 writing studies (Canagarajah, 2012; Hanauer, 2012a,b; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Pavlenko, 2001, 2002, 2007) as it enables L2 researchers to gain more detailed insights regarding the negotiation of identities, especially in cross-cultural autobiographies. Most of the earlier studies investigating identity construction in writing, also recommended ‘life history’ (Ivanić, 1998) and autobiographical narratives’ (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000) as effective methodologies for gaining deeper insights into experiences and struggles that multilingual writers might encounter in writing to construct their academic identity over time. Thus, in the current study, the researcher employed an autobiographical narrative approach not only to examine and understand the insights of two graduate bilingual/multilingual students about their academic writing development as teachers and doctoral students, but also to explore how their bilingual/multilingual status has impacted and constructed their academic identity.

In recent decades, there have been valuable studies regarding academic authorship and construction of academic identity, in particular from readers’ perspectives (Hyland, 2008; Matsuda, 2001; Morton and Storch, 2019; Matsuda and Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012; Tardy and Matsuda, 2009). However, there are very few studies that explored this relation from L2 graduate writers’ own perspectives (Crawford et al., 2016; Dressen-Hammouda, 2014; Flowerdew and Wang, 2015) in construction of their L2 academic identity (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Canagarajah, 2015; Flowerdew and Wang, 2015). There are very few studies that have examined the insights of individual graduate writers from their own words in narratives approach. More specifically, this issue has less been examined in English PhD programs which play a very critical role in teaching writing education (Canagarajah, 2016). In this regard, it should be noted that previous studies on L2 graduate writers have collected the insights from narratives of graduate bilingual/multilingual writers in disciplines other than English (e.g., Crawford, et al., 2016; Dressen-Hammouda, 2014). Thus, this study attempts to provide an effective platform in examination of the insights of two bilingual/-multilingual graduates through their narratives about possible affordances and potential difficulties they might encounter in constructing their academic authorship identity. Moreover, it strives to provide more insights regarding the significance of narrative inquiry as a very effective research approach for future bilingual/multilingual graduate writing development.

1.3. Theoretical framework: social identity in academic writing

In recent studies on identity in L2 writers, the old approaches of ‘standard language ideology’, ‘linguistic ideology’, and ‘essentialism’ have shifted and moved toward social, sociocultural, and sociolinguistic framework theories (e.g., Block, 2006; Kramsch, 2000; Lippi-Green, 1997; McNamara, 1997). For instance, Lippi-Green (1997) demonstrated how imposing the notion of the ‘standard English’ as the only ideal, intellectual, and accepted model in different social settings might affect some speakers of various English dialects to feel marginalized, isolated and subordinated in different social settings. Block (2006) emphasizes the significance of sociolinguistics as a poststructuralist approach in the examination of identity and as a dominant approach to identity-oriented studies among social sciences theorists and researchers in applied linguistics. This sociolinguistic approach may help L2 researchers in determining how bilingual/multilingual individuals “define, reconstruct, compare, position, and interact their multiple identities in different social settings” (p. 40). He also advocates ‘poststructuralist’ rather than ‘essentialist’ theoretical framework in order to explore social identity in applied linguistics research. In this new paradigm of poststructuralism, Tajfel (1978) social identity theory has played a key role in researches associated with social identity construction. Tajfel’s social identity theorizes formation of individual’s identity in connection with the inter-group (societal) expectations and norms. In other words, each group member’s identity is tightly (Anderson, 2006) interconnected with the social conventions that the individual interacts with (Bailey, 2000). On the significance of this social identity view, McNamara (1997) contends that Tajfel’s framework can be applied as a very critical framework in investigating social identity among ‘non-English speaking immigrant groups, with attendant changes in language attitudes, particularly attitudes to English and home language” (p. 562). Endorsement of this social identity approach can also be seen in Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) characterization of L2 learning as a process of not only learning a set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological patterns but also becoming a ‘member of a certain community’ (Anderson, 2006).

2. Review of the related studies

2.1. The impact of academic writing on construction of identity

Academic writing in English language countries like the US is considered as an important evaluation criterion to assess individual students’ academic qualifications (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Flowerdew and Wang, 2015; Matsuda, 2015). Through the process of evaluation of students’ writing in academia, students’ academic identity is constructed. In general, this construction of academic identity in writing development
process is defined as **writerly voice** (Elbow, 2007; Ivanic, 1998; Ivanic and Camps, 2001), which has been taught in writing instructions and studied as one of the major processes in writing development. Regardless of first language (L1) and L2, the significance of academic writing development in construction of academic identity has been signified and well informed as a critical interconnection in academia (Elbow, 2007; Ivanic, 1998), one which has been studied as one of the significant identifiers in writing studies. However, scholarship in the construction of identity in L2 writers (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Matsuda, 2015) needs further study to better understand L2 writers’ identity construction in academic writing development process. This notion of construction of academic identity in writing development process, in particular in higher education has drawn a great attention among L2 writing researchers. Reviewing the literature of academic writing and its impact on identity in academia, it is evident that academic writing plays a critical role (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015; Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Ivanic, 1998; Matsuda, 2015) in the construction of academic identity of the student writer, an identity which is constructed over time. As emphasized by Murray (1972), construction of a successful academic identity needs time and practice in writing as a process. This construct in a specific institution is a social construction that requires multilingual writers, in particular in higher education to accommodate their voice toward rhetorical situation and genre conventions of academic written discourse (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Flowerdew and Wang, 2015; Matsuda, 2015).

In social perspectives, academic identity is a social phenomenon that is constructed, defined, shaped through accommodation of multilingual writers toward appropriate rhetorical situations, genre conventions, and overall academic writing genres. In this regard, Kramsch (2000, p.151) pointed out that in L2 learning process “roles through the written and the spoken medium that students experience themselves as both private, individual, and public, social sign makers, and that they appreciate the fluidity of meanings they can attribute to themselves and others.” In other words, social theory perspective defines writing as a sociocultural action (Goffman, 1959; Kramsch, 2000)“contributed actively to move consistently the students from their ‘true self’ to their ‘narrator’ or ‘author’ self, showing them, in effect, that, in a language class, they are who they say they are, no more, no less” (Kramsch, 2000, pp.133–153).

### 2.2. Variation of L1 and L2 writing and its impact on (L2) academic identity

Given the significance of multilingual identity studies in bilingual/multilingual writing development, composition scholars (e.g., Matsuda, 1998; 1999; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008) argue that although the awareness and need for examining bilingual/multilingual writers have increased in academic institutions, there are few studies on multilingual writers’ identity. As was previously stated, Tajfel (1978) social identity theory proposes that construction of individual’s identity is connected with the intergroup (societal) expectations and norms.

From this social identity view, some social theorists studying bilingual/multilingual writers contend that there exists a strong interrelation between social factors and such students’ writing patterns and choices. This argument can challenge the old essentialist approach that views social factors and identity construction, in particular the relationship between language and identity, as static and confirms the new poststructuralism paradigm in social identity theory which views the very nature of this relationship (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1995; Bhatt, 2008) as fluid, ever changing, and dynamic (e.g., Block, 2006; Kramsch, 2000; Lippi-Green, 1997; McNamara, 1997). In this social notion, Tardy (2012) research has “displaced traditional perceptions of academic writing as impersonal and neutral through insights into its highly social and interactive nature” (p. 64). Applying social theory framework, Tardy (2012) explored “the influence of readers’ gaining knowledge” of social factors of “a student’s sex, race, language background, personal and educational history”, and how these social factors “(beyond the text)” played a critical role in constructing “textual identity of the participant author” (p. 90).

In another study following this social identity perspective, Gentil (2005) examined the bilingual/multilingual choices that three French-speaking writers make in their writing practices at different institutional settings. The results revealed that bilingual student writers’ choices in the usage of their bilingual linguistic resources were highly contextual and they involved some aspects of social, political-institutional, and linguistic-dominant disciplinary of universities. In yet another study, Matsuda (2001) examined the variation of voice and writers’ identity through examining Japanese discourse and its linguistic codes and social norms that can influence and construct Japanese authorship in their L2 writing practices. The findings revealed that Japanese students’ difficulties in construction of voice in English writing practices were not primarily associated with the absence of voice concept in their cultural orientation but instead due to various modes via which voice is created and constructed in the Japanese and English language.

Hanauer and Englander (2011) study may help explain the different patterns in L2 writing scholarship which has resulted in difficulties. In that study, the researchers, through the application of qualitative survey approach, attempted to highlight the issue of “burden of writing research articles in English as a second language” (p. 410). The results of the study revealed that the L2 scientist writers face some degree of difficulties when they write scientific research articles in English language as their L2. More significantly, results showed that L2 writers face “24% more difficult [sic] and generated 11% more dissatisfaction and 21% more anxiety” (p. 412) than when they write articles in their L1.

### 2.3. Interconnection of bilingualism/multilingualism and authorship as social identifiers in academia

A review of the bilingual/multilingual literature indicates that there is a need for more studies in academic writing education, especially in terms of a more detailed description of bilingual/multilingual writers’ perceptions of academic identity construction (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Canagarajah, 2015; Flowerdew and Wang, 2015; Matsuda, 2015). Investigation of these perceptions is particularly important given the fact that scholarship in multilingualism has revealed that “multilingualism is not what individuals have or lack, but what the environment, as structured determination and interactional emergence, enables and disables them to deploy” (Blommaert et al., 2005, p. 213).

For instance, Matsuda et al. (2013) showed that although the composition teachers respect and help their multilingual student-writers, the teachers perceived their multilingual students’ identity not by their diverse linguistic-cultural assets, but mostly by their ‘different appearances’, ‘accent’, and ‘different writing’. In a further study, Crawford et al. (2014) examined the construction of academic identity in L2 writing learning context. The findings demonstrated the interconnection of L2 writing and being bilingual writer and the impact of that interconnection on constructing hybrid identity in academic contexts. The study also emphasized the non-linguistic factors such as emotional, and contextual issues, the very issues that were explored to be interconnected in the construction of hybrid identity in L2 writing. Finally, Crawford et al. (2014) contends:

> Writing may be seen as adhering to a set of writing conventions, yet part of the writing process involves the person who is writing. When the person writing is taken into account in the forefront, then the building of a recognizable identity becomes important (p. 92).

### 2.4. Graduate L2 writers and development of academic identity

In a longitudinal study over a decade, Dressen-Hammouda (2014) investigated the development of voice among scholars in a specific disciplinary field (geology). The findings revealed that novice scholars
learn to adopt more appropriate disciplinary voices over time as they became more senior members of the academic community. Crawford et al. (2016) looked into the narratives of two PhD professors to explore the possible challenges they might encounter to develop their professional academic identity in their L2 writing journey. The results indicated that the issue of dealing with two languages is a factor in relation to the participants' authorial identity.

In yet another study, Li and Deng (2019) explored the identity construction of Chinese students based on Ivanic (1998) framework of writer identity construction. According to the findings, the participating students constructed their identity by making discursive choices such as ‘narrating life experiences’, ‘referring to oneself and others’, and ‘highlighting’. The interviewing patterns also highlighted the effectiveness of personal statement writing in constructing writers’ identity. Ivanic (1998) social theory constructed a fundamental framework for the exploration of the effect of academic writing as a social action, and how it can play a key role in construction of identity in academia, in particular in higher education, in order to articulate not only the content in writing but also the ‘representation of self’ in academic discourse. Mehian, 1996 that is revealed in academic writing.

Given the importance of narratives and lived experiences of graduate writers in the exploration of their academic identity construction, this study attempts to look into the insights of individual graduate writers. As mentioned before, studies have been conducted on the issue of academic authorship and construction of academic identity in bilingual/multilingual contexts. However, this issue is less explored from their own words and their narratives, in particular in the English discipline. To investigate this issue, the present study employed autobiographical narratives to explore the insights of two graduate bilingual/multilingual writers and their identity construction in their academic authorship development in an English program. The following research question was explored in the current study:

How do graduate PhD bilingual/multilingual writers perceive their academic identity construction in their academic writing development?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were two PhD students who were studying in an English program at a US university. The two were selected based on the inclusion criteria of the current study. The first criterion required the participants to be studying in an English program and to have achieved advanced authorship identity in the English discipline in their writing scholarship. In other words, the two writers were recruited to provide the insights and writing approaches in their narratives that helped them to be accepted in their English PhD disciplines as qualified English writers, whose writing scholarship resulted in publication of their writings and their recruitment in the writing program as writing/composition teachers. The first participant, Ken (pseudonym), was a bilingual (first language being an East Asian one) doctoral student in an English program; he was teaching composition courses to American students. The second participant, Mina (pseudonym), was a multilingual doctoral student in an English program and spoke English and Spanish as her first and second language; she also said she studied and was exposed to Korean and Japanese languages in her English language teaching career. In the current study, after obtaining the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at a US university, the researcher asked them to submit their autobiographic papers. Then, the researcher (first author) further interviewed them to seek their views about their shared autobiographical papers.

3.2. Data collection: autobiographical narratives

In this study, after the IRB approval, the researcher requested the director of the English program to submit an invitation email to this study on the listserv for English graduate students. Then, two PhD students who met the study's inclusion criteria were selected. After obtaining their consent, the researcher asked the participants to submit their autobiographic papers (written in their Language Teacher Identity (LTI) course in the Spring of 2017). In the course, students are well informed about concepts such as identity, L2 writers, language teachers, social construction theory, and so on. At the end of the course, students are assigned to write their academic autobiographic narratives that are mostly focused on their academic identity construction. More effectively, these narratives describe how they shift from being language teachers to writing/composition teachers, the interconnection of their professional academic writing development, and their English PhD study. These autobiographic papers were valuable data for the present study which required graduate narrators who were well informed about concepts such as academic identity, writing development over time in the PhD program, the influence of writing/composition teaching career, L2 writing, and the English PhD program on academic identity construction. After collecting the autobiographic narratives, the researcher (the first author of this article) interviewed them about their narratives. Following the rules and guidelines of transcripts in DuBois et al. (1993), the two interviews were transcribed to be ready for the data analysis process. During the transcription process, all identifying information was replaced with appropriate pseudonyms.

3.3. Data analysis

Following Huynh and Rhodes (2011) recommendation, the narratives were arranged in chronological order, listing major events discussed in the narratives and drawing up headings that reflected major topics of interest relevant to the research question. The headings were derived from the participants’ autobiographic and transcripts. Then, the two narratives were organized using the chronology and heading as a guide, and extraneous material were excluded. The narratives were arranged using participants’ own words and were first coded and then interpreted. Pavanlo (2007) study recommends content and thematic data analyses as effective analytical approaches in autobiographic narratives. Therefore, thematic analysis was employed to examine the narratives to identify patterns across participants and to develop themes in accord with the research question. Across the two narratives, elements with a shared focus were placed under the same code. In this study, four themes across the narratives were explored that will be discussed in the results’ section of this article. Conducting the present coding activity, the researcher tried to follow Braun and Clarke (2006) recommendation that implies:

“sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. ... It may be helpful at this phase to use visual representations to help you sort the different codes into themes” (p.89).

In addition, the researcher attempted to follow Braun and Clarke (2006) rules and regulations for the thematic analysis procedure; the thematic analysis was conducted through these stages: 1. familiarizing herself with the data, 2. generating initial codes 3. searching for themes 4. reviewing themes, 5. defining and naming themes, 6. producing the report.

4. Results

Through the data analysis process, four major categories (themes) and a few minor categories (sub-themes) emerged (see Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4). These categories are based on analyzing the two participants'
Development and the interconnection of these two concepts. The significance of narratives as data is in their capacity to be interpreted from different perspectives with different purposes, a quality which makes narratives valuable and rich data with other possible interpretations.

4.1. Self-identification as a bilingual/multilingual (student/teacher) writer

Ken

Excerpt 1

My identification reveals that I am a bilingual graduate student in ..., (an East Asian) language, my native language, and English is my L2. However, in terms of writing, I don't consider myself as a bilingual or multilingual writer because my writing experiences are mostly limited to academic writing that are done in English. Therefore, my writing is limited to academic writing in English. The only time I feel myself multilingual writer is when I want to write something creative such as a poetry or autobiography or when I want to write fiction. At that time, I may consider my writer identity as just significantly multilingual writer. So, I feel more comfortable when I call myself multilingual composition teacher because there are mostly my writing experiences and my job as a writing teacher is interconnected. This is really related to my identity as a multilingual writing teacher. I have 2.5 years of experience of teaching in English as a L2 writing teacher in America.

Excerpt 2

When I am thinking of my teaching in ESL, I perceived my identity as an ESL teacher whose identity was just like a language teacher; however, I was teaching writing. So, I was not just only teaching writing but also, I was teaching language. In other words, when I wanted to try to teach writing to my ESL students, my teaching was mostly for the sake of grammar, mechanics, and so on in writing. My multilingual teaching identity as an ESL teacher was mostly focused
on language issues. Now, I am teaching composition to American students and interestingly my identity is changed to a writing teacher not about language. So, when I am giving feedback on the writings of my students, I keep overlooking lots of their grammatical, and punctuation mistakes. I usually don’t leave any comments about it and instead I will pay more attention to the content, and strength of their argument. Now, as a composition teacher for American students, I don’t act like their language teacher of writing. I just feel that I’m a writing teacher that’s kind of interesting thing for me, my multilingual academic writing identity and multilingual ESL teacher writing identity there might be a kind of correlation between these identities.

In excerpt 1, Ken conceptualizes his multilingualism identity as a multilingual language student rather than a multilingual graduate student writer. He explains that “in terms of writing, I don’t consider myself as a bilingual or multilingual writer. Because my writing experiences are mostly limited to academic writing that are written in English.” Ken, in excerpt 1, and 2 also illuminates how he constructed his multilingual identity in his teaching job, specifically through his new teaching career in composition courses to American students. Therefore, Ken has mostly constructed his writing identity in his teaching career as a multilingualism teacher. He explains that “I call myself multilingual composition teacher because there are mostly my writing experiences and my job as a writing teacher is interconnected.”

Mina
Excerpt 3
I know Spanish, and I studied a few other languages like Korean, and some Japanese with a low level of proficiency in them. Therefore, I can identify myself as a graduate multilingual student and teacher. However, I have never configured myself as a bilingual or multilingual writer. In my whole studies, as far as writing in another language, the last time I wrote in another language was in my undergraduate program where I had to write a paper in Spanish a long time ago that I really enjoyed it. Although it was challenging for me, it was enjoyable experience one multilingual experience that I always really liked it, I think for the experience of Spanish in my undergraduate studies in my Spanish class it was an enjoyable, because I enjoyed the challenge of writing.

Excerpt 4
My multilingualism relates to my EFL/ESL teaching job that made me travel and live in other countries to teach students from different nations. After these years of teaching and living with other people around the world for me with another language, multilingualism is so normal and natural than other people who are not exposed to diversity. For me, living around the world, and as a multilingual person who is grown up in US, where in Arizona (pseudonym) especially in Phoenix (pseudonym), I think more than 50%, and I know in phoenix (pseudonym) and …. school district more than 50% of their public schools are Spanish and English. I don’t do much writing out all languages other than English. In my opinion, music is itself a language that I know how to write a lot as well, so that kind of monolingualism perspective bugs me. I don’t really believe if it really fits this term for anybody and so I think that’s from my attitudes towards multilingualism.

In excerpt 3, Mina, like Ken, perceived her identity as a multilingual language student rather than a multilingual student writer. She explains that “I can identify myself as a graduate multilingual student and teacher. However, I have never configured myself as a bilingual or multilingual writer.” Mina, like Ken, claims that her academic writing is focused on the English language, so her identity in writing is not perceived as multilingual writer. Similarly, in excerpt 4 Mina illuminates how she constructed her multilingual identity in her teaching job. She states that “My multilingualism relates to my ESL teaching job that made me travel and live in other countries to teach students from different nations” (see Table 1).

4.2. Relation of bilingualism/multilingualism (student/teacher) and academic writing

Ken
Excerpt 5
My status as a multilingual and non-native in English language is strongly connected to my academic writing. Because my language usage in my writing practices is just limited to my previous exposures, and learnings. So, I cannot be as creative as native speakers in terms of generation of language in my academic writings, because without being exposed to a certain language usage, I cannot speak or write that…. In other words, in terms of this issue I think I’m going behind from the native speakers as a writer or a language user when it comes to academic writing. I feel confident if I can be closer to native speakers.

In excerpt 5, Ken has perceived his multilingual identity, as a non-native, and deviant from the native English that might be perceived as the ideal norm in academic writing practices. He points out that “I’m going behind from the native speakers as a writer or a language user when it comes to academic writing.” Moreover, Ken considers his writing identity as being less creative compared with that of his native cohorts and mentions that “I cannot be as creative as native speakers in terms of generation of language in my academic writings.”

Mina
Excerpt 6
I think that the relationship between writing in an L2 and writing academically is very similar. Writing academically is not natural to anybody because it’s not really so much of a natural part of a speech, and we don’t always use references when we are speaking. So, in that sense, writing academically is very unnatural especially when you are reporting scientific results, it is unnatural we would say that students are more likely to do this. So, I think the challenges of writing in L2 and writing in academic style are pretty similar in that way that you’re trying to find the right language to get your point across it doesn’t really make a difference to me if I’m writing in English or another language or music. I think it’s always a challenge to find the right note to find the right word to find the right structure.

In excerpt 6, Mina maintains that she perceives the difficulty of academic writing in a similar way to that of writing in an L2. She explains that “I think the challenges of writing in L2 and writing academic are pretty similar.” She perceives writing in an L2 as challenging. She also identifies multilingual identity as a barrier in L2 writing practices (see Table 2).

4.3. Changes in bilingual/multilingual writers’ identity in academic writing: the influence of bilingualism/multilingualism on academic identity

Ken
Excerpt 7
I personally think I have three stages in my academic writing development. My first stage is when I got my bachelor’s degree in Korea (pseudonym): I started to study academic writing in English, when I started studying for TOEFL to prepare to apply for a graduate school in America. My country doesn’t have good and strong courses in academic writing in English, so you don’t learn how to write English effectively. So, as an applicant to a graduate program in America, I
must get sufficient scores in TOEFL. Then, I started to learn how to write a 300–400 words essay. Writing is mostly about techniques how to write introduction, body paragraph, and thesis statement properly. Then, by learning these techniques, my TOEFL score especially in writing section improved a lot and I felt like that academic writing is only about strategies and techniques. The second stage is in 2011 when I entered in MA in TESOL program in Florida (pseudonym). Since I was in TESOL field, besides the knowledge of certain strategy and techniques in writing, I needed to learn specific type of genre in writing in my MA program. I started to study that specific writing in that field genre, and I tried to imitate it for my own writing, and this was my second stage change in my academic writing. My final stage in my writing process was in the PhD program when I first came to English program. I remember it was a section in Dr. Anderson (pseudonym name) in an English course that he told us about Canagarajah’s translanguaging approach. Since then, I frequently discussed about diversity and multilinguals as an accepted practice in writing, and then I really loved reading the articles. Then, in the other course Dr. Henderson (pseudonym), we studied articles about non-nativness in writing. So, I understood that I need to be a little more creative than certain expectations as academic writing. Throughout these TESOL course, I understood that besides following specific genre of TESOL field, I need to create my multilingual identity as a writer in TESOL field. Although I am used to show my fluency in my writing through following specific strategy, techniques and style, now, I’m practicing to create my own TESOL identity. Being multilingual makes me feel like different from other people, and as an academic writer I feel a little bit more confident about my writing because I have sufficient knowledge.

In excerpt 7, Ken has explored his multiple writing identities in three different stages. In the first stage, Ken has defined his writing identity as an L2 writer who “felt like that academic writing is only about strategies and techniques.” Then, in the second stage, Ken explored his writing identity in learning “specific type of genre in TESOL.” In the last stage of his writing education, Ken defines his writing identity as a more confident multilingual writer who intends to accept his multilingual identity as a multicompetence rather than deviant from English-only norm. He accepted his multilingual identity as a privilege in some TESOL courses in his PhD education, “Throughout these TESOL courses, I understood that besides following specific genre of TESOL field, I need to create my multilingual identity as a writer in TESOL field.”

Mina

Excerpt 8

I definitely can say that I’ve always felt comfortable as a writer when I just keep the APA book next to my side just follow the directions. I remember that in a training event in high school I would get a seven-page research paper and all what I did in my class was to open up the APA manual and follow the recommendations for writing, formatting and style. I think as long as you can keep that book, you know you’re going to be fine just like we were talking in class. Academic writing is just a matter of being conscientious looking in the manual because I make writing is on the rule. So, with that said, definitely later in my carrier I feel much braver to include more of my own voice, because I have a general understanding of certain issues. It is right to make claim of my own without constantly referencing to the others due to my general understanding of certain issues that I gained from reading different articles throughout my master and PhD education.

In Excerpt 8, Mina has similarly explored her multiple writing identities in different stages of her educational process. In the first stage, Mina has defined her writing identity as a writer who believes that academic writing is only about following APA styles, specific writing strategies and techniques. She emphasizes writing is just following “formatting and style.” Then, in the second stage, Mina explored her writing identity in learning how to include her own voice, “later in my carrier I feel much braver to include more of my own voice.” In the last stage of her writing education, Mina defines her writing identity as a confident multilingual writer who can effectively write while including her voice. She also claims that her writing identity is improved as a competent multilingual writer who has adequate background knowledge as a result of her constant “reading different articles in my [her] master and PhD education” (see Table 3).

4.4. Advantages and challenges of being bilingual/multilingual in academic writing

Ken

Excerpt 9

Maybe my language identity or my academic writing identity is communicating each other. Although I’m not confident as a speaker, now I feel comfortable about my academic writing. These two identities are always communicating in my mind constructing my thinking. When I write something, I feel much more comfortable than speaking, because of the more time I’ve spent on writing than speaking. As an academic writer, I don’t feel any advantages, because of my multilingualism and maybe when it comes to fluency of a language, native speakers can be much more communicative in their language. So, my language is so limited to what I know as a language learner and as multilingual language writer my language is limited to what I have already read. I don’t think I have an advantage as a multilingual writer in TESOL field. But, as a teacher I can have more empathic to my students, so as a teacher in English, I think my multilingualism can be considered as an additional language, so in terms of this, I can feel a little bit of advantage. So, as a writer my multilingual part is not that strong but as a person in TESOL field, I feel like my multilingual identity can work well for me in the future as a teacher.

In excerpt 9, Ken explains that his multilingual identity is not perceived as an advantage in his education but in his teaching career, it has provided a sense of sympathy to the learners. He explored more advantages in his multilingualism through his teaching career than his academic writing. However, he encountered more challenges as a multilingual writer in his doctoral studies, “as multilingual language writer my language is limited to what I have already read.”

Mina

Excerpt 10

It’s always a challenge to write academically, because it’s not what I have in most of my interactions. I think there are some advantages of being multilingualism, because you’re exposed to a discourse of different languages, and you feel more comfortable when you are speaking with people from different countries. But my multilingualism is not considered as an advantage in my academic writing. For instance, when I go back to my master program, that was challenging for me entering in the field of education. Since, I was coming from an undergraduate program in business and music, I was challenging about understanding different content knowledge, and discourses in education field. Similarly, when I entered in PhD at first research articles in linguistics, anthropology, TESOL were challenging for me, because I was not familiar with the kind of terms that they use in TESOL. So, I wouldn’t say that I have an advantage as a multilingual student over the other cohorts, but I think I feel better than others because, I am brave to different languages. Maybe I should say that I am brave, because I have been brave to study in different countries, learning different languages. I think it makes me a
little bit less worried when I encounter new words and reading articles to understand them.

In excerpt 10, Mina similarly explains that her multilingual identity is not perceived as an advantage in her writing process. She explained that her multilingual identity has provided a sense of confidence over her cohort “when I encounter new words and reading articles to understand them”. She experienced more advantages in her multilingualism through her diverse language sources she possesses over her cohort to understand new languages and content. However, similar to Ken, Mina also faced more challenges as a multilingual writer in her master's and doctoral studies. For instance, she explained that entering PhD, writing was challenging for her because I was not familiar with the kind of terms that they use in TESOL.” (see Table 4).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how graduate bilingual/multilingual writers perceive their (academic) identity construction in their academic writing development. The results showed four major categories (themes): self-identification as a bilingual/multilingual (student/teacher) writer, relation of bilingualism/multilingualism and academic writing (academic identity), changes in multilingual writers’ identity in academic writing, advantages and challenges of being bilingual/multilingual in academic writing. Under these four major categories, the narratives were organized into 10 excerpts to demonstrate the participant narrators’ stories about their academic writing development and the impact of their bilingualism/multilingualism in construction of their identity.

Results showed that both participants conceptualized their identity as a multilingual language student rather than a multilingual student writer. In addition, both narrators explored their multilingual identity in their teaching job. Analyzing these findings from the social constructivist perspective, we might refer to what Block (2006) emphasizes as the significance of social identity and dominance of its function in identity construction. From the social theory perspective, these findings might reveal how bilingual/multilingual individuals define, reconstruct, compare, position, and interact their multiple identities in different social settings” (Block, 2006, p. 40). The participants identified their multilingualism not solely based on multilingual identity they carry as individual writers, but mostly based on their perception of their being multilingual that is influenced by social factors. More importantly, their academic writing in their PhD program, as a core identity, defines, ‘co-constructs’ (Jacoby and Ochs, 1995), and negotiates their multiple identities at times. Social factors, more dominantly multilingualism and its significant impact on the participant bilingual/multilingual PhD students’ identity, reveal the significance of social construction perspective as an effective theory in identity studies, in particular in L2 graduate writer studies.

This research, through autobiographic narratives approach, attempted to analyze the stories of the writing education of two doctoral students in an English program to explore the relationship between their bilingualism/multilingualism and their academic writing identity. In this issue, the findings revealed that bilingualism/multilingualism status has influenced and constructed multiple identities for the two participant narrators in their writing education. The findings also showed the two candidates’ TESOL education and also their ESL/ESL composition teaching career greatly influenced and constructed their writing identity as a bilingual/multilingual writer. Interestingly, the findings readdress the findings of earlier studies that highlighted the significance of teaching career in construction of professional identity in academia (e.g., Aneja, 2016; Appleby, 2016; Kubota, 2002; Park, 2009; 2012; 2013; Park et al., 2016; Varghese et al., 2005; Varghese et al., 2016). For instance, Ken mentioned that “my writing experiences and my job as a composition teacher are interconnected” and Mina stated that “My multilingualism relates to my ESL/ESL teaching job”. We might relate this relationship of multilingualism and teaching career in the construction of identity to the Goffman (1959) performance theory that addresses the significance of the individuals’ social performances, and how these daily performances can define, construct, and change our social identities in social contexts at times. In addition, how their perceptions of their academic writing are closely interconnected with their being bilingual or multilingual and whether it plays a facilitative or deconstructive role in various social settings. For instance, we might refer to both narrators who unitedly argued that their bilingual/multilingual identity is not perceived as an advantage in their education, rather they both face more challenges than advantages in their writing process.

In terms of challenges and difficulties that bilingual/multilingual students face in their academic writing, the results of the current study are consistent with those of the previous studies (e.g., Hanauer and Englander, 2011; Matsuda, 2001). Hanauer and Englander (2011) study, for instance, demonstrated that the L2 scientist writers face some degree of difficulties when they write scientific research articles in English as their L2. Moreover, from social construction perspective, the results of the present study are also consistent with those of the previous studies (e.g., Aneja, 2016; Appleby, 2016; Kubota, 2002; Park, 2009; 2012; 2013; Varghese et al., 2005; Varghese et al., 2016). These studies claim that positive or negative perceptions of bilingual/multilingual teachers are tightly connected to their social identity. These social identities, in particular their bilingualism/multilingualism as a core element, constructed and negotiated their varied and multiple identities. These multiple identities also influenced the teachers in terms of ‘their (self-) confidence’ (Song, 2016) and teaching practices at times.

Furthermore, both narrators expressed some writing stages that they had to go through, from a novice writer to a more competent writer, to construct their writing identity. Interestingly, both participant narrators admitted that their doctoral education has influenced their writing growth, not only their academic writing but also their creation of their professional identity as a multilingual doctoral student. Mina also defines her writing identity as a confident multilingual writer who can effectively write while including her voice. This finding readresses Matsuda (2001) who highlighted that Japanese students faced difficulties in their writing practices, not because of the mismatches with their cultural orientation but due to different modes in which voice is created and constructed in Japanese and English. The current study also revealed that bilingual/multilingual writers would not include their own voice in their professional writing unless they are familiar with strategies and rules in academic writing and have achieved a high level of writing proficiency (Flowerdew and Wang, 2015). Further, the findings of a longitudinal study of Dressen-Hammouda (2014) also highlighted the development of voice among scholars in the geology field over time as they became more senior members of the academic community. In the present study too, both narrators mentioned that in their initial stages of writing they perceived “academic writing is only about strategies and techniques”, “learning specific type of genre in TESOL”, but later in their doctoral education, Ken explained that I understood that beside (sic) following specific genre of TESOL field, I need to create my multilingual identity as a writer in TESOL field.” Similarly, Mina elaborated that “later in my carrier I feel much brave to include more of my own voice.” This notion of voice development over time in higher education, which in the current study was gathered from the participants of the English discipline, has been interestingly paralleled with the earlier studies, despite the fact that the narrator participants of those studies were recruited from disciplines other than English (Crawford et al., 2016; Dressen-Hammouda, 2014).

To conclude, the findings of this study revealed that bilingualism/multilingualism status has influenced and constructed multiple identities for the two participant narrators in their academic writing education. Moreover, the findings readressed the very significant role of higher education and teaching profession that influenced and constructed academic identity of graduate writers. This study, through application of Tajfel (1978) social identity framework and autobiographical narratives, aims to create an effective platform for future graduate bilingual/multilingual writers’ studies, in particular PhD
candidates in English program. Additionally, the current study hopes to provide a helpful approach for other PhD candidates in English not only to write narratives about their L2 writing experiences but also to listen to the other scholar graduate colleagues’ narratives regarding their writing approaches, affordances, and some difficulties they might face in constructing their L2 academic authorship identity.

Reading narratives of composition stories by other PhD writers who are on the path to constructing their academic authorship identity will also help writing educators and administrators in their future plans to improve L2 writing. In other words, writing instructors, administrators, and those dedicated to bilingual/multilingual academic writing education would be more aware of L2 writers’ preferences and concerns from the insights that are explored from their narratives’ collected data. These collected data could then help university writing designers to cultivate and adapt or design their future writing curriculum on the needs and support of bilingual/multilingual PhD graduates in their attempt to provide a more efficient writing education environment. Thus, these untold stories of PhD writers not only help graduate writers to explore their transition in construction of academic writing identity development process, but also provide a practical reference for graduate writing curriculum development at universities.

6. Limitations of the study

The findings of this research revealed that bilingualism/multilingualism status has influenced and constructed multiple identities for the two participant narrators in their writing education. The two participants in this study were selected as representatives of constructors of very successful academic identity. In other words, the two PhD writers were recruited to provide the insights and writing approaches that helped them be accepted in their English PhD disciplines as qualified English writers whose writing scholarship resulted in publication of their writings and their recruitment in college writing program as writing or composition teachers. The findings of this study would be valuable to be considered for future studies in this topic. Due to the limited number of participants, however, these findings might not be generalizable to other contexts.

Although this study tried to expand the body of the literature on multilingual writers’ identity through sociolinguistic construction theoretical framework, we must be very cautious about extrapolating the findings to other contexts due to the very complex nature of identity (Hanauer, 2012a,b; Matsuda, 2001). The findings of this study would be beneficial in future L2 graduate writing studies; however, more participants’ narratives are required to understand deeply the insights of different PhD candidates in English disciplines. Therefore, further studies with more participants are highly suggested for future studies in bilingual/multilingual graduate authorship to obtain more insights from different PhD candidates in their authorship narratives.

6.1. Recommendations for future L2 writing studies

The present study has some suggestions worth considering for future L2 writing research. First, this study highly recommends researchers generate an online platform for collecting narratives from L2 graduate writers. Generating anonymous online platform would encourage more PhD graduate writers to express their academic writing identity stories since they understand that they do not have to disclose their personal information. Although participants’ identities in earlier studies, including the present study, are kept strictly confidential, very few PhD writers would desire to participate in L2 studies that are grounded on the participants’ narratives. As it will be mentioned later, most of these PhD writers are or will be recruited as writing instructors, future professors, journal article authors, and so on. Therefore, they might not feel comfortable being interviewed or identified in fear of being judged on their writing competency. Hence, providing an online platform for interested PhD L2 writers to tell their writing experiences in narratives would create an effective approach to collecting more diverse data from different narratives of bilingual/multilingual PhD writers. Second, this study recommends that when applying narratives approach in future L2 studies, researchers ascertain that their participants’ narratives are collected while the participants are well informed about narratives genre and its processes. As a result, their participants are able to generate their L2 writing (development) stories that create more relevant and applicable information to explore. Third, this study calls for future studies to apply the current study’s identity concepts as a core foundation in order to explore more specific information regarding some sensitive writer identity concepts that emerged from the data in the current study. Considering this point, future L2 writing researchers are encouraged to conduct an online survey study through the application of the gained identity concepts from the current study. The writer identity concepts that emerged from the present study included self-identification of a bilingual/multilingual writer, relation of bilingualism/multilingualism and writing identity, changes in multilingual writers’ identity in academic writing, and advantages and challenges of being bilingual/multilingual (see Table 5).

7. Implications for teaching L2 writing development

From the social construction point of view, the current study lends support to Kaplan’s claim that “teaching composition to foreign students does differ from the teaching composition to American students, and cultural differences in the nature of rhetoric supply the key to the difference in teaching approach” (Kaplan, 1966, p. 11). In regard to the influence of variation of L1 in L2 authorship, Kaplan (1966) illustrated the following superficially graphic patterns to show that the rhetorical patterns L2 writers are taught might differ from those of their L1 (see Figure 1). Then, Kaplan attempts to draw visual evidence of those various writing patterns to be carefully considered by L2 writing educators when designing L2 writing instructions.

From a pedagogical point of view, since writing and composition programs in universities recruit writing/composition teachers from PhD graduates in English programs, more examination of the context of bilingual/multilingual PhD graduates in such programs is worth future research. As pointed out by Canagarajah (2016), English graduate students are future composition teachers and also the university training course in applied linguistics program “consist of largely master’s and doctoral students who are teaching first year composition courses on campus” (p. 267). He adds “we don’t have adequate research on teacher development in L1 and L2 composition instruction” (p. 265). Therefore, more studies are highly recommended to provide further detailed insights from narratives of more PhD graduates in English programs, graduates like Mina and Ken in the current study who are involved in teaching writing. The collected data gained through narratives of these participants would be very valuable information for writing teachers, administrators, and those engaged in bilingual/multilingual teaching academic writing education development. The narratives approach which allows collection of data in the form of narratives can generate a creative platform for bilingual/multilingual PhD graduate writers to tell their writing (development) stories and thus explore their academic identity transitions, stories that are not demonstrated in their writing endeavors but do exist in the heart of their academic writing development process. As mentioned earlier, these untold stories of PhD writers not only would help L2 graduate writers to explore their identity transitions in their academic writing process, but also could provide a reliable

Table 5. The four theme concepts in the narratives as a platform for future L2 studies.

| 1. Self-Identification as a Bilingual/Multilingual (Student/Teacher) Writer |
|-----------------------------|
| 2. Relation of Bilingualism/Multilingualism, and Writing Identity |
| 3. Changes in Multilingual Writers’ Identity in Academic Writing |
| 4. Advantages and Challenges of Being Bilingual/Multilingual in Writing |
practical source for graduate writing curriculum developers at universities.

Finally, this study hopes to have provided an effective platform for future graduate bilingual/multilingual writers’ studies, in particular PhD candidates in English programs. In other words, the current study hopes to have created a helpful venue for future studies in PhD graduate writers’ field in order to create an effective approach for PhD participants to feel more comfortable to narrate their L2 writing development and how it is connected to their academic identity construction. Specifically, this study believes that the exposure to these collected narratives is very helpful for PhD writers’ adaptation in their English disciplines to sense that they are not alone in their L2 writing education journey in constructing an appropriate academic authorship identity. In the analysis of narratives that would be collected from future PhD graduate participants, researchers would find more data which have not sufficiently been examined in English programs. As a result, a collection of more narratives in future studies can surprise us with significant information that could contribute to the development of L2 graduate writers’ education, particularly those in English programs.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

S. Asadolahi: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper; Revised and edited the manuscript.

M. Nushi: Commented on the manuscript; Proofread and Revised the paper; Selected an appropriate journal; Corresponded with Heliyon journal.

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The data that has been used is confidential.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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