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# The dynamic ecology of the writing process and agency: a corpus-based comparative case study of stancetaking among native speakers and non-native speakers of English in first-year composition conferences

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**The dynamic ecology of the writing process and agency: A corpus-based comparative case study of stancetaking among native speakers and non-native speakers of English in first-year composition conferences**

by

**Kirk Wilkins**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Program of Study Committee:  
Bethany Gray, Major Professor  
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Ames, Iowa

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**ABSTRACT**

While previous research into writing conferences and tutorials has found that sessions with non-native speakers of English (NNSs) differ from those with native speakers of English (NSs), these studies using conversation analysis have tended to approach conferences through more qualitative methodologies. This thesis builds upon and enriches these previous studies by incorporating more of a quantitative analysis through the use of corpus linguistics to systematically analyze the frequency with which particular grammatical devices that express the attitude of the speaker, otherwise known as stance, and power are used and how these frequencies may vary within a specific set of NS and NNS conferences for a first-year composition (FYC) class. Though it is determined in this particular context that the frequencies of these devices do differ somewhat between these two populations, indexing possible differences in stancetaking and power, it is also asserted that these different frequencies may reflect variation in the concerns being discussed. Discussions involving assignment requirements, for example, may predispose interlocutors to position each other differently than would discussions involving organization or ideas. For this reason, stance may constitute a highly dynamic and ecologically situated behavior, one in which native-speaking status plays a role alongside and interacts with other matters.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background and context

In first-year composition (FYC) classes, students beginning their undergraduate education may experience a much-needed personal learning environment: In contrast to impersonal and detached lecture halls, first-year composition classes offer small and tight-knit communities. Within these communities, they may have the opportunity to converse with the instructor on a one-on-one basis in the form of a writing conference. To this conference students may bring their own questions, struggles, needs, and aspirations and enjoy highly individualized time with the instructor. Contingent upon the students' own concerns in learning and writing, the topics discussed will thus vary across conferences.

Some particular groups of students may tend to bring different concerns to the conference setting. Within these FYC settings, students of diverse geographic and linguistic backgrounds come together. These many backgrounds may predispose them to take an interest and be concerned about different areas of the writing process. These students for whom English is a second language, it has been found, may struggle and experience more anxiety with grammatical and other lower-order matters (Ritter, 2002; Williams, 2004). Non-native speakers (NNSs), also referred to in this study as English language learners (ELLs), tend to bring to the conference setting different questions, struggles, needs, and aspirations: Besides trying to secure success in this particular class, they are also trying to attain proficiency and communicative competence in a second language (L2) at the same time. The challenge of achieving both simultaneously may cause them to approach conferences in a manner that differs from native speakers (NSs).

Besides the increased and more multifaceted demands of composing a paper in an L2, NNSs may also treat and view education and educators in manners that differ from those considered the norm or predominant in American contexts: They may transfer not only linguistic features from their first languages (L1), but may also hold culturally influenced standards and expectations of pedagogy, including a tendency toward positioning the teacher as the fount of all knowledge on whom to rely (Harris & Silva, 1993; Powers, 1993; Thonus, 2004). Because of the considerable language needs and issues that NNSs may face and wish to address and because of the divergent educational experiences they may have had previously, they may approach and experience the conference differently than would NSs.

The pedagogical question thus emerging from these differences in positionality is this: “Should tutors provide information to writers rather than elicit it?” (Williams, 2004, p. 195). Previous research has found that writing conferences and writing center tutorials may indeed differ in terms of the topics discussed and how (much) the teachers and students talk for NSs and NNSs. Teachers tend to dominate and be direct and explicit in feedback in conversations with NNSs more so than in conversations with NSs (Thonus, 1999). Meanwhile, NNSs, who are understandably concerned about communicative success, may use a variety of strategies, including silence, to encourage the teacher or tutor with whom they are working to adopt a more direct, explicit, and authoritative role (Haneda, 2004; Sperling, 1991). However, this more vertical relationship between teachers and students, in which the teacher is located above the student in terms of knowledge and expertise, may prove problematic: Research has found that more horizontal positioning in conferences, a more equitable tenor between the interlocutors, may result in more substantial revision (Freedman, 1982; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997).



The sociolinguistic concept of *stance* may thus vary, fluctuate, and prove dynamic across conferences due to the native-speaking status of the students and other factors, with which native-speaking status could interact. Stance refers to the position one adopts in relation to the utterances made in a context, showing one's attitude and relationship with the content of what is being said. It refers to the ways in which people linguistically embody and signify themselves in the myriad settings they experience and in which their identities adapt and change. For example, a student may adopt a stance position of more humility in conversation with an employer than with a friend or a sibling, or a man who persists in talking over a woman is constructing a dominant stance position. "Stancetaking — taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance — is central because speaker positionality is built into the act of communication" (Jaffe, 2009). Not only are stance positions socially situated, but they are also socially consequential: They both are influenced by and influence the positions of interlocutors in a speech event.

Another approach by which one may analyze writing conferences is provided by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Recognizing the highly contextualized nature of language use, SFL would account for differences in the *field*, the ways in which what is taking place and what is being discussed in the writing conference (ideas and organization or assignment requirements and language use) may vary across conferences. Alongside the field, SFL would analyze the *tenor* of the conferences, the relationship of the student and the teacher as expressed by the language used; tenor would account for how distant or unequal the teacher and student are in their interactions. An analysis of the interplay of the field and the tenor of writing conferences may help illuminate the dynamics of these communicative settings and suggest not

only linguistic and pedagogical differences in conferences, but also the causes for these differences among NSs and NNSs.

A sociolinguistic analysis of stance, tenor, and field in conference settings may indicate how particular subject positions routinely lead to the realization of certain forms of stance (Jaffe, 2009). One may explore and better understand how teachers and students position themselves and each other in conference settings, and explore how characteristics of the participants (such as the native speaking status of novice writers) relate to the expression of stance in these interactions. That is, one can explore and identify how teachers and students position themselves differently on the basis of the native-speaking status of the student, identifying differences between conferences with NSs and conferences with NNSs. Through so doing, one may ascertain variation in the power dynamics and changes in tenor that index stancetaking in relation to students' linguistic identity.

### **Statement of purpose and research questions**

Previous research into variation in stancetaking and tenor among NSs and NNSs in conference settings has relied heavily on a qualitative analysis of these conversations as its research methodology: Prior studies have analyzed transcriptions of conferences in a holistic and inductive manner, identifying overall patterns in the positioning of students in conferences. Another possible methodology for the exploration of stance in conferences, but one that has received little attention or use in the previous research, is a corpus-based approach, in which the frequency with which particular devices are used is analyzed to explore sociolinguistic variation. For example, if a teacher is hedging or presenting multiple options available to the student in the writing process to consider, the teacher may use more devices that index possibility, such as *maybe*, *may*, or *might*. If, on the other hand, the teacher wishes to be direct and explicit in giving

directions to the students, seeking to establish that something is necessary and that the student should do it, the teacher may use more devices that index necessity, such as *have to* or *must*. These different modals reflect how the teacher or student are appraising and relating to the content of what they are saying, indicating whether it is advisable and something to perhaps consider or absolute and something to strictly apply.

A comparison of these frequencies and how these devices are being used to different degrees may show variation in the realization of stance across the conferences and represent overall patterns in stancetaking among these populations. This study adopts a corpus-based approach to analyze variation stancetaking among NSs and NNSs in first-year composition classes. Through identifying and analyzing the frequency with which students use a particular stance device, it may corroborate, enrich, add nuance to, or perhaps even problematize previous research into variation in stancetaking, tenor, and power dynamics in conference settings. The frequency with which students and teachers use devices of possibility and uncertainty or devices of necessity and certainty may linguistically index the positionalities they are embodying and performing. They may also represent and indicate the agency and creativity in the writing process permitted of the student, by either the teacher or the student himself or herself.

What is important to remember, however, is that stance and tenor, like learning itself, are dynamic and evolve as the context evolves: A writer only beginning to understand and undertake an assignment may position herself differently than she would toward later in the writing process. Stance and tenor may reflect more than native-speaking status: They may also reflect where a student is in the writing process. Students may adopt different stance positions in relation to where they are in their work and what the exact nature of the writing process that concerns them is. Increased agency may emerge as students proceed further and deeper into the

writing process (Strauss & Xiang, 2011). For example, it is possible that discussing higher-order concerns, such as ideas and organization, may lead to the use of more devices of possibility and uncertainty (*maybe, may, can*); these constructs in writing are ones that are never firm, never absolute, never certain, never closed, but instead are always tenuous, always variegated, always malleable, always open. Meanwhile, discussing lower-order concerns, such as the general requirements of an assignment, grammar, or formatting, may encourage the use of more devices of necessity and certainty (*have to, must, should*). Thus, the writing concern being discussed may affect stancetaking and tenor just as much as, if not more than, native-speaking status and ought to be considered.

The concern being discussed and one's native-speaking status, it should be noted, do not influence the trajectory and discourse of conferences autonomously and in isolation. Rather, they may interact with each other, influencing the student's concerns and one's stance in a holistic and dynamic way. It is possible that differences in stancetaking among these populations may result from the differences in the types of concerns being discussed during writing conferences; previous research has found that conferences with NNSs tend to orient more toward lower-order concerns, such as vocabulary or grammatical correctness (Nakamaru, 2010; Ritter, 2002). This tendency may affect the stancetaking performed. Thus, the relationship between native-speaking status and the concerns being discussed informs the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative patterns of stancetaking found in this study. While variation in stancetaking among NSs and NNSs is the subject of inquiry in this study, the influence of the topic being discussed also merits analysis. Therefore, the following research questions guide this study.

RQ1) How do NNSs and NSs differ from one another in the use and realization of (different categories of) stance in writing conferences?

RQ2) Within the context of writing conferences, how does the instructor's use of stance devices vary across interactions with NNSs and NSs?

RQ3) How does the use of these devices by the teacher and students relate to the concern being discussed?

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Three areas of research inform this study: conversation analyses of variation among and differences between NNSs and NSs in writing conferences and tutorials in terms of both field and tenor, corpus-based identification and description of the common stance devices found in spoken discourse, and research in the area of contrastive rhetoric on epistemic stance in NS and NNS writing. A review of the foundational and seminal literature and work that has built upon these areas will indicate that while much research has been conducted within each of these, there has been a dearth of research that has employed a combination of these three approaches. This review of previous studies across these domains will indicate that an integration of these strands to analyze conferences may prove fruitful. Each of these threads suggests that the writing conference, with its potent role in the writing process, operates as a critical and pivotal pedagogical, cultural, and linguistic site, through which one may uncover variation in stance and tenor. A synthesis of this body of research reveals possible directions for a corpus-based comparative analysis of stance in writing conferences. Before considering the significance of what happens within writing conferences, however, one must consider the significance of these conferences themselves.

### **Variation in the tenor and the field of writing conferences**

In the last few decades the field of composition theory has interrogated, challenged, and re-conceptualized the pedagogy of writing. Whereas in the past classroom instruction focused on a singular product submitted for a grade, it has now come to adopt more of a process approach, in which writing is considered an evolutionary journey. Emig (1983) differentiates between these two approaches, considering the former limited and highly ordered and the latter more erratic,

playful, and open-ended. In this latter method, over the course of the evolution of a written work, feedback plays a critical role in helping the student reappraise and reshape a text. Though written comments from peers and instructors on drafts submitted may prove resourceful and helpful in revising and editing a text, students may also benefit from another activity that has come to be commonplace in composition classes: the writing conference.

In classes with many students, conferences provide opportunities for individualized attention, in which the teacher and a single student can discuss and engage with each other over written work at length in a one-on-one environment. Through this more personal and interactive setting, conferencing may “counter the impersonality and ineffectiveness of whole-class solutions” (Lerner, 2005, p. 193). With each writer bringing and every work containing its own unique idiosyncrasies, the conference allows the teacher to address and work with the student on these in a manner infrequently achieved in a traditional classroom. Besides offering more personalization in the learning and writing process, Lerner also asserts conferences may challenge and subvert dominant and transmission models of teaching in which information is deposited into the minds of students to be regurgitated at a later time.

The more personal and dialogic learning that takes place in the conference setting may affect the discourse of students and teachers, encouraging them to adopt and use a particular language variety with one another. Identifying a unique code used by interlocutors, Jacobs and Karliner (1977) argue that the discourse of the conference “falls somewhere between classroom discourse and casual conversation” (p. 503). An analysis of the conference based in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), an approach in which one can only understand language in terms of context, would argue that what is taking place (the field) is distinct from the classroom (Halliday, 1978). Though the interlocutors continue to perform academic responsibilities and

aspirations, they are doing so in a private context over one's unique personal work. The relationship of the interlocutors (the tenor) will thus differ accordingly, with the participants demonstrating more of a horizontal relationship than the vertical ones traditionally seen in and associated with classrooms: their relationship is informed more by equality than it is by power differences. There is less status and distance separating student and teacher and instead more contact bringing them together. The realization of linguistic features, of both conversational discourse and classroom discourse, would suggest differences in field, tenor, and ultimately register and indicate the more personal and constructivist learning attained in conferences.

Conferences may provide an avenue to work toward and achieve more student-centered pedagogies, in which learners adopt a more agentic, constructivist, and proactive stance toward the learning process (Corbett, 2013; Duke, 1975; Skidmore, 2006). Students may come to exercise more ownership of their learning and writing in this context, in contrast to the traditional classroom in which they are often passive in the development of knowledge. It has been found that traditional, whole-class instructional methods may lead to domination by the teacher in the discourse of the classroom: Bellack's landmark 1963 study analyzed classroom discourse and found that teachers tend to talk about three times as much as students, something that suggests instructors adopt a position of authority and assert themselves as the depositors of knowledge. More recent research has corroborated this finding of teacher dominance across a number of contexts, ranging from music (Goolsby, 1996) to bilingual science classrooms (Morton, 2012). Conferences may defy this pattern.

Rather than imposing knowledge as absolute and firm from above, the writing conference may instead bring it into play and interrogation, Welch (1999) argues, by opening new possibilities and deconstructing what the writer may have taken for granted. In a spirit of



playfulness and inquiry, students and teachers may discover new methods, approaches, and ideas. In the context of the conference, the student and the teacher work together to uncover, ponder, and discuss alternative and variegated perspectives on a dynamic text. “This view conceptualizes the role of the teacher in an effective conference as that of co-discoverer of each learner-writer’s meanings and writing processes” (Glasswell, Parr, and McNaughton, 2003, p. 292). Through this process of playing with a text, conferences may enable and empower writers to experience and practice “emergent agency” (Strauss & Xiang, 2006). The increased ownership of one’s learning and writing through the conference may constitute a site to challenge traditional and more authoritative pedagogies. Conferences are thus a site infused with the dynamics of power, expectations, and needs adopted and displayed by both of the interlocutors. This different field creates a different tenor.

Though proposed and advanced as an alternative to traditional teaching methods, the conference may still function in such a way as to maintain the authority of the teacher or tutor. Some conferences could realize tenor more in the form of status. However, a teacher or tutor may adopt and practice a different role in the conference. The approaches and techniques adopted and used by “experts” in a writing setting, such as a writing center or a writing conference, call into question and relate to controversies about pedagogical authority and trust, in addition to the nature of writing (Corbett, 2013). A more explicit, direct, and authoritative role by the tutor or teacher may align with more transmission models of teaching, while a more open-ended and student-centered practice could reflect a more student-centered and constructivist philosophy of education. A number of arguments have been advanced in the literature for the benefits gained by pursuing the latter philosophy in the context of conference. These include its cognitive, affective, and writing effects.

Conferences may encourage critical thinking and more emotional engagement with the act of composing a text. More dialogic pedagogies, of which the conference has been presented as an example that contrasts with impersonal and deficient classrooms, invite the student to approach learning as a process of thinking rather than one of merely remembering and also foster an atmosphere in which both the intellect and affect of the student may receive affirmation and cultivation (Skidmore, 2006). Duke (1975) argues that a non-directive approach, with solidarity informing the conference, will alleviate stress and anxiety on the part of students and enable them to take more responsibility for and demonstrate a more active stance toward the act of writing. The increase in cognitive and affective engagement facilitated by the conference may induce substantial motivation and productivity on the part of a student as they proceed further with and improve a text.

Previous research (Freedman, 1982; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997) has found that conferences in which students and teachers position each other in traditional epistemological roles, in which their tenor is based more on status than on contact, result in less substantial revision on drafts than do conferences in which these two interlocutors approach each other as equal co-participants. The tenor of the conference affects the ensuing work of the student. In order to encourage extensive and thoughtful work on the part of students in the revising process, teachers may wish to emphasize the fact that the conference does not function as a “paper-fixing” opportunity but rather as an opportunity to dive into, interrogate, and play with a text. What is critical is that students act as topic selectors within the conference (Jacobs & Karliner, 1977). In so doing, they exercise and fulfill Duke’s (1975) call for students to exercise more agency in the context of a conference.

The practices associated with the student-centered approach may result in more thinking, more engagement, and more output. However, these idealized practices in the setting of a conference may not prove consonant with the previous educational experiences of students and thus constitute a specialized cultural practice with which students are unfamiliar (Newkirk, 1995). The transformation in the roles of the teacher and the student called for by the theoretical and research literature may violate culturally variable pedagogies and epistemologies that have informed so much of students' previous academic experiences, especially for students from backgrounds in which the teacher is usually positioned as the authority to directly furnish absolute knowledge into the expectant minds of students. While both Western and Eastern education systems consider the teacher as having more knowledge than the students, these two contexts may differ in terms of how students expect the teacher to share that knowledge with students and predispose and socialize them to pursue and cultivate a different tenor in the conference.

Western education may encourage teachers to perform, behave, and act like learners collaborating with and growing alongside their students, while other areas of the world may conceptualize the teacher as being more direct and explicit about what they know and what the students need to learn. The common phrases of *guide on the side* and *sage on the stage* may best capture this difference. Due to cultural backgrounds and past academic experiences, students of some backgrounds may expect the teacher to adopt and practice a more direct role, with those expectations informing the approach to the conference adopted by students and leading to possibly considering the teacher a "teller" and little else (Harris & Silva, 1993). Thus, cultures experienced by the student may affect the tenor expected by the student. While it is important to acknowledge that the backgrounds and experiences of NNSs are not monolithic and to avoid

essentializing identities and backgrounds, cultural differences may predispose some students to approach the tutor or teacher as an authority on whom to depend for information (Thonus, 2004).

Besides the differential cultural expectations, one must also account for the fact that, for many of the concerns under discussion in the writing conference, the teacher brings much more knowledge than do the students about what constitutes a successful and effective composition. Some of these concerns, such as vocabulary or grammar, may cause much anxiety for students. Students may require a more capable expert to assist and guide them in navigating the challenges of writing in a new language, in a new culture, and with these concerns. Powers (1993) argues that a Vygotskian (1980) analysis of the discourse of conferences would suggest that a more authoritative role on the part of the teacher may serve the purpose of helping students attain a potential level of development. This unique field would lead to a distinctive tenor for conferences with these students. The tenor of the conference may initially emerge more from the status dimension, from the differences in knowledge of the interlocutors, but as the student gains more competence, confidence, and comfort with the assignment, the tenor should evolve and reflect a more balanced power dynamic. As students gain more understanding and ownership of their work, they may actually gain the position of providing information to the teacher rather than of receiving it (Powers, 1993; Williams, 2004).

Thus, the more vertical relationship between the teacher and the student at the beginning of the writing conference would still not remain permanent but instead operate in such a way as to help the latter grow and develop, with the eventual goal of withdrawing support (Glasswell, Parr, & McNaughton, 2003) and with contact coming to play a more prominent role. Legitimate Peripheral Participation, proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), calls for novices, such as less knowledgeable students, to practice limited responsibilities and thus have peripheral

participation at the beginning of the learning process. Students who are still developing in a community of practice, such as ELLs, may thus contribute less than NSs initially in this model. More direct and explicit conferences are perhaps both necessary and temporary, an important means for providing scaffolding needed for success on the part of individual students. If there are differences in stancetaking among NSs and NNSs, then this perspective would hold that these are not absolute and inevitable, but rather a necessary and useful part of the learning process that actually equips and empowers these diverse students, especially those from different backgrounds. Such a view would acknowledge and account for where they are situated as learners rather than consider homogeneity in their behavior in the writing process and conferences as an absolute positive.

Cultural variation and language needs could influence the discourse of the conference. Based on personal interlanguage needs and familiar educational practices, explicit and authoritative comments may thus operate in a manner beneficial and facilitative to the student. Powers (1993) suggests teachers may need to accept a role of “informant” rather than one of “collaborator” in conferences with second language learners (p. 241). This different tenor is required due to the field that often faces English language learners: They may need the guidance of an expert to feel and become more equipped for and comfortable with addressing unique language needs, such as grammar and vocabulary. The choice between these two roles, between these two dimensions of tenor, Williams (2004) observes, is “the most important issue...that dominates discussions of L2 tutorials,” and she then raises the difficult question: “Should tutors provide information to writers rather than elicit it?” (p. 195). The position of the teacher, discursively constructed by the student and the teacher in the conference, may not only orient to

and build upon the specific needs of a learner, but also strongly affect the linguistic and topical trajectory of a conference.

The provision of information on the part of instructors will affect the discourse of the conference session, leading to effects on the ratio of teacher-student or tutor-tutee talk, as well as on the pragmatic expression of politeness: Teachers providing information may not hedge and mitigate the content of what they say as much as they would if they were instead eliciting or collaborating on information. Besides how they say it, teachers may differ simply in terms of how much they say it: Thonus (1999) found that while tutors do tend to speak more than tutees in sessions regardless of tutees' language background, that pattern of dominance becomes more pronounced in sessions with NNSs. Conferences with ELLs thus display a less conversational atmosphere. With the increased dominance practiced on the part of tutors, teachers may mitigate their feedback to NNSs less by displaying a more direct and explicit approach and relinquish the floor to NNSs less (Thonus, 1999). NNS tutorials are thus characterized by teacher dominance, demonstrated in time-at-talk and politeness strategies. There is an increased influence of the status dimension than of the contact dimension on the discourse of the interlocutors.

However, it is important to note that the teacher or tutor may adopt this more dominant position in response to the communicative behavior of the student in the conference or tutorial setting. Often interpreted as a sign of passivity or deficiency, silence may instead constitute an agentive act on the part of the student to achieve more directive and explicit feedback from an interlocutor (Haneda, 2004; Sperling, 1991). Students may treat the conference as an opportunity for receiving critical and necessary feedback on a draft from a more capable other and thus perform in the conference space in such a way as to maximize that possibility. A non-agentive stance is not static and permanent, but instead fluid and dynamic, with the possibility of turning

into agentive as the conference advances, Strauss and Xiang (2006) found. In addition, these different stance positions are expressed through a variety of devices; with more agentive stance positions, Strauss and Xiang note modal verbs of possibility as being among the predominant linguistic features. The more significant differences in time-at-talk and reduced hedging, in addition to other markers of non-agentive stance identified in this study, may result from the initiation of the student.

In addition to differences in the quantity and pragmatics of utterances on the part of interlocutors in the conference session, the content of those utterances may also indicate variation in the approaches to and attitudes toward authority and agency in the writing conference and index specific needs on the part of learners. For ELLs, those needs — and the comments that build upon them — may consist of language use more than for NSs. It is intuitive to conjecture that conferences with NNSs will discuss lower-order concerns more extensively, possibly creating a different field and ensuing tenor than for NSs. Research has indicated that tutoring sessions with L2 writers do indeed tend to concentrate on language (Ritter, 2002). Conscious of the additional issues and challenges posed by writing in a second language, tutors may adopt a more direct role in order to assist their tutees through the Zone of Proximal Development in this area. One particular area of language use with which ELLs may require assistance is lexis. Nakamaru (2010) analyzed writing center tutorials and found that tutors with NNS tutees devote more time to discussing lexical issues in drafts than they do with NS tutees, as lexis may constitute more of a challenge for the former group than for the latter group.

It is possible that the content of what is discussed influences, if not determines, matters such as time-at-talk or pragmatics. The tenor of the conference may emerge from the field; ideational meaning may influence interpersonal meaning. Haneda (2004) found that students

tend to position themselves as the “primary knower” more in content-related exchanges than in language-use exchanges. In the latter, teachers often find themselves compelled to adopt a “primary knower” position. In content-related exchanges in conferences, students will find themselves in the position of giving information, while in language-use exchanges they may find themselves in the position of receiving information, as they are likely not in the “primary knower” role in that context. If English language learners do seek more support with language use in the conference or tutorial, then it is to be expected that teachers may position themselves as the dominant interlocutor and practice a more explicit and authoritative stance, giving needed information to learners. Haneda’s study suggests that language-use exchanges contribute to the variation found in dominance and pragmatics in conference settings. The stance adopted by teacher because of language needs may account for the fact that conferences with NNS tend to feature more evaluation and suggestions than do ones with NSs (Williams, 2004).

The fact that conferences with NNSs focus on issues and questions related to language use may not align with what some contend to be best pedagogical practice for teaching and learning a second language. Leki (2001) expresses anxiety that such a concentration may lead to the adoption of a reductionist and narrow attitude toward and philosophy of writing on the part of students. Meanwhile, Truscott (1996) has called into question and expressed doubts and skepticism regarding the efficacy of corrective feedback on matters of grammar. However, it is also an obvious reality before many instructors and tutors that ELLs do indicate a need for and wish to receive more assistance with surface features and grammar (Bell & Elledge, 2008). As it is the case that indulging these expectations may violate standard practices and principles of the writing process and writing centers, teachers and tutors may find themselves in a challenging situation, one in which they are subject to the possibility of serving one of two masters: the best



practices of composition theory or the needs and expectations of a student. This tension is one that teachers and tutors must try to navigate to the best of their abilities.

Previous research that has studied differences between NS and NNS writing conferences or tutorials has relied on a number of features to identify and analyze in these sessions, including time-at-talk and mean length of utterance (Thonus, 1999), pragmatics and face-saving techniques (Bell & Elledge, 2008; Dings, 2012), and the semantic content and purpose of the utterance (Ewert, 2009; Freedman, 1982; Nakamaru, 2010; Ritter, 2002). While these studies have suggested these variables reflect variation in the linguistic and pedagogical practices of NS and NNSs, they adopt a qualitative and inductive approach that depends on explicit dominance or content words. The studies done so far may overlook and neglect to address the subtler ways in which stance and power are realized in the discourse of conferences and tutorials, the apparently unimportant language we use so often as to be ignored. A quantitative analysis of these aspects of language may also enable researchers to explore and analyze the power dynamics of conferences. An analysis of these less visible realizations of how students and teachers position each other may complement the research done so far.

### **Corpus linguistics, spoken discourse, and stance**

In addition to time-at-talk, mean length of utterance, pragmatics, and semantic content, seemingly minor and insignificant variation in word or phrase, such as the semantic differences between *You have to* and *You maybe could* or between *I don't know* and *I think*, may operate in such a way as to convey the speaker's power, authority, and knowledge; these common phrases in spoken discourse may index tenor in addition to what previous research has analyzed. Function words and common phrases similar to the aforementioned may suggest and index the attitudes and dispositions of both teachers and students toward the content of what is being

discussed, the writing process, education in general, and each other's roles. The frequency with which students may use a particular word or phrase or a set thereof over another may serve as another means for identifying and analyzing the differences in stance and tenor between NSs and NNSs in conference contexts, in addition to those between students and the teacher.

The analysis of the frequency of these features would require a linguistic research approach known as corpus linguistics, in which a systematic collection of natural language in authentic texts (a corpus) undergoes quantitative and qualitative analysis through the use of computer programs (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1998). Frequency functions as “the bedrock of corpus linguistics” (Baker, 2010, p. 19). Variation in the frequency of use of a particular word or phrase, as identified through the use of corpus-based approaches, may distinguish not only individuals from one another, but also different social groups from one another. For example, it is possible a corpus analysis will support the assumption that some particular vernacular terms are more pervasive among younger individuals, while older individuals may not use this vocabulary as much. A corpus-based analysis may also help confirm or challenge pervasive stereotypes about the language varieties and practices of racial, gender, or sexual minorities, interrogating or complicating essentialist assumptions.

In addition to sociolinguistic variation, corpus linguistics may also help illuminate variation among different registers, the variety of communicative domains and situations with which people linguistically engage over the course of daily life. Corpus-based approaches may, for example, illuminate and clarify the specific features that differentiate and vary between spoken discourse and written discourse or among academic disciplines, such as the physical sciences and the humanities. The identification and description of these more frequent and distinctive features may constitute a matter of interest to not only linguists, but also teachers

serving NNSs and ELLs, who are likely learning or teaching an L2 with a specific goal in mind: casual purposes, specific, job-related purposes, or academic purposes. Aware more explicitly of the specific devices, phrases, and vocabulary often used in a particular register, teachers and students can approach communicative competence with more deliberateness and insight.

The context discussed earlier, academic writing conferences or tutorials, is but one example of a setting of spoken academic discourse that a corpus analysis may describe. This setting, one would predict, will feature some of the patterns traditionally associated with spoken discourse; Jacobs and Karliner (1977) have asserted that conferences generally borrow features from both classroom discourse and conversational discourse. If there is indeed variation in the discourse and interaction of NSs and NNSs in conferences, if these conferences possibly realize divergent fields and tenors, it is possible that the actual frequency of these devices will also vary and differ between NSs and NNSs. A corpus-based analysis of the frequency of these common devices for spoken academic discourse could assist with and complement analyzing the power dynamics and stance of the participants in the conference setting.

The positioning of participants in a speech event is only one out of many ways that they may express their attitudes toward and relationships with what they say. These expressions of “personal feelings, attitudes, value judgment, or assessments” (Biber et al., 1999, p. 966) comprise much of spoken discourse. These expressions all convey what *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999) refers to as stance, the attitude and evaluation communicated by a speaker with regard to the content of their utterances. Similar to the concept of stance and grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics, appraisal theory (Martin, 2005) involves a consideration of speaker’s attitudes and feelings, their approval or disapproval toward the content of their output: Three systems for appraisal Martin identifies within his framework

are affect, judgment, and appreciation. The second of these systems, judgment, may inform much of the discourse of conferences as students and teachers engage with and evaluate the quality of the student's written work. How teachers and students express their judgment on written work may take a variety of forms and serve a variety of functions. Students may express in their conference a desire to improve something or certainty about a part of the writing process, rendering judgment about their ability as writers, while the teacher may present an option as being available to a capable writer or establish requirements for an assignment, offering the content of what they say as either a possibility or a necessity.

Regardless of the approaches used, whether one adopts the frameworks of stance or appraisal theory, these all recognize the importance of attitudes and feelings in discourse. Within the expression of stance are several sub-categories that relate to these and help realize expressions of judgment: epistemic, desire, obligation, intention/prediction, and ability (Biber & Barbieri, 2007): how certain a speaker is, how much a speaker wants something, how necessary and required something is, what is anticipated and expected, and the assumed capacity to perform a task. Previous research in corpus linguistics (Biber et al., 1999) has identified a number of grammatical devices that commonly serve the purpose of conveying stance across these categories. Stance markers have been found to be far more common in spoken academic discourse than in academic writing (Biber, 2006; Biber & Barbieri, 2007).

Besides being more frequent in spoken registers in comparison to written registers, these devices also differ in terms of the forms they take and the functions they serve in these registers. The marking of stance in academic writing tends to involve noun phrases or other multi-word patterns involving nouns, while in conversation it tends to involve clausal constructions, such as *I don't think* (Biber, 2009; Biber & Conrad, 1999; Gray & Biber, 2015). In addition to these

clausal constructions, modal verbs and adverbs also appear more in spoken academic discourse as stance markers than in written academic discourse (Biber, 2006). While the syntactic composition of these devices distinguishes these registers, these markers also serve different purposes: in conversation they often communicate stance, while those in academic writing tend to serve more referential functions (Biber, 2006).

Speakers may use certain devices associated with the different sub-categories — epistemic, desire, obligation, intention/prediction, and ability — to convey attitudes in spoken discourse. As noted, many of these devices are lexical bundles, modal verbs, and adverbs, the specific grammatical features that will undergo analysis in this study. The first of these devices, clausal stance constructions, have been noted as being particularly prevalent in spoken discourse (Biber, 2006). In fact, the prevalence of these clausal stance constructions in spoken language is evidenced by their appearance in many lexical bundles (Conrad & Biber, 2004). Lexical bundles, multi-word patterns in language, are characterized by their extreme commonness, lack of perceptual salience, and structural incompleteness (Biber & Barbieri, 2007). They have been noted as pervasive: Estimates of the extent to which they account for language have ranged from about twenty and twenty-five percent (Conrad & Biber, 2004) to as much eighty percent (Altenberg, 1998). Though frequent in spoken discourse, lexical bundles are not that diverse in that register and tend to be more fixed, showing less variability. “Conversation has a few bundles with very high frequencies” (Conrad & Biber, 2004).

The most common structure for bundles in conversation Conrad and Biber (2004) identify is “personal pronoun + lexical verb phrase (+ complement clause)” (e.g., *I don't think*), which accounts for forty-five percent of the lexical bundles in conversation. In these bundles, cognitive verbs often appear, lexical verbs that express epistemic stance, one's state of knowing

or not knowing or one's mental processing of the information at hand (e.g., *I don't know*, *I guess*, *I suppose*, *I bet*, etc.) (Kärkkäinen, 2003). This common function of this kind of bundle is of significance to the analysis of stance. This strikingly dominant function of lexical bundles in conversational discourse marks the speaker's epistemological commitment to and certainty about information at hand (Biber, 2006; Biber, 2009; Biber & Barbieri, 2007; Conrad & Biber, 2004). These devices are dominantly indicative of the tenor of the interlocutors or their mental or emotional attitude toward the field.

It is important to remember that speakers may realize stance through avenues other than the use of cognitive verbs (Biber, 2006; Biber et al., 1999). Modals, auxiliary verbs to express possibility or necessity, may also realize these stance positions (e.g., *You may like to* or *You must*); while modals of possibility would present options to consider, modals of necessity would offer requirements to be met and binding tasks to be performed. In addition to modal verbs, such stance adverbs as *kind of* or *maybe* may index uncertainty about and hedge a proposition, while other adverbs like *actually* or *in fact* may demonstrate certainty and certitude, treating something as beyond dispute and questioning. Verbs controlling complement clauses, modal verbs, and adverbs all may express and realize stance in spoken discourse. In an analysis of these different markers of stance across registers, Biber (2006) has found that all three of these are more common in spoken academic discourse and that modal verbs are far more abundant than the other two categories.

If these three different devices — lexical verbs controlling complement clauses, modal verbs, and stance adverbs — express stance on the part of a speaker, then it raises questions and possibilities about their application to the analysis of the discourse of writing conferences involving NSs and NNSs. As noted earlier, modal verbs of possibility characterize more agentive

conferences (Strauss & Xiang, 2011). It is possible there is variation in the frequency with which teachers and students use markers of these different semantic categories for stance, the attitude or certitude of the speaker toward the proposition at hand. Frequencies of these devices may indicate variation in stance and tenor and how students and teachers conceptualize and position themselves, each other, an assignment, the class, and perhaps even the nature of learning. Stance devices could vary across and perhaps index fields and tenors. Variation in the use of these devices may reflect the specific communicative contexts and unique situations before the interlocutors (Kirkham, 2011).

The tenor of participants in the conference context may affect the realization and use of these three categories of stance devices. However, another linguistic device pervasive in spoken discourse may also reflect and index how the interlocutors are positioning themselves and the power dynamics embedded in pedagogical contexts: personal pronouns. Modal verbs, cognitive lexical verbs, and adverbs have already been discussed as an indicator of stance, but pronouns themselves have not. Biber (2006) notes that first person pronouns with the use of stance devices explicitly reflect the personal stance of the speaker, often appearing in the aforementioned lexical bundles featuring verbs controlling complement clauses. While first-person pronouns may index stance, other pronouns, such as those in the second person, may also index the tenor of the interlocutors. Variation in the use of these may also result from and reflect differences in power.

Pennebaker (2011) argues that two groups of words operate to characterize language and distinguish individuals on the basis of the power they experience in their social contexts; these groups of words are what linguistically constitute the gaps between men and women, the older and the younger, and the upper classes and the working classes. The differences in how these groups speak emerge from the same difference in authority. Those with more authority and

prestige tend to use more devices from the *noun-article cluster*, using more “articles, nouns, prepositions, and big words,” while those in positions of lower status use more of the *pronoun-verb cluster* consisting of “personal and impersonal pronouns (especially first-person singular), auxiliary verbs, and certain cognitive words frequently linked to hedge phrases” (p. 70).

Pennebaker notes that the higher use of pronouns is not monolithic and singular for those in lower positions of authority; instead, while those in authority may use less of the first-person singular, they tend to use more of the first-person plural and the second person. Meanwhile, those in positions of reduced status tend to use more of the first-person singular due to a need and tendency to draw attention to themselves in contexts in which they are dependent and subordinate, according to Pennebaker. In an analysis of university email correspondence, he found that while students tend to use more of the first-person singular and other devices of the pronoun-verb cluster, faculty tend to use more of the first-person plural, the second person, and other devices of the noun-article cluster. The frequency with which a speaker uses a particular pronoun (*I* or *you*) may demonstrate and derive from the degree to which they are positioning themselves and the interlocutor in a particular speech event. Such frequencies of these pronouns would illuminate the degree to which their tenor is characterized as being vertical or horizontal and, if the former, whether they are in a position of authority or in a position lacking authority.

The positions adopted by interlocutors, the tenor of the conference, may affect their output at the most basic and common of linguistic levels. For example, the more direct and authoritative nature of interactions with NNSs described earlier may lead teachers, who are adopting the position of “informant” advocated by Williams (2004), to not hedge claims as much, instead using modals of necessity rather than of possibility and perhaps use more second person and first-person plural pronouns. NNSs, who are possibly seeking more direct, absolute,



and corrective feedback from instructors, who adopt less agentive stance positions, and who may experience more self-consciousness in using an L2, may also use more modals of necessity rather than of possibility and use more first-person singular pronouns. It is also possible that NNSs, who would like more certitude and absoluteness in conferences, would use more pronouns for those in positions of power, if they are seeking to gain control and certainty over the writing process rather than engage with it in the spirit of play. On the other hand, more dialogic conferences, in which both participants are positioning themselves as equals with agency in engaging with higher-order concerns and in which the student may function as the “primary knower,” may involve more modals of possibility and equitable pronoun use as the two interlocutors proceed through the myriad paths possible in the labyrinth of the writing process and deliberate how to best proceed with bringing order to the chaos of one’s ideas. Linguistic choices made by the interlocutors may reflect and realize the field and tenor of conferences.

A corpus-based analysis of the frequency of these devices would complement and enrich the previous research performed on variation among NNSs and NSs in the pedagogical power dynamics of writing conferences and centers. Such research would further illuminate the positions and attitudes of the interlocutors as they engage with each other, the writing process, and education in general. One may argue that a corpus-based comparative analysis of stance devices and pronouns in conferences constitutes a viable area for research, as it involves the intersection of the established differences in interaction found in conferences and the common features of spoken academic discourse. However, little if any research has been done so far into this possible avenue for the comparative analysis of the language of NSs and NNSs. This is not to say that there is an utter and complete dearth of corpus-based research into the realization of stance in the output of NSs and NNSs: Previous research has analyzed the expression of stance in

academic writing and has indicated that there are differences among NSs and NNSs. These insights should inform and guide a comparative analysis of spoken discourse.

### **Variation in epistemic stance in academic writing**

Previous research has indicated that NSs and NNSs differ from one another in their writing processes and products; these studies in contrastive rhetoric have identified a number of potential areas in which these populations may diverge, with which ELLs may require explicit instruction, and of which teachers may like to practice continuous pedagogical awareness. This research has suggested particular forms of variation among and within different populations in their approaches to both writing and thinking. One of these rhetorical and linguistic differences to emerge from the field of contrastive rhetoric involves stance. While it is important to acknowledge that ELLs are not monolithic but rather reflect a cornucopia of cultures and to adopt a non-essentialist interpretation of data, studies have shown a tendency on the part of NNSs to approach and treat knowledge and information in writing differently than do NSs.

NSs tend to mark stance far more frequently in their written output than do NNSs. Chen and Baker (2010) found that while 24% of the lexical bundles used by NSs serve a stance function, only 18% of the lexical bundles produced by L2 Chinese students do the same. This difference between NSs and NNSs in the expression of stance has been noted in other studies as well. Chen (2010) found that NSs express stance 48.8 times per 10,000 words, in contrast to NNSs, who only did 18.76 times. In addition to the number of tokens of stance devices, the number of types of these devices constitutes another distinction between NSs and NNSs: more proficient L1 users of English tend to use the widest range of lexical bundles, while ELLs use the smallest range (Chen & Baker, 2010).

Differences in the quantity of expressions of stance are but one way in which NSs and NNSs differ. In addition, studies have uncovered variation between NSs and NNSs in the nature and function of these stance expressions. According to Chen (2010), ELLs use a lower proportion of “downtoners” to hedge claims, a phenomenon more common among NSs. NSs use more of these constructions, such as *It is possible* or *perhaps*, to reduce the certitude behind a claim made. Instead, NNS use of stance devices tends to contain a greater proportion of “boosters,” with which to assert propositions with certitude. Corroborating this finding, Gilquin et al. (2007) have noted that while NSs tend to use more hedging adverbs (e.g., *possibly* and *maybe*) so as to save face and reduce the magnitude of a claim, NNSs are more inclined to use certainty adverbs (e.g., *absolutely* or *really*) to convey certitude regarding a proposition. Milton and Hyland (1999) have also shown that Chinese NNS writers tend to use more absolute and explicit statements in argumentative writing.

This variation in the use of stance devices may reflect cultural differences in pragmatics, epistemology, and pedagogy: Some of the cultures from which NNSs may come value certainty, confidence, and absoluteness in assertions made, while other cultures, Western ones included, may emphasize hedging, qualifying, and questioning what one knows and asserts (Chen, 2010). It is possible that these differences in the expression of knowledge derive from varying norms of pragmatics and epistemology. They also may result from ideological variation in the conceptualization of the individual: Western and individualistic cultures may celebrate and affirm autonomy, voice, and critical thinking, whereas collectivist cultures might emphasize group conformity, respect, and interdependence (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). Hedging in academic writing may constitute a culturally constrained practice, one affected by pragmatic

transfer from one's L1 and C1 (first culture). Cultural diversity may constrain, influence, and maybe even determine this pattern of stance.

However, the appropriate expression of stance in academic writing may also constitute a developmentally constrained practice. It is important to note that this realization of stance may follow a developmental pattern. Leńko-Szymańska (2014) notes that NNSs may use lexical bundles, but not in a formulaic manner, initially: They may form the unit analytically, consciously using each word, before gaining automaticity with the bundle. Increased proficiency leads to and involves increased formulaicity, and increased formulaicity leads to and involves increased proficiency; their relationship is cyclical and interwoven. Increased proficiency with the effective use of stance devices in academic writing characterizes not only NNSs, but also NSs.

NSs also may demonstrate a need to develop more pragmatic competence in the use of stance devices. Unlike scholars and expert writers, novice writers in academic discourse tend to generalize and adopt an absolutist and universalist approach to knowledge and ideas as well (Barton, 1993); Barton presents the possibility that novices in academic discourse tend to approach knowledge “as a product of shared social agreement” rather than as “a product of contrast...that values the competitive knowledge-maker...with a critical perspective” (p. 765). This tendency to express certitude may encompass both NSs and NNSs. The implication is that this specific approach to epistemic stance may function as a form of academic gatekeeping. With growing access to and integration within academic communities of practice and familiarity with the involved registers, one may acquire the needed pragmatic competence and proficiency.

The question that now emerges involves the efficacy of providing instruction to learners on this standard approach to stance in academic writing. Although it is possible that implicit

learning and noticing may enable learners to incorporate these devices into their output, their lack of perceptual salience may prevent this from transpiring. Explicit instruction has been found to be efficacious and useful for helping learners gain an awareness of and incorporate these into their language. Fordyce (2014) has found that students receiving explicit intervention on epistemic stance see greater gains in the use of these devices than do students receiving an implicit intervention. It is possible to draw the explicit attention of NNS students to these devices and encourage the increased incorporation of them into writing. This suggests that one cannot generalize and rush to premature conclusions about power dynamics based on quantitative differences in the use of stance devices; these frequencies may reflect proficiency as well as stance.

### **The intersection of conferences, spoken discourse, and stance**

It is apparent from the previous research that NSs and NNSs tend to conceive and express stance differently in academic writing. It is on this note that it is important to recall the expression of stance is especially characteristic of spoken academic discourse in comparison to other registers. While these studies have identified variation and differences among NSs and NNSs in the use of stance devices, they have been limited to comparative studies of written student output and neglected to account for the realization and expression of stance in other registers. The different stance positions identified in academic writing may extend to or differ within spoken language; an analysis of spoken discourse may corroborate, enrich, problematize, or challenge the conclusions drawn from studies in contrastive rhetoric.

A comparative approach in studying spoken academic discourse would supplement not only previous research into epistemic stance, but would also contribute to the body of research performed on NS and NNS interactions in conference and tutorial sessions. Considering that

conversation analyses of writing conferences and centers has found a number of differences between NSs and NNSs in their discourse and interaction with teachers and tutors, one may hypothesize these varying power dynamics would also lead to differences in the use of some of the stance devices and pronouns common to spoken discourse. The frequency with which students or teachers use specific devices and pronouns may further illuminate how these interlocutors are positioning, conceptualizing, and treating themselves, assignments, learning, and writing. The variable use of these devices may emerge from differences in field and tenor.

When considered together, these three strands of previous research discussed in this literature review — the variegated power dynamics of writing conferences and tutorials with NSs and NNSs, the common features marking stance in spoken academic discourse, and the differences between NSs and NNSs in the expression of stance in writing — suggest that these stance devices serve as another means for the comparison of NS and NNS conferences. The data yielded by a corpus-based analysis may indicate the authority or lack thereof expressed by the teacher operating as either an “informant” or as “collaborator” in the conference, index the extent to which propositions conveyed are hedged, and suggest the degree to which the interlocutors are approaching a topic as open-ended, subject to play, and filled with possibility or as closed, determined to be absolute, and driven by necessity. Such information would suggest how NSs and NNSs experience conferences differently.

This study draws upon and synthesizes these three seemingly and previously disparate areas of study. When combined, these areas open a new avenue for the use of writing conferences to analyze variation in the expression of stance. This study will build upon and contribute to research in these areas by providing further exploration of the differing power dynamics of conferences with NNSs by means of a comparative analysis of the realization of

stance, as indexed by particular devices common to spoken discourse; these devices include modal verbs, cognitive verbs, stance adverbs, and personal pronouns. In addition, it will consider power dynamics through the amount of output, through both the proportion of the teacher's or student's output accounting for the total word count for a conference and the mean words per minute produced by an interlocutor.

## CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Corpus creation

The present study uses a corpus-based approach in an effort to explore the research questions. As explained in the previous chapter, corpus linguistics involves the systematic collection of naturally occurring texts (Friginal & Hardy, 2014). This collection of texts then undergoes analysis by computer software so that researchers can analyze both quantitatively and qualitatively the frequency of particular lexical items, phrases, patterns, or collocations. Linguists may use this information about variability to analyze language change, language varieties, or register variation. By comparing different corpora, one may examine how particular demographics use language differently or how certain forms of communication involve divergent linguistic and discursive practices. This study uses corpus linguistics to analyze stancetaking in student-teacher conferences in a particular instructor's work in first-year composition.

This study uses a corpus-based approach to explore variation in the use of stance devices among NSs and NNSs and variation in the use of stance devices by a teacher in interactions with these two populations of students. These two lines of inquiry from the research questions will yield insight into both how students and teachers use particular features to hedge or bring certitude to their utterances and use this information to consider how these behaviors position interlocutors. In order to analyze variation in this behavior effectively, however, one must obtain a representative corpus relevant to the lines of inquiry. This corpus must feature writing conferences involving both NSs and NNSs.



### **Research setting and participants**

The creation of a corpus of relevant FYC (first-year composition) conferences would seek to obtain adequate representations of the different populations. For this study, the corpus of texts consisted of transcriptions of recordings of conferences in such FYC classes at a large public, land-grant university in the Midwest, Iowa State University. The collection of this data received approval from the Institutional Review Board of this school in the fall of 2013 under IRB # 14-548. To ensure such a corpus that would adequately represent the different groups of inquiry in the research questions, this study turned to a unique and specific type of FYC class at this institution: cross-cultural sections in which half of students were of native-speaking status and half of students were of non-native speaking status. I visited these sections toward the end of the semester and invited students to participate in the study; those who agreed allowed me to obtain a recording of a conference they had with the instructor.

All of the sections available and able to participate in this study were taught by the same instructor, a lecturer with a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language. This instructor had earned her degree from the same institution in which she was now teaching. During the course of her studies, she had obtained previous experience with teaching FYC and serving international students in an intensive English program (IEP) as a teaching assistant. That only one teacher's output constituted the entire data for the instructor's section of the corpus limits the generalizability of the information found for the second research question, as it may reflect more the idiosyncratic characteristics and style of this teacher than of the teaching profession more broadly. Nevertheless, this teacher's communicative behavior and use of stance devices may provide a basis for further inquiry and critical praxis within the TESOL profession.

A larger sample of participants for the two student groups in question, NSs and NNSs, was obtained: Though a total of twenty-eight individuals initially consented to participate in this study, several did not appear at their scheduled conference times and thus could not be included in the corpus. As a result, the final number of students participating in this study and represented in the corpus is eighteen, of whom twelve were NSs and six were NNSs. Among the NNSs there were three East Asians, one Indian, one Arab, and one Hispanic. Within the sample of eighteen participants who did attend conferences and contributed to the corpus, there was more balance in terms of the representation of sexes, with males comprising eight of the participants and females the other ten. Due to the fact that this is a case study of one instructor's context, it was decided to include all participants in the corpus. The table below summarizes the demographic information about the participants.

Table 1

*Student Participant Demographics*

<u>Native-Speaking Status</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Native-Speaker	5	7	12
Non-Native Speaker	3	3	6
Total	8	10	18

Before considering the process undertaken to transcribe the texts that comprise the corpus, some additional observations about the conferences deserve mention. These conferences took place near the end of the semester during the week prior to final examinations, a stressful and hectic time for students. Because of the timing of these conferences in the curriculum of FYC classes at this institution, the conferences all focused on the creation of an electronic portfolio, made using the WordPress platform and in which students processed and reflected on their growth as writers over the semester. The date and content of these conferences may have

affected the discourse of and use of stance devices in them, as is addressed further in the discussion chapter.

Another way in which the discourse of these conferences may have been affected is by my presence or absence. When possible and allowed by participants, I stayed in the office for the duration of the conference and sat in the background, taking field notes and inductively identifying any patterns or observations on the use of stance devices. This raises the possibility that observation bias may have influenced the discourse of the both interlocutors: Participants, both students and the teacher, in this context may have modified their output. However, because of conflicts with my own teaching schedule, I was not able to attend all conferences recorded. In these situations, I relied on the instructor in question to record the conference and obtained the audio files from her at a later time. The reality of being recorded and observed may have exercised an influence on the practices of some of the conference participants, although they were not aware of the specific constructs being analyzed and only aware that I was looking at how teachers and NS and NNS students may interact and talk differently in conferences.

### **Transcription and organization**

Upon collection of the recordings of conferences, these files were manually transcribed verbatim as text files. Pauses were indicated through the use of ellipses. In instances in which the interlocutors overlapped with one another, brackets were used to indicate utterances taking place simultaneously. Only I transcribed the conferences, a fact that raises questions about the reliability of the transcriptions. Upon completion of transcription of a conference, in an effort to increase accuracy, I listened to the conference multiple times while reading through the transcription to ensure quality. Where it was impossible to determine what a speaker was saying, an “(unclear)” was inserted into the transcription.

As the research questions seek to ascertain variation in the extent of the use of particular stance devices, it was decided that the transcriptions did not need to include or account for intonation and other phonological features. In addition, because pauses were not relevant to the specific research questions in this thesis, the length of silence between or within turns was not included in the transcriptions. However, this is not to say that silence, intonation, and phonology may not pertain to the analysis of power dynamics and stance in the conference setting. It has been found that those in positions of power tend to speak differently than those with less power (Ko, Sadler, & Galinsky, 2015). Future analysis of the recordings may be designed to account for this form of variation among these groups in the conference recordings, as it may corroborate or add nuance to the findings made here regarding stance devices. Other omissions or changes during the transcription process include the use of pseudonyms for names and the removal of any specific reference to performance or grades, with “a B” or “an eighty-two” instead described merely as “LETTER GRADE” or “PERCENTAGE GRADE” in order to protect student privacy and confidentiality.

When completed, the original transcriptions included all utterances by both interlocutors, the student and the instructor. This complete transcription was copied into two other text files, one containing only all utterances by the student and another containing only all utterances by the teacher. Thus, each conference resulted in the creation of three text files, with one of these files contributing to either the NS or NNS student corpus and the other contributing to the teacher corpora. The creation of these individualized files would allow for the creation of specific corpora relevant to the research questions: For example, one corpus featured NS students, another did NNS students, while another did the teacher’s utterances to NS students and one more to NNS students. The information for these sub-corpora could yield additional

information and helped create more holistic corpora, such as one for all students and another for all of the teacher's utterances.

The size of each of these corpora, along with the mean words per minute of the interlocutors, is provided in Table 2 below. Due to the imbalance of NSs noted earlier, the NS corpus is substantially larger. However, it is important to note that not only is the NS corpus considerably larger than is the NNS corpus, but it also features more mean words per minute on the part of NS students. NNS students, on the other hand, produce about a quarter fewer words per minute, a fact that will become relevant and significant in the analysis of the power dynamics and stance positions adopted over the course of the conference.

Table 2

*Word Count (WC) and Mean Words Per Minute (WPM) for Conferences*

<u>Native-Speaking Status</u>	<u>Student-WC</u>	<u>Teacher-WC</u>	<u>Student-WPM</u>	<u>Teacher-WPM</u>
NS	13,695	16,501	61.36	109.10
NNS	2998	7654	45.62	116.47
Total	16,693	24,155	57.78	110.78

Though not included in a particular corpus, the original complete transcriptions were preserved to analyze the mutual and dialogic construction of stance among the interlocutors to complement the quantitative corpus analysis of features. A focus on the frequency of devices in individual corpora may neglect to consider the ways in which the interlocutors collaboratively construct the content of utterances and realize stance. The specific processes by which the corpora of text files were analyzed thus involved both quantitative and qualitative components.

### **Quantitative corpus analysis**

The identification and analysis of the quantitative frequency of stance devices relied heavily on a software program for corpus research known as AntConc (Anthony, 2014).

Available for free for major operating systems, AntConc allows the researcher to search for and determine the frequency of a particular word or phrase in a text or a set of texts. In addition, it presents concordance lines showing the search term or terms in context; the researcher can sort these results alphabetically in terms of the words appearing on the left to the right, enabling one to find common collocations, words with which specific words often and typically appear. Figure 1 demonstrates how AntConc may display information about specific words or phrases for analysis.

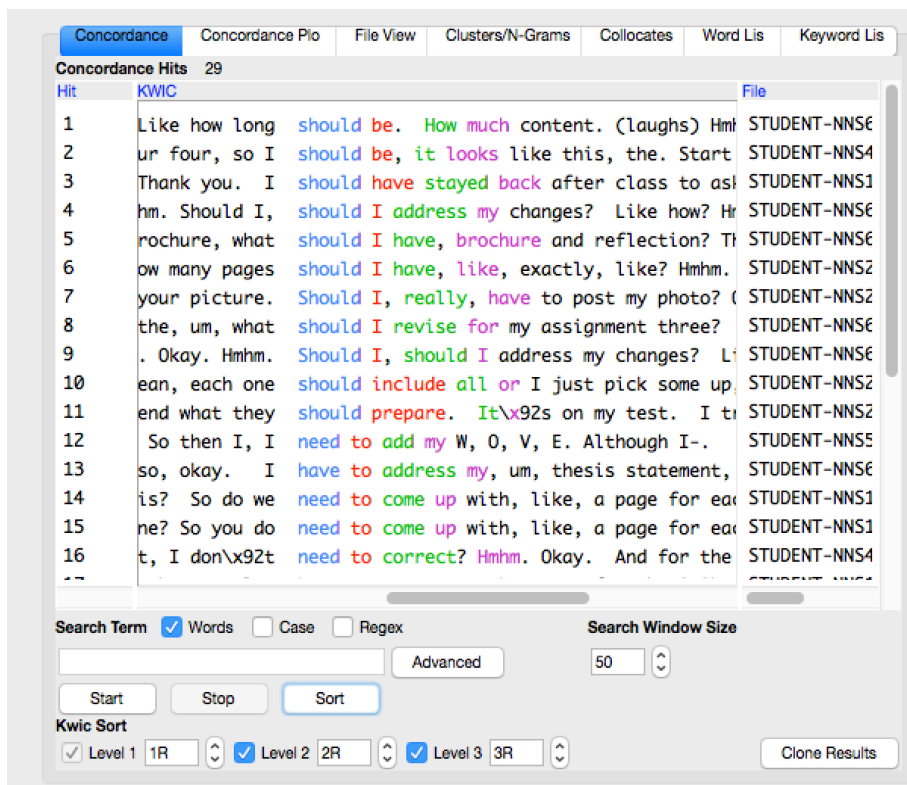


Figure 1. Concordance lines for searches in AntConc

A useful feature of AntConc is that it allows the researcher to search for more than one term at a time in what is called a “batch search,” thus allowing the researcher to search for multiple stance devices at once. Each text file underwent individual analysis and batch searches based on the use of different categories of stance devices. These categories derived from and involved the work of Biber (2006) and encompassed specific modal verbs, stance adverbs,

cognitive lexical verbs introducing and controlling stance complement clauses, and personal pronouns.

The searches done on AntConc were restricted to particular sets of these devices that were based on the previous research into the stance and conferences. Modal verbs, indicating whether something is possible or necessary, would indicate whether the teacher or the student considered what they were saying something necessary and absolute or something possible and optional for the paper. In addition, these devices may indicate differences in the pragmatics of politeness, with some feedback being mitigated to not pressure students as much. As for cognitive verbs, it was decided to include these out of the hypothesis that they may express the certainty of the speaker about the content of their utterance. Like modal verbs of possibility, uncertainty verbs (e.g., *I guess* or *I don't know*) may help reduce the directedness with which feedback or ideas are presented in the conference setting or the firmness with which feedback ought to be applied in the writing process; students could also use these verbs to indirectly request suggestions from the teacher. The last of the stance devices analyzed, hedging adverbs, were selected because of their influence on the meaning of the sentence. While it is possible that speakers use these to mitigate and bring tenuousness to what they say, reducing the speaker's epistemic commitment to his or her propositions, these devices could also express openness and creativity in the writing process. Table 3 provides a summary of the categories and the relevant terms included within searches for them in the corpus.

Table 3  
*Categories and Examples of Linguistic Devices Analyzed by AntConc*

<u>Grammatical Device</u>	<u>Examples</u>
Possibility Modals	<i>may, might, can, could</i>
Necessity Modals	<i>must, should, has/have to, need(s) to</i>
Certainty Verbs	<i>I see +, I know + (manual)</i>
Uncertainty Verbs	<i>I guess +, I don't know + (manual)</i>
Hedging Adverbs	<i>maybe, kind of, sort of, like, possibly</i>
Table 3 continued	
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Singular	<i>I, me, my</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Plural	<i>we, our, us</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	<i>you, your</i>

AntConc yielded immediate information on the frequency of tokens for the specified types for modal verbs and stance adverbs, but a more complicated process was required for identifying tokens of the lexical verbs due to the cornucopia of types possible. Within modal verbs, searches were performed to locate tokens of modal verbs of possibility/permission/ability and necessity/obligation, but did not account for another category presented by Biber (2006): prediction/volition, such as *I will* or *I plan to*. It was decided, based on the previous research into conferences and an inductive analysis of the transcripts, that the discrepancies in power dynamics may have exerted the strongest influence on the expression of possibility or necessity in modals and would not affect the expression of prediction as much. As for stance adverbs, adverbs that indicate both hedging and likelihood on the part of the speaker (*maybe* or *kind of*) constituted the only set to be searched in the corpus. Within this category were included instances of *like* that functioned to convey some hedging, hesitation, or disconnect between what is said and what is meant.

A different process was employed to analyze lexical verbs. This search was restricted to the “personal pronoun + lexical verb + complement clause” pattern identified as constituting almost half of the lexical bundles in conversational discourse (Conrad & Biber, 2004). Due to the



abundance of verbs that may fit within this category and the variety of aspects in which they may appear, it was decided to perform the searches in a more manual manner: Searches were performed on AntConc for all instances of *I* and *you* in the text file or corpus in question and then the concordance lines were sorted alphabetically according to the immediate words to the right, as is shown below in Figure 2. These concordance lines were then exported into a text file that underwent manual scrutiny to identify all verbs that expressed the speaker's epistemological commitment to the proposition at hand. These verbs then were separated into two categories: verbs of certainty and verbs of uncertainty. Appendix A provides a list of all the cognitive verbs occurring in the corpus for both of these categories. It is important to note that all cognitive verbs included controlled a complement clause; any utterance of *I think* or *You know* that did not precede or modify a clause was excluded from the results. Devices outside of this role and position may constitute more of a tail or insertion, a formulaic bundle that is unconsciously inserted; these expressions are common in spoken discourse (Carter & McCarthy, 1995; McCarthy & Carter, 1995; Timmis, 2005). The figure below gives an example of such a search on an exported text file, showing included and excluded concordance lines.

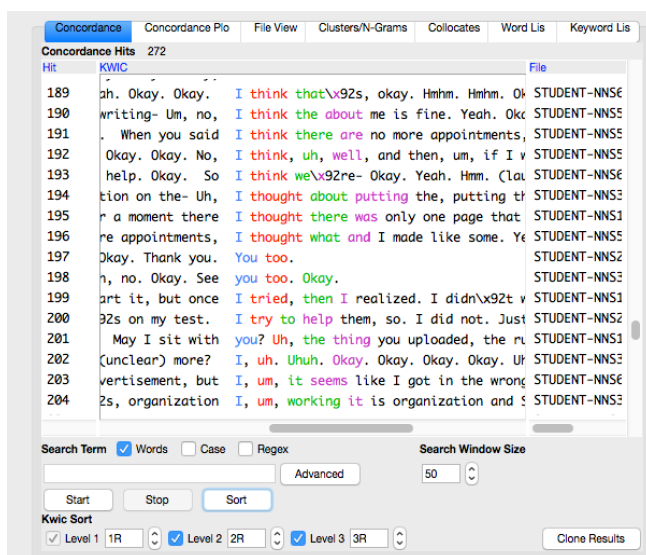


Figure 2. Manual analysis of concordance lines AntConc

All of the raw frequencies for these five categories — modal verbs of possibility or necessity, stance adverbs, and lexical verbs of certainty or uncertainty — were identified for each individual interlocutor text files, and then compiled into summary data for each sub-corpus for the four different groups (NNS students, NS students, Instructor addressing NNS students, and Instructor addressing NS students). However, the generated information presented in concordance lines for all searches underwent manual analysis to ensure that all identified tokens for stance devices in the search applied and were relevant to the purpose of this study, in addition to minimizing the likelihood of polysemy, of multiple meanings, affecting the data. Several of the search terms or phrases included within a category could serve multiple semantic functions and purposes, a fact that rendered it necessary to read through the concordance to remove items not relevant to the research questions and not qualifying as stance devices. A specific example of these polysemous terms is *like*, which, besides operating as “a signal of discrepancy between an utterance and the thought it represents” (Andersen, 1997, pp. 167-168), can also signify fondness, analogy, or behavior on social media in the form of following an account or approving of a status update.

The analysis of the frequencies of these stance devices for individual interlocutors in a conference and for groups needs to account for the variable length of conferences and time-at-talk by an interlocutor. For this reason, all raw frequencies were normalized so that meaningful comparisons and analyses could be applied and done (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1998). The normalization of frequencies involved dividing the raw frequency for the device or devices in question by the total number of words in the text file or corpus and then multiplying by 1000. With normalized frequencies for analysis, it was possible to compare variation across the groups in question. For example, if it is found that necessity modals accounted for 10 out of 1000 words

for NNSs but only 5 out of 1000 words for NSs, then it can be concluded NNSs use necessity modals twice as much as NSs do. This normalized data allowed for comparisons among NSs, NNSs, and all students, in addition to the teacher's discourse with NSs, with NNSs, and with all students, and thus provided insight into the research questions.

While this study sought to analyze variation in stancetaking and tenor on the part of NSs and NNSs, it also accounted for and considered the fact that the field, the concern being discussed, may influence the discourse of conference. It was assumed that two categories for the expression of stance — possibility and necessity — may reflect different concerns being discussed or positioning of interlocutors at hand. In terms of the content of the discussions, in content (higher-order) exchanges more possibility stance devices may receive use because of the more dialogic instruction fostered. Meanwhile, in language-use (lower-order) exchanges, something apparently favored by ELLs according to previous research (Bell & Elledge, 2008; Ritter, 2002), it is possible that a greater proportion of necessity stance devices receive use. It is also possible that lower-order concerns lead to a greater imbalance in pronoun use due to the increased self-consciousness and reduced authority students may hold on these topics. Besides the content of what is discussed, variability in the use of possibility and necessity stance devices may index how teachers and students are positioning each other: as two collaborators wandering through the myriad paths available in a forest of communication or as an expert directing and guiding (or, more cynically, appropriating and dictating to) a writing novice, possibly of NNS status, in the Zone of Proximal Development. The transcriptions underwent a qualitative analysis to ascertain whether variation found emerged from the concerns being discussed or not.

### Qualitative corpus analysis

It is dangerous to assume that quantitative patterns in and of themselves can explicate themselves. Considering frequencies of linguistic features alone may overlook the context in which these tokens appear and the pedagogical or communicative purpose they may serve. For example, it is convenient but problematic to assume a number of instances of modal verbs of necessity may in and of itself represent an authoritative and direct teacher dictating to a student how to do an assignment or structure a paper. It is possible that an abundance of these modals, such as *have to* or *must* may result from utterances in which a teacher is urging a student to think critically about work being done. *You need to think about what you want to focus on* is an example of this.

For this reason, a qualitative analysis of the complete transcripts complemented a quantitative analysis of the frequency of the types in text files and the corpus. One must consider and interpret the contexts in which these stance devices appear and the instructional or learning purposes they serve. In the process of analyzing the overall frequencies, the content of what was being discussed, the apparent needs and expectations of the interlocutors, and the mutual construction of stance by both interlocutors are important to consider. An inductive analysis of the overall transcripts identified holistic categories (higher-order concerns, lower-order concerns, website architecture, assignment requirements, etc.) that students and teachers were discussing; the data was coded accordingly. This coding process would illuminate the effect of what is being discussed on how it is discussed in context. An exclusive focus on all the stars in the sky may neglect to appreciate the unique and dynamic interstellar environments in which individual stars have come to be.

The quantitative word frequency counts and the qualitative interpretation of the content of conferences constituted the two telescopes by which to view these stars. However, the information generated through these two avenues still needs a frame of reference, an approach for explanation, a way to make sense and become comprehensible. Two theoretical frameworks informed the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data: critical discourse analysis (CDA) and natural discourse analysis (NDA). Though different and perhaps even in conflict with one another, these approaches both helped explicate and bring meaning to the results.

### **Interpretive frameworks**

The first of these approaches, critical discourse analysis, is grounded on the principle that power is both reflected and constructed in discourse; language is inevitably both a cause and an effect of ideology (Fairclough, 2013). The emphasis on ideology derives from the work of Gramsci (1971) and Foucault (2012) into hegemony and discourse and recognizes that “language instantiates particular policies” (Lewis, 2006, p. 373). A critical discourse analysis of a text or a corpus of texts would seek to ascertain how language may both represent and reinforce the structure and nature of society, identifying social injustice and perhaps suggesting possible remedies. Conducted in academic contexts, a critical discourse analysis would elaborate upon the power relationships that language realizes among students and teachers.

For this reason, critical discourse analysis and critical pedagogy are philosophically consistent, both seeking to deconstruct and critique how traditional instruction may maintain the status quo, reinforce and reproduce relations of oppression, or marginalize particular populations. One of the founders of critical pedagogy, Freire (1978) criticizes “banking models” of education, in which teachers serve the primary task of “depositing” information, often serving the interests

of those in power, into the empty minds of students; this approach to teaching prevents students from exercising more agency and gaining more consciousness in the learning process. A critical discourse analysis of teaching would identify and interpret instances of these problematic power relations in the classroom and would account for the ways in which the discourse influences and is influenced by how participants in the classroom position and are positioned by each other (Lewis, 2006). However, there has been a dearth of research into the ideological forces that drive classroom discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 1999).

The application of critical discourse analysis would yield insight into how variation in the use of stance devices may distinguish not only between teachers and students generally, but also between NS and NNS students in their interactions with teachers. This variation suggests the possibility that the hypothetical use of more stance devices of necessity and certainty with NNSs, for example, may index a “banking model” of education in which students are denied opportunities for critical thinking, engage primarily with lower-order concerns in the writing process, and are led to depend on the teacher. A critical discourse analysis would approach the quantitative and qualitative findings with an awareness of how the frequencies of stance devices and the content of discussions may represent problematic pedagogies that limit the communicative possibilities available to students. However, by emphasizing the asymmetry of power, a critical discourse analysis may neglect to account for the situational factors and specific learning needs of students, in addition to how students and teachers may interact together to determine the course and content of a conversation. A natural discourse analysis will thus complement the critical discourse analysis.

Whereas critical discourse analysis is a critical approach, natural discourse analysis is a descriptive approach (Fairclough, 2013, p. 31). It focuses on the micro-level context of

interaction and discourse and can analyze the moment-by-moment contingencies and needs that arise over the course of teaching and learning. In this way, it avoids adopting a “deficit model” that informs the act of interpreting of what is assumed to be an “unequal encounter” (Macbeth, 2003). It is possible that the inequities found and critiqued by a critical discourse analysis would embody and index interlocutors engaging with each other in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980): The student, for whom English is an L2 or an assignment is especially challenging or confusing, may adopt a position of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). What critical discourse analysis interprets as an imbalance of power may instead constitute a cognitive apprenticeship for natural discourse analysis (Atkinson, 1997).

Critical thinking and agency, which an interpretation based on critical discourse analysis would affirm and celebrate, are taken to be absolute and unqualified goods. However, they constitute matters that may lead educational practitioners to overlook the cognitive process of learning and developing in a community of practice. Furthermore, the presentation of these goods in the educational literature may also fail to acknowledge that they themselves are constructs that reflect and reproduce culturally produced and constrained practices. In its emphasis on these constructs as absolute goods to be pursued, education neglects to engage in critical thinking about critical thinking: cultures may possess different notions of the individual, norms of self-expression, and use of language (Atkinson, 1997). A critical discourse analysis of classroom discourse may thus approach interaction with NNSs within an imperialist frame of reference and adopt a deficit perspective of cultural difference. For even NSs, critical thinking and individualism in pedagogy are potentially problematic: These practices may reflect and reinforce particular ways of thinking and knowing that align with masculinity and the upper classes, only one form of capital, and not include or affirm unique communities’ cultural wealth

(Yosso, 2005). In addition, critical thinking might conflict with more collaborative and feminist forms of pedagogy, in which *connected knowing* is more important than mere independent thought (Atkinson, 1997).

Thus, cognitively and culturally, critical discourse analysis may interpret interaction and the use of stance devices in conferences in a reductionist and simplistic manner. Though it is important to consider matters of power and pedagogy in interpreting the data, it is also important to consider the role of the concerns being discussed in the contextualized and dynamic construction of stance in the conference setting. Both critical discourse analysis and natural discourse analysis will inform and guide the interpretation of the data in this study: CDA may help one describe and explain the marginalization and positioning on the basis of native-speaking status, while NDA may better account for the mutual construction of stance by the interlocutors as they engage with the specific questions, demands, needs, and expectations before them. Both of these approaches should remain in mind during the presentation of the results in the next chapter and the discussion to follow.



## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

### Overall variation between teachers and students

Before analyzing variation in the frequency of the devices in question among students and teachers on the basis of native-speaking status, one may like to consider the overall differences that distinguish between the students as a composite group and the teacher in this study. One particular way in which students and teachers diverge from each other is in the number of words generated over the course of conferences: While students produce 16,693 words for this corpus, the teacher produces 24,155 words. The teacher produces approximately forty-four percent more output during conferences than do students. When considered in terms of mean words per minute, this teacher surpasses students even more considerably: Students as a whole generally speak for only fifty-seven words per minute, while the teacher produces one hundred and ten.

Within these conferences, NSs and NNSs show disparate outcomes in terms of the amount of output they contribute, both in terms of the proportion of words accounting for the total conference and in terms of mean words per minute. In NNS conferences, the teacher produces more than twice as much output in terms of overall word count than do students, while the teacher only produces about twenty percent more than students in NS conferences. With regard to mean words per minute, the teacher produces over twice as much as NNSs, but also still speaks considerably more than NSs. Conferences with both populations, but especially with NNSs, are characterized by pronounced teacher dominance. In terms of the mere amount of output, NS and NNS conferences show considerable variation and suggest differences in the positioning of students and teachers. In addition to the overall word counts and words per

minute, students and teachers differ in their overall use of particular stance devices. Figures 3 and 4 below provide the normalized frequency, per 1000 words, of the features being analyzed.

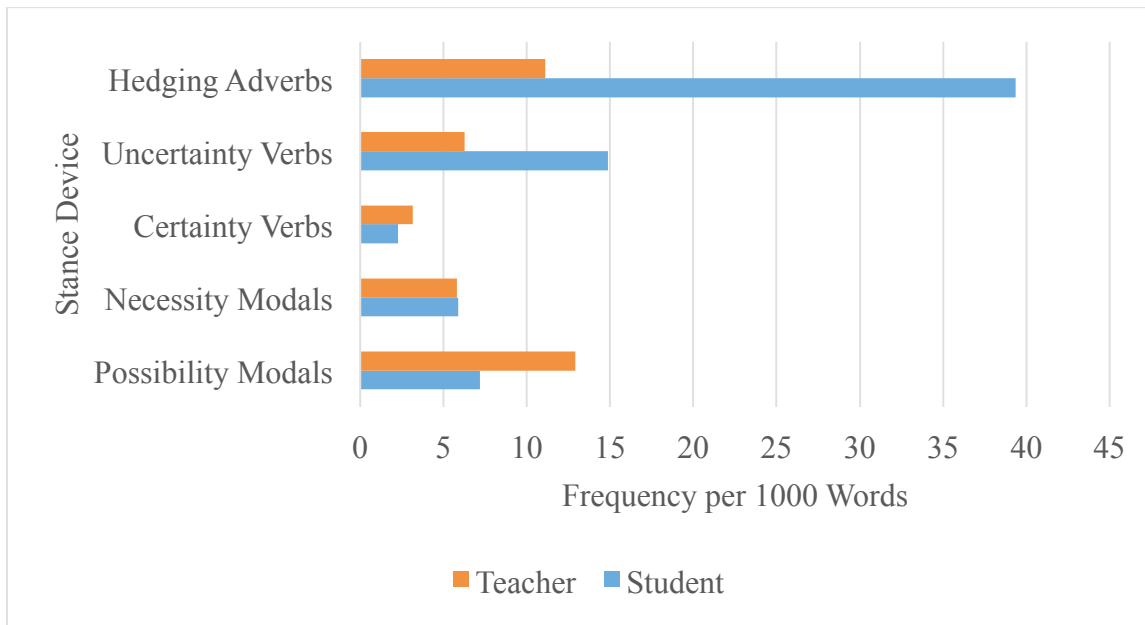


Figure 3. Frequencies of stance devices by teacher and students

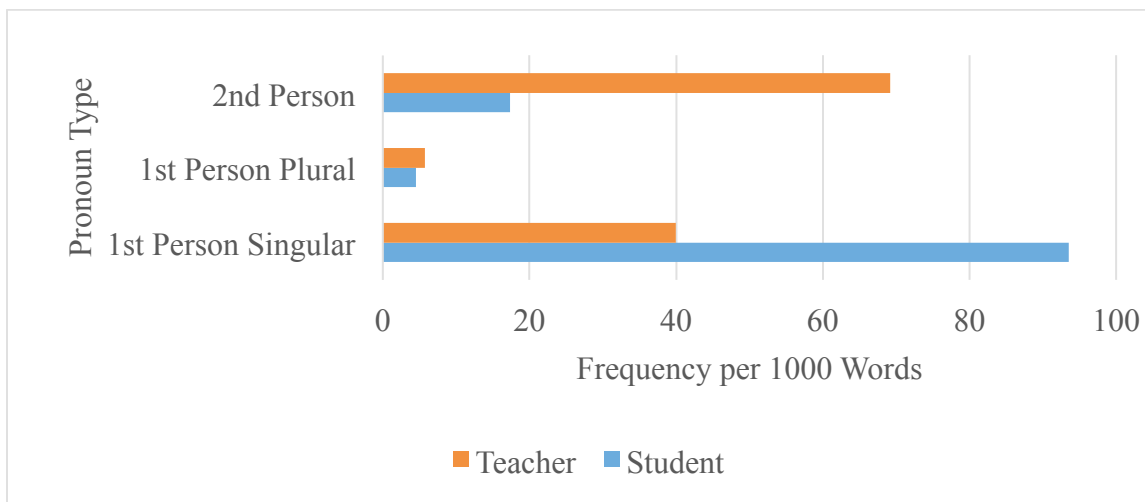


Figure 4. Frequencies of pronouns by teacher and students.

One of the main patterns to emerge from the data above is that these students tend to hedge more than does the teacher: They tend to use more uncertainty verbs and hedging adverbs than does the teacher. Instead, the teacher tends to use more modals of possibility and slightly more certainty verbs. Besides these stance devices, there is a disparity in the use of pronouns:

students tend to use the first person singular more than the teacher, while the teacher is inclined to use more of the second person. This is to be expected, as the student and his or her writing, one would assume, function as the subject of the conversation in the conference context. In addition, the teacher appears to use slightly more of the first person plural. These differences in the overall corpora for the students and the teachers do suggest that there is a difference in stance and power dynamics between students and teachers. The question that now emerges is how the differences identified above may vary among NSs and NNSs. While the amount of output already discussed is important to consider, this study also finds that in conferences NSs and NNSs differ in the use of stance devices and pronouns, a fact that may help explain the differences in the extent of students' contributions.

**RQ1: How do NNSs and NSs differ from one another in the use and realization of (different categories of) stance in writing conferences?**

Synthesizing previous research, the literature review anticipated the possibility that NSs and NNSs would vary in their use of stance devices due to their divergent needs and expectations for the conference setting. The statistics found on the proportion to which a student's output comprised a text in the corpus and the mean words per minute already suggest there could be some variation in the devices being searched for. Figures 5 and 6 below indicate the normalized frequencies for the grammatical devices indexing stance, as produced by students over the course of the transcribed conferences. Both groups show a similar distribution in the use of stance devices, with such hedging adverbs as *kind of* or *maybe* appearing much more frequently than modal verbs and cognitive verbs. Within cognitive verbs, verbs indicating uncertainty appear much more than do verbs indicating certainty for both populations. Despite these similarities, there are some differences that distinguish NSs and NNSs.

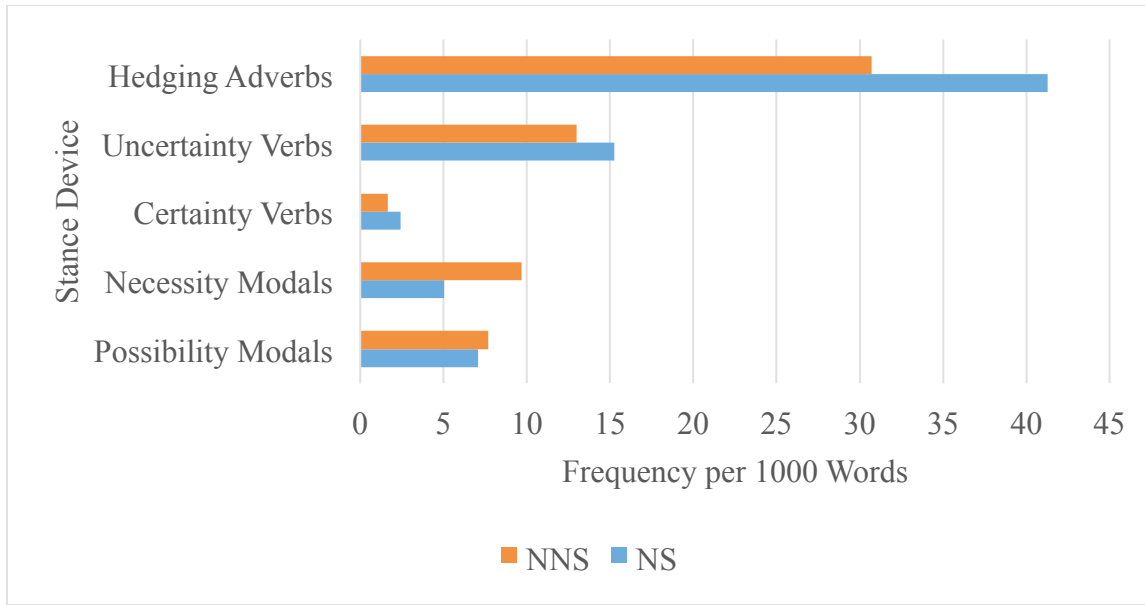


Figure 5. Frequencies of stance devices among NNS and NS students

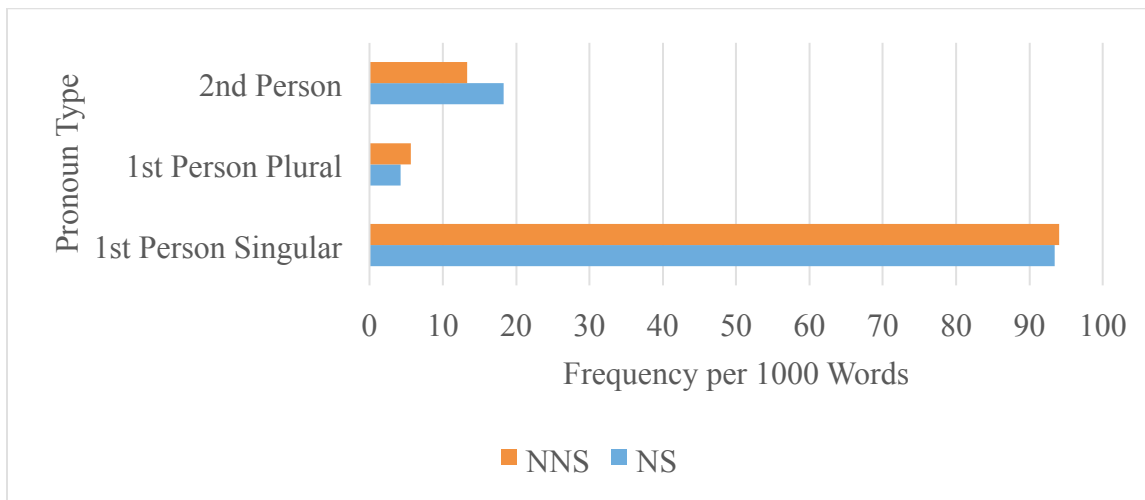


Figure 6. Frequencies of pronouns among NNS and NS students.

A distinction between possibility and necessity emerges from these normalized frequencies. What becomes evident in the data is that NNSs in this conference setting tend to use almost twice as many necessity modals as do NSs. Whereas NNSs may use more necessity modals, NSs insert more certainty verbs, uncertainty verbs, and hedging adverbs into their output. Hedging adverbs are a feature that is especially pervasive in students' output, but particularly among NSs: They account for about four percent of their overall discourse. A

particular form of hedging adverbs that may account for much of this quantity is *like*, operating to index a disparity between the signifier and the signified, between what an interlocutor is saying and what the interlocutor actually means; these tokens may operate as a form of epistemic hedging. They are so common as to perhaps be automatic and unconscious in the output of NNSs, as is suggested by one of many utterances found in the corpus: “*I guess I’m just kind of confused on, like, the whole thing.*” It is impossible to discern the extent to which the hedging adverbs used are conscious or automatic.

There is not much variation between the two groups in the use of possibility modals or the first person singular. However, NNSs do use some more of the first-person plural, and NSs tend to use the second person somewhat more. These differences suggest multiple possibilities: Though it may be the case that NNSs are more inclined to draw attention to the overall class as a collective, many of these utterances also involve general requirements for the assignment that students are expected to meet. For example, one NNS in the corpus asked, “*So do we need to come up with, like, a page for that?*” Though it is convenient to associate the use of the first-person plural with an orientation toward the group, many instances of it in this corpus pertained to the requirements of an assignment that applied to all students. With the increased use of the second person, on the other hand, NSs may address the teacher more directly. This data suggest that students may indeed approach and experience the conference with different positions with regard to stance. Alongside the fact that the students may vary in terms of the stance expressions they use, one may wonder if there is any relationship or correspondence with variation in the use of stance devices by the teacher.

**RQ2: Within the context of writing conferences, how does the instructor's use of stance devices vary across interactions with NNSs and NSs?**

Though they do show some disparity, the differences between the normalized frequencies for the teacher's output to NSs and NNSs are not as apparent as they are for the students. Nevertheless, some noteworthy patterns do emerge and are displayed in Figures 7 and 8 below. In particular, it is important to note that in this conference context the teacher does use slightly more necessity modals with NNSs, as do NNSs with her. With NSs, on the other hand, it is important to note that this teacher is consistent with the students' practices and tends to use more uncertainty verbs and hedging adverbs. There appears to be some consistency and overlap with the output of the students and the output of the teacher in terms of the stance devices used. This suggests that stancetaking is interactive and emerges from the field, from the concern being discussed. It is also possible that the field may affect the use of pronouns: as with the use of stance devices by the teacher, pronoun use by the teacher may correspond with what is being discussed. It is curious to note that the teacher tends to use slightly more first-person singular pronouns with NSs. This behavior, it is assumed, may reflect the topic being discussed.

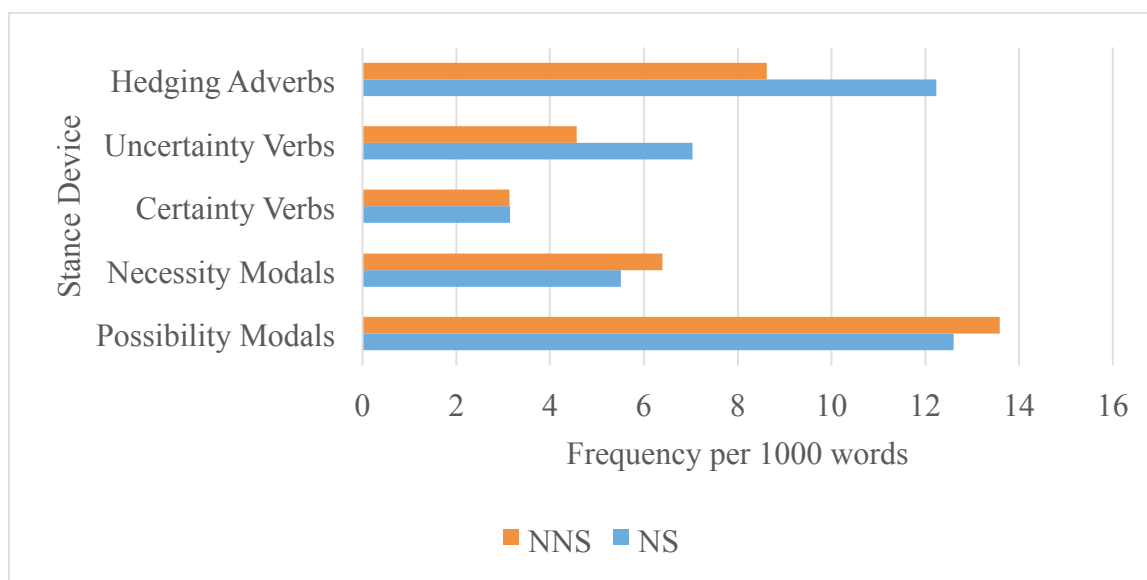


Figure 7. Frequencies of stance devices of teacher in NNS and NS conferences

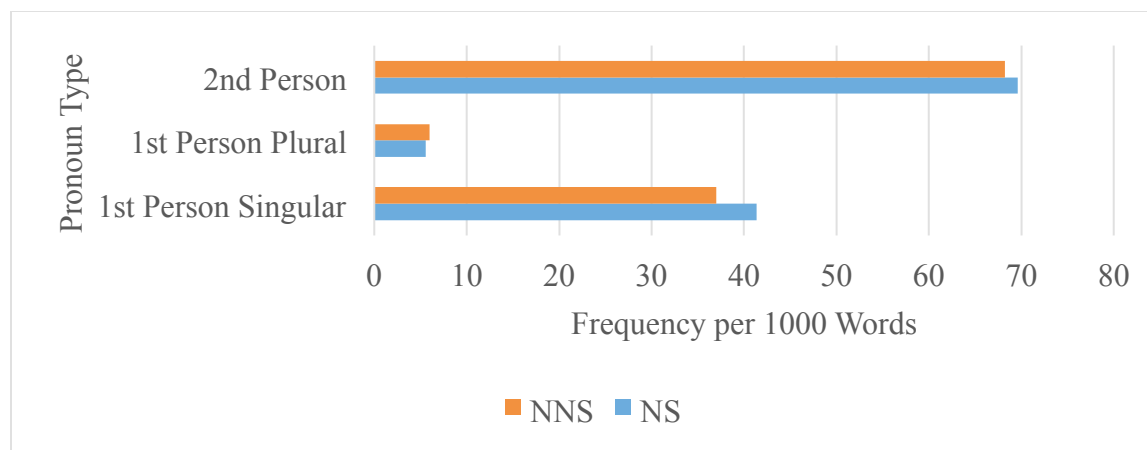


Figure 8. Frequencies of pronouns of teacher in NNS and NS conferences

Overall, several patterns have emerged, in which necessity modals characterize conferences with NNSs, while uncertainty and hedging adverbs do conferences with NSs. There are some slight differences within these settings with regard to pronouns too: In conferences with NSs, the teacher may use more of the first person singular, while students may use more of the second person to address the teacher. On the other hand, both teachers and students tend to use slightly more first person plural pronouns in conferences involving NNSs. The relationship between the students' and the teacher's use of stance devices within both of these populations deserves further analysis.

This study adopted a corpus-based approach to analyze the realization of stance in conferences. By identifying the normalized frequencies of a number of stance devices, this study has indeed found that native-speaking and non-native speaking students do differ in the frequency with which they use some of these different categories of stance devices and the power and dominance that the teacher may demonstrate. The differences in frequency do not extend only to students, however; they also describe the output of the teacher and her interactions with students in this conference setting. It is apparent that the conferences analyzed in this study — and probably other conferences as well — are characterized by variation in the use of

particular forms of stance devices and personal pronouns. While quantitative data presenting these normalized frequencies does raise some patterns and variation, it does not in and of itself explain the origin and purpose of this variation. So far an emphasis on *forms* has driven this analysis, but *function* needs to be considered and accounted for in order to better understand the variable distribution of these forms. What needs to complement the quantitative analysis of frequencies in the corpus is a qualitative analysis of these forms, an account of the ends and purposes they serve.

**RQ3: How does the use of these devices by the teacher and students relate to and communicate their stance on the concern being discussed?**

An emic analysis of the causes for these differences would better explicate the reasons for which this variation in use exists. For this reason, a qualitative analysis of the corpus is necessary. The results presented have thus undertaken both an analysis of conferences from two perspectives, from the mutually enriching lenses of *form* and *function*. With regard to *form*, this chapter has presented the quantitative frequency of different devices in conferences and described how these may vary due to the native-speaking status of the student. As for *function*, a qualitative analysis of the concordance lines and of the transcriptions has identified several predominant themes and purposes guiding the use of these forms.

The relationship between the frequency of forms and the function of these forms helped explicate, clarify, and account for the dynamics of stancetaking and tenor in the conference setting. Accounting for the correspondence between form and function of stance yielded insights into why and how divergent stancetaking unfolds over the course of conferences. As part of the analysis of the corpus, an inductive and qualitative consideration of each of the concordance lines allowed for the identification of themes in purpose and function of these forms. These



themes illuminated, explicated, and clarified the various frequency counts identified above, describing the utility of their use in conferences and further probing the stancetaking performed.

Functioning differently, forms of possibility modals index the divergent stance positions of the teacher and the students respectively. With regard to teachers, these modals often operate to hedge and reduce the explicitness of directions or feedback given. In addition, the teacher often uses these forms to indicate that multiple options are available or that possibilities exist in terms of how students structure and design the portfolio websites they are in the process of creating. Some examples of these functions are inserted below: Examples 1 and 2 show indirectness and hedging on the part of the teacher, while 3 and 4 reflect instances in which the teacher is discussing the multiple options available in the architecture and design of this assignment.

(1) “Um, you **could**, you know, maybe generally introduce what...”

(2) “That **might** be a better way to phrase that.”

(3) “And I **could** add them, as um, Word files or a PDF.”

(4) “I think you **can** edit so that this does not show up.”

Unlike the teacher, students using possibility modals do not utilize these devices as frequently to “hedge” an assertion that was already absolute or certain. Instead, they often employ possibility modals to ask for the teacher’s permission to pursue a course of action in the writing process or to denote their own abilities as communicators. Rather than reducing power, as is the case in the teacher’s use of possibility modals, the use of them among students seeks to clarify whether agency is even possible in a particular writing context. Example 5 below shows a student requesting permission of the teacher to pursue a specific activity in the conference setting, while the other two examples express evaluations of ability.

(5) “Okay, so then **can** we just look at my, like, about me?”

(6) “I mean, I guess I **could** just, um, start with that.”

(7) “I guess maybe I just **can’t** talk about it all in this...”

In sum, this teacher may use possibility modals to adopt a less direct and authoritative stance toward students as they give feedback and directions and to demonstrate the availability of multiple options with designing or working through an assignment. Students, on the other hand, use possibility modals to request permission for pursuing a particular option or to express a judgment regarding their own abilities or capacities as communicators. While the teacher uses these modals to express possibility for students, the students tend to use them to convey ability or permission.

It was found that NNS conferences used necessity modals more than NS conferences. Though these two populations differed in terms of the number of times they use these devices, they also differ in terms of the purpose for which they use these devices. Necessity modals differ from possibility modals in that they are explicit: They are less concerned about saving face and do not seek to mitigate the content of the rest of the utterance. When used by the teacher, these devices often present feedback directly. During the analysis, a curious commonality emerged with the use of this device for this function: Directions or feedback using necessity modals often involved the general structure or requirements of the assignment or other lower-order concerns, as shown in examples 8, 9, 10, and 11 below.

(8) “Yes, you really **have to** put a photo.”

(9) “...but you don’t **have to** do that, okay?”

(10) “Then your reflection on W, O, V, and E **should** each be two paragraphs each.”

(11) “And you also **need to** include the date of publication.”

It is convenient to generalize about the use of necessity modals and assume that they remove the burden of thinking about one's own writing and communication. It is convenient to assume that the teacher may use necessity modals to provide information and direction to the student and that the teacher may do the "thinking work" by using these. However, the functional analysis found that the teacher may often employ these devices to compel the student to engage in more cognition and more work. Thus, another theme that surfaced in the use of necessity modals by the teacher is the need for students to dive into and practice deeper and richer thinking, of embracing and practicing increased responsibility and agency in the writing process; the teacher summons and challenges students to lose themselves in exploring and analyzing the complex landscape before them in their journeys as writers, as is represented in examples 12 and 13 below.

(12) "You just **need to** think about how are you communicating."

(13) "...That's something you totally **need to**, um, think through."

While the teacher uses necessity modals to give explicit and direct feedback to students and to challenge them to engage in more cognition and thinking, students often use them in an effort to clarify instructions or requirements. As is the case with the teacher, necessity modals often appear in the discourse of students when discussing the general structure or requirements of the assignment or other lower-order concerns, as is represented in examples 14 and 15 below.

(14) "So do we **need to** come up with, like, a page for each one?"

(15) "Like how long **should** be. How much content."

Besides clarifying instructions and requirements, students may often use necessity modals to request direct and explicit feedback, as exemplified in samples 16 and 17, and

mentally determining and deciding on a course of action for further work as a writer, as exemplified in samples 18 and 19.

(16) “Um, what exactly do I **need to** replace that with?”

(17) “**Should** I take that out?”

(18) “Um, gosh, maybe I **should** try that way....”

(19) “I still **need to** decide what other picture I’ll use.”

What is most striking about NNS conferences is the fact that they are characterized by the use of about twice as many modals of necessity by students as are NS conferences. There is also variation among the NS and NNS conferences in the proportion of the functions they use: While 39% of the necessity modals (27 out of 69 tokens) used by NSs serve the purpose of establishing intentional future action, only approximately 10% (3 out of 29 tokens) of the necessity modals used by NNSs work in this role. It thus appears that the use of necessity modals for NNSs, more so than for NSs, is characterized by the dominance of requests that elicit direct feedback or directions from the teacher; these NNS utterances often are designed with the intent of positioning the teacher in the role of “informing” the student of something. The fact that the teacher is in the position of informing the student of what to do, the fact that necessity modals lead to a more vertical relationship between the teacher and the student pedagogically, may account for and explain the fact that NNS conferences are dominated by talk from the teacher.

However, it is also important that the qualitative analysis of the transcripts established that necessity modals often appear in contexts involving lower-order concerns or general assignment categories. Unlike higher-order concerns, the matters or courses of action expressed by these modals are not possible, but are rather necessary. It is simplistic and reductionist to assume that the increased use of them among NNSs reflects solely a desire for the teacher to

inform, if not dictate to, students what needs to be done in order to achieve success with an assignment. Rather, the increased use of these direct and explicit devices may also show a need among these students to achieve some clarity and understanding of what is expected of them before proceeding further with the task before them. It is possible that the increased use of necessity modals does not necessarily constitute an increased dependence on the teacher for guidance so much as reflect writers at an earlier stage of processing and working through an assignment they have been given. They may be confused about what they need to do still and the options available to them, as lines 14 and 15 would suggest.

While it is convenient to dismiss necessity modals as a reflection of banking models of instruction (Freire, 1978), in which teachers serve the purpose of depositing information in the minds of students, such an assumption overlooks the possibility that these modals may also serve the purpose of challenging and compelling the student to engage in more thinking, to dive further into the ocean and the submerged ideas they may have, to continue considering and contemplating. As noted earlier, the teacher may use necessity modals to challenge students to think further. With this function of necessity modals in mind, it is curious to note that this form appears with approximately the same frequency in the output of the teacher in NNS conferences: In NS conferences 12% of necessity modals serve the role of calling upon the student to think (11 out of 91 tokens), while in NNS conferences 14% of them serve this function (7 out of 49 tokens). While these students may orient toward dependence on the teacher for requirements and expectations, she does not appear to necessarily indulge them.

Some general patterns distinguishing possibility and necessity modals have thus emerged through this analysis of their use in context. Associated with hedging, possibility modals often function to index whether something is possible or whether someone is capable; they approach

and present the matter at hand as optional, available, tenuous, and variegated. Students may also use these to express judgment on their own abilities about the task at hand. Necessity modals, on the other hand, embrace an explicit and unmitigated stance toward the topic at hand and the construct under consideration: These modals index something as inevitable, certain, obligatory, or absolute. In addition, necessity modals tend to orient lower-order concerns, such as the general requirements of an assignment, but they do not always restrain thinking: Sometimes the teacher may use them to encourage students to dive further, to inform them that while they are smart, she still wants them to think. Students, on the other hand, may use them to process with agency the remaining actions and tasks before them. The function of these two categories of modals is neither singular nor monolithic; rather, they are complex, multifaceted, and myriad.

In addition to modal verbs, lexical verbs controlling complement clauses may express and realize stance. This study analyzed variation in the use of both certainty expressions and uncertainty expressions in this area; examples of the first group are *I know* and *I doubt*, while the latter group includes such common lexical bundles as *I don't know* or *I guess*. Identified manually, the relevant instances of these forms underwent further analysis to infer their discursive and communicative functions: Themes driving and informing the use of these emerged. When used by the teacher, certainty verbs and uncertainty verbs often express empathy and understanding for students, reassuring them. Examples 20, 21, and 22 all represent instances in which the teacher uses these expressions to exercise and display solidarity with the student present. In addition, use of these by the teacher may convey ongoing mental processing and constitute a form of thinking aloud, as shown in examples 23 and 24. One additional function of the use of these devices by the teacher, represented in line 25 and 26, is in the form of hedging and mitigating feedback given.

- (20) “And I **know** this is really strict, but...” (certainty)
- (21) “Because I **know** you can do that.” (certainty)
- (22) “I **understand** you have other classes.” (certainty)
- (23) “I **know** there’s a connection...” (certainty)
- (24) “I **think** what was tripping me up...” (uncertainty)
- (25) “I **think** what it comes down to is reorganizing...” (uncertainty)
- (26) “I **think** you can take it one step further.” (uncertainty)

When used by the teacher, certainty and uncertainty verbs often operate to signify understanding of the experience of students. When used by students, however, certainty and uncertainty verbs do not accommodate for and embrace the reality and mind of the interlocutor: Rather, these verbs often orient toward and process one’s own place and journey as a writer and as a student. Students often use certainty verbs to establish that they are aware of something in which they need to improve or grow further as communicators. Students articulate their own needs, struggles, and learning through these expressions and thus exercise agency and ownership of their own learning and communication, as is shown in examples 27, 28, and 29.

- (27) “I **know** I have a problem with, like, every single one.”
- (28) “I **know** I need help with my citations.”
- (29) “I **know** kind of what I want to change.”

While the use of certainty verbs by students predominantly orients toward this function, students use uncertainty verbs for a variety of functions. Students may deploy these devices to communicate that they are in a state of confusion and disorientation, at a loss in terms of where to proceed and travel in the landscape of writing before them; they may use uncertainty verbs in an indirect effort to receive a map from the teacher to facilitate and alleviate the task of arriving

at whatever destination is best for them as writers. These expressions often involve higher-order concerns, such as ideas or organization. Examples 30, 31, and 32 demonstrate how these devices represent and convey confusion and being lost. Besides indexing being lost, these devices also indirectly request advice, suggestions, or feedback from teachers or even amount to highly mitigated criticism of them, as is shown in lines 33 and 34 below.

(30) “I **don’t know** how to, like, I **guess**, do topic sentences.”

(31) “I, I **guess** I have a question.”

(32) “‘Cause I **don’t know** what to do for mine.”

(33) “I **don’t think** the formatting is right.”

(34) “And I **don’t know** if I can actually attach a...”

These devices of certainty and uncertainty operate differently when used by the teacher and when used by students. With the former, they often represent solidarity and cohesion with students’ thinking, experiences, and work and thinking aloud. With the latter group, with students, these devices are oriented toward their own place as writers and as learners, indexing agency and responsibility over learning. With both populations, these devices often appear in utterances involving higher-order concerns, unlike necessity modals.

The conferences with NSs tend to feature slightly more use of lexical verbs of both certainty and uncertainty and abundantly more hedging adverbs on the part of both the teacher and the student. The slightly higher use of certainty verbs suggests these conferences are characterized by a tendency of the teacher to express understanding of and empathy for the experience of students, while students are more inclined to process and reflect on their growth and learning as communicators. As for uncertainty verbs, NSs insert them slightly more as a means of indirectly eliciting information from the teacher or registering their disorientation as to



where they are in the writing process, while the teacher may use them as part of thinking aloud. Common to certainty and uncertainty verbs is the fact that they are generally oriented toward and often emerge from contexts involving higher-order concerns, toward matters like ideas and organization, that constitute deeper progress into the work involved with an assignment.

In contrast to the increased use of necessity modals, NNS conferences differ from NS conferences in the slightly decreased use of lexical verbs by both students and teachers. NNS conferences appear to feature fewer think-alouds of this type; the teacher does not as frequently use these lexical bundles to process aloud her thinking. In addition, the reduced use of these devices implies that these conferences may involve less hedging, in which the interlocutors seek to save face and mitigate their utterances.

Far more so than the modal verbs and lexical verbs discussed, hedging adverbs appear very frequently in the discourse of conferences, accounting for about four percent of the output of students overall and about one percent of the output of this teacher. Considering the pervasiveness of their use, the function and the purpose for which students and teachers may use hedging adverbs is of great interest. However, the identification and description of their communicative utility is a problematic exercise; it is difficult to discern the extent to which these expressions are intended to convey epistemic stance or operate as unconscious, automatic, and natural formulaic sequences or fillers. Examples 35 and 36 below are but one of many utterances from students, utterances that could receive multiple interpretations. Nevertheless, a generic purpose may describe many of these utterances well: Conveying a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, what is uttered and what is referred to, between the signifier and its signified.

(35) “I guess I’m just **kind of** confused on, **like**, the whole thing.”

(36) I **kind of, like**, answered your questions.”

Expressing a discrepancy between what is uttered and what is represented, hedging adverbs serve to hedge and reduce the explicitness, directedness, and certitude of an utterance made. The increased use of them in NS conferences suggests that students and teachers are unsure of or are seeking to save face as they engage with each other in the writing process. Both lexical verbs and hedging adverbs may index a more indirect approach toward eliciting or giving feedback or directions, but they may also index increased and enhanced cognition and meandering with higher-order concerns, matters that are always uncertain and subject to valid interrogation and growth, matters that are subject to the reality of further adaptation and evolution as much as life itself.

However, as noted earlier, some hedging adverbs, especially *like*, may enter into the discourse of NSs automatically and unconsciously; their formulaic and automatic nature may account for some of the difference in the use of them. NSs may not consciously use these adverbs. Speakers frequently use *like* as a discourse marker rather than as an adverb; in many of these utterances, it is uncertain whether the speaker meant for these adverbs to be semantically meaningful or not. Meanwhile, NNSs may not appreciate or realize the extent to which these are present in the discourse of NSs; they may not have had the opportunity to notice these devices yet and therefore lack ownership and awareness of them in their interlanguages. When they are used by NNSs, these devices may appear with more effort, deliberativeness, and decision: NNSs may use them more than NSs in an actually meaningful way, but it is impossible to determine whether that is the case from the transcripts alone.

While this function of indexing discrepancy between signifiers and signifieds is possibly present in the corpus of the teacher’s output as well, another purpose of using hedging adverbs is

more pronounced with the teacher corpus: that of hedging and mitigating the feedback presented to students, treating it as optional and available but not as absolute and binding. Examples 37, 38, and 39 show how the teacher may use hedging adverbs to adopt a less direct and authoritative stance in relation to students.

(37) "...But **maybe** it would helpful to briefly introduce..."

(38) "You still need to **sort of** narrow down your focus."

(39) "I'm thinking, **like**, three sentences, not, **like**, a whole page."

Besides the three categories of stance devices presented — modal verbs, lexical verbs controlling complement clauses, and hedging adverbs — personal pronouns also underwent quantitative analysis in this study. The differences found between students and teachers are understandable and intuitive in that the work of the student operates as the subject of conversation in writing conferences, one would hope. However, some quantitative differences did emerge in the data. For example, NSs are more inclined to more directly address the teacher using the second person; they directly address the teacher as *you* more, as is shown in examples 40 and 41 below. Meanwhile, conferences with NNSs tend to involve slightly more use of the first-person plural by both students and teachers; this tendency is represented in lines 42 and 43. Also curious to note and shown in line 44 is that the first-person singular is used more by the teacher in conferences with NSs.

(40) "And then **you** said condense it down, um, like, this one..." (by student)

(41) "...Because **you** said something about the colors, and **you** told me to stay, stick with a color." (by student)

(42) "So do **we** need to come up with, like, a page for that?" (by student)

(43) "**We're**, um, **we're**, um, **we're** allowed to put any photo available?" (by student)

(44) “Yeah, I see what you’re saying.” (by teacher)

In addition to frequency, these pronouns also vary in terms of function. Addressing the teacher in second person often embodies an effort to interact and engage with her as a collaborative peer in the writing process, regurgitating and clarifying feedback or directions given. Meanwhile, the use of the first-person plural often represents a we-statement, an expression that applies to the class as a collective whole, often involving the requirements or structure of an assignment. Less general, firm, and universal in its meaning, the use of the first-person singular by the teacher in conferences frequently introduces utterances in which the teacher thinks aloud and processes her own cognition and processing of a text written by a student. Regardless of application to and description of oneself, a present other, or the class as a community, pronouns reflect and construct different stance positions and orientations toward the writing process and assignments.

The hedging and richer thinking reflected by the increased use of lexical verbs and adverbs among NSs may inform the analysis of the slightly higher use of second person pronouns by and with this population in these conferences. Seeking to orient toward and save face in the presence of the other, registering and processing the feedback and ideas of another on the many possibilities available in terms of ideas and organization, students may naturally infuse more of these pronouns into their output. In addition, the increased use of them, one may argue, reflects an increase in power and agency on the part of students as they position the teacher as a peer and partner from whom to gain insights and clarity in the writing process. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the second person still remains far more pervasive in the discourse of the teacher than in the discourse of students: The conference is ultimately about the student still.

Another curious pattern to observe with regard to pronoun use in NS conferences is the slightly increased use of first person singular pronouns by the teacher: She tends to refer to herself somewhat more in conferences with NSs than in conferences with NNSs. This is perhaps due to the fact that the teacher does discuss higher-order concerns and engages in more thinking aloud and articulated mental processing in these conferences through the use of cognitive verbs. Nevertheless, it is significant that the teacher is somewhat more inclined to refer to herself in the presence of NSs. When considered together in the light of Pennebaker (2011), the teacher's tendency to use more of the first-person singular and the students' tendency to use more of the second person raise further questions and possibilities regarding the power dynamics and stancetaking in these conferences.

A pattern in the use of pronouns also emerges and raises possibilities regarding stancetaking and tenor with NNSs: NNS conferences tend to involve slightly more use of the first-person plural; both the teacher and the student seem to refer the class as a collective, as a community, especially in the context of considering and discussing expectations or requirements for activities, assignments, or upcoming sessions. In addition, in contrast to NS conferences, in NNS conferences the teacher tends to use slightly less of the first-person singular, whereas students employ fewer second person pronouns: The teacher refers to herself less, and students address the teacher less in these contexts. Figure 8 on page 57 also indicates that the teacher uses a greater proportion of the second person in NNS conferences than in NS conferences; she is addressing these students considerably more. This disparity suggests additional possibilities and raises further questions about the power dynamics of conferences and how stancetaking may vary between NS and NNS conferences. An analysis based in Pennebaker (2011) would argue

that these proportional differences suggest that NNS conferences may prove less dialogic and heteroglossic and more imbalanced in the power dynamics involved.

Stance devices and pronouns may perform different functions and moves by interlocutors. The analysis of the purpose of these devices suggests that divergent frequencies may represent divergent stancetaking and variation in tenor and could illuminate differences in conferences involving NSs and those involving NNSs. While this analysis so far has focused on the corpora, concordance lines, and transcriptions as a whole, it now adopts a more nuanced and idiosyncratic to examine these patterns and frequencies.

### **Analysis of two individual conferences**

In addition to a holistic comparison and integration of the discussion so far, two conferences, one involving a NS and the other involving a NNS, will undergo description and analysis to more effectively account for the variation in the realization of stance in conferences — both in the quantity of forms and in the functions communicated. These individual conferences do not represent all conferences for that particular native-speaking status corpus. Rather, the patterns that emerge in the discourse of these conferences may relate to, supplement, corroborate, and help describe the overall patterns identified both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Within both of these conferences and common to all conferences are variations of a question from the teacher: “*What questions do you have for me today about the e-portfolio assignment?*” This question gives the students agency, empowering them to select and decide the journey that the conference will take. Students do not respond to this question in monolithic and similar ways, however, instead seizing upon it to pursue highly divergent and variegated matters of concern and interest. The variation in how they respond to this question and the ones to follow

is important in accounting for, describing, and analyzing the various distribution of forms found earlier.

One of the conferences with a NNS begins with teacher asking a variation of the question above. The student, after some hesitation, admits that her primary concerns are with the length requirements involved with the assignment. As observed earlier, discussions involving lower-order concerns or the general structure or requirements of assignments tend to result in the increased use of necessity modals, a pattern shown here. The teacher, rather than providing a firm and absolute answer to the student, invites the student to take responsibility for that matter. It is also worth noting that she uses a certainty verb to show her understanding of the burden that this lack of rigidity may place upon the student in determining what is necessary. The teacher seeks to empower the student with agency in her work in this portfolio.

S: Like the range. Like how long **should** be. How much content.

T: Okay, so I haven't set a word limit, which **I know** is **sort of** vague.

S: (laughs)

T: Think about how you **can** create for the shorter reflections, the W, O, V, and E.

However, the student still remains uncertain and seeks more guidance and clarity from the teacher. As a result, she asks additional questions to elicit more explicit instruction from the teacher. This time the teacher uses a necessity modal to placate the demand for more direct information placed upon her by the student.

S: Hmhm. So each **shouldn't** be too long?

T: It doesn't **need to** be really long.

The teacher then proceeds to ask the student what she intends to discuss and address in the reflections that will constitute her portfolio. The student, in articulating her goals and

intentions for the portfolio, begins by focusing on the comments and feedback she received from her peers and the instructor. Her own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about what she may like to do as a communicator follow and are thus possibly subservient and subordinate to the feedback and suggestions others give her.

T: Okay. What in the presentation are you going to talk about?

S: The comments and feedbacks.

T: Okay.

S: And what do I **think I need to** do better.

The teacher and the student proceed to discuss different components of the portfolio, including a page about the student in question and what is expected for revised artifacts posted to the portfolio. During this time, because of the emphasis on requirements and expectations for the assignment, an abundance of necessity modals appears in the discourse of both the student and the teacher, though the latter uses possibility modals frequently to either hedge what is said or present multiple options available. The teacher and the student then proceed to discuss the introductory page of the portfolio. At this point the teacher seeks to impress upon the student the opportunity to be creative and novel in how to structure and write a page. While the student seeks a clear and explicit agenda for composing this part of the portfolio, the teacher uses a combination of possibility modals, necessity modals, and hedging adverbs to demonstrate that student should exercise creativity and flexibility in composing it. It is important to note that the abundance of necessity modals used, rather than depriving the student of freedom and responsibility, instead summons the student to engage with and think more about the assignment.

T: Okay? So whether you structure it as a letter or as, um, an essay, you do want to have in that first paragraph, **sort of** introduce the ideas. Um, it does not **need to** be in a



traditional five-paragraph essay format. But there does **need to** be a logical flow between your ideas.

S: So, um, so, okay. I **have to** address my, um, thesis statement, like, to guide the reader from the reflection?

T: Um, **maybe**, think about how you, you **can** help your reader understand what you will talk about. Um, but **maybe** you don't **need to** have an explicit thesis statement, like, I really pushed everyone to have.

S: Hmhm.

T: Because, if you look at example of reflections in our textbook, one thing you'll notice is that they **maybe** don't have a thesis statement like a lot of our essays do.

S: Hmhm.

T: But their introduction will still give the reader a sense of wha-, what are they going to talk about.

Following this, the teacher and the student dive into the introductory reflection further, discussing how to design it and the need for a photo or photos to be posted on the portfolio website. They then continue to discuss one of the assignments that the student will use as an artifact in her portfolio, an advertisement analysis assignment whose purpose and expectations the student did not fully meet. In this part of the conversation, the teacher asks the student what she thought the purpose of the assignment was, with the result that the student emits longer utterances while describing and explaining the assignment. At this point, the student operates as the primary knower and the dominant interlocutor.

After the student speaks, however, the teacher proceeds to clarify and explain what the assignment really involved and required. In the process of so doing, the teacher supplants the

student as the primary knower and gains dominance of the conversation while describing the actual expectations and requirements of this assignment, with which the student struggled. The student and the teacher proceed to view the advertisements that the student sought to analyze in the assignment from earlier in the semester. During this time, the teacher discusses the visual at length with the student and engages in a think-aloud, articulating and exploring her own mental cognition; what is important to note with this think-aloud is that at this point the teacher begins to use far more first person pronouns than have characterized her discourse in the conference so far. The student, on the other hand, does not receive the opportunity to articulate and express this extensively and elaborately her own mental and emotional experience of the visual in question.

T: Um, but, when you see this, are you **sort of**, like, I **should** write a letter to somebody? (laughs) And so, I **think** that is a message that is being sent, is for me, uh, it makes me think about, well, who have I not, you know, sent a, a letter to or emailed in a while, so there, it's **sort of** encouraging people to take action and, and stay connected. And I **think** you **could** argue that that is definitely a message that's being sent. Because, so often, advertisements, they're selling a product, right? But there's so many other additional messages that come in that advertisement, so I'm trying to encourage everyone to look at a deeper level of what the message is that's being sent.

Rather than indulge in her own think-aloud, the student seeks to receive more clarification and guidance from the teacher, asking an explicit and unmitigated question. The student, rather than develop her own stream of thought and inquire about what best works for her work, seeks the input of the teacher to determine the appropriate course of action to take.

S: Okay. So it, it is not, is not advisable for the last paragraph I submit, I talk about the similarities?

While the teacher does answer her question somewhat, she attempts to lead the student toward exercising and practicing more agency and ownership of her writing rather than exercise dependence on others. Rather than dictating to the student what to do, the teacher invites the student to reconsider, re-conceptualize, and reconceive this work based on what works best for the student and for the student's readers.

T: (laughs) Um, my suggestion for you is start with the bare ideas.

S: Hmhm.

T: So **maybe** you want to try to re-outline your paper.

At this point the conference begins to conclude, with the teacher and the student synthesizing their discussion and bidding each other farewell. The student has been left a task by the teacher, of deeply engaging with, rethinking, and reorganizing the work done so far. Rather than leave this conference with answers and directions, this student has left with additional questions and matters into which to inquire. Throughout this conference the student has sought to elicit explicit direction and instructions from the teacher, as is exemplified in the use of necessity modals. Though the teacher does indulge some of these questions with regard to lower-order and necessary concerns, the teacher also often refuses, instead placing responsibility and agency upon the student for ascertaining the appropriate action to undertake in a particular situation. The substantial amount of possibility modals, hedging adverbs, and necessity modals used by the teacher signify a multiplicity of courses available to the student as she undertakes the portfolio assignment further, courses that the teacher will not dictate or require that she take.

Within this conference, the NNS student initially seeks explicit and direct feedback from the teacher with regard to the structure and the requirements of the assignment. As the conference advances, the student continues to seek unmitigated instruction from the teacher for

higher-order concerns, only to not obtain it and instead be challenged by the teacher to own her portfolio further. The student seeks to position the teacher as the “informant” (Powers, 1993), as the primary knower, on whom to rely, but the teacher rejects this position and this vertical relationship and instead empowers the student to engage with and think critically about her work. The teacher neither seeks the outcomes desired by the student nor reciprocates the stancetaking performed. The tenor desired is not the tenor experienced.

Having analyzed the realization of stance in an NNS conference, this chapter concludes by analyzing a NS conference. As with the NNS conference, what transpires within this conference is not assumed to represent or speak for all NS conferences. Nevertheless, what unfolds over the trajectory of this conference may help paint a richer and more multifaceted of the variation in frequencies identified earlier. As the analysis of the NNS conference helped illuminate and understand the distribution and function of necessity modals, so may the analysis of an NS conference help better account for and provide a basis for understanding the distribution and function of modal verbs, lexical verbs, hedging adverbs, and pronouns.

As with the NNS conference analyzed, this NS conference begins with the teacher inquiring what questions students may have about the assignment at hand. This time, rather than asking her question explicitly and directly, the student uses a narrative to describe how she arrived at a state of confusion and disorientation, a common feature to and behavior in NS conferences and often used as a means of asking a question indirectly.

S: And I just had a few questions about that. So I’m trying to put written and visual under here, and somehow I got oral under there, but when I tried to publish these two menus, it showed up on the first page.

T: Okay, I **think** you **might** have made them as posts rather than pages.

The student and the teacher proceed to interact with and explore the website, collaborating to overcome and address the issues that this student has been experiencing. After successfully eliminating the problems that were interfering with this student's work on this assignment, the student identifies remaining work to be done with the architecture of the website through a necessity modal. In contrast, the teacher is not as concerned with the design of the website as with the content that the student may like to add to the pages she is in the process of creating. The teacher uses possibility modals and hedging adverbs to impress upon the student that something is available and open to consideration, but neither required nor inevitable in her future work as a communicator.

T: We're good. I apologize that that is very complicated.

S: So now I just **need to** delete these.

T: Yes. You **probably** want to put a little something in this first, um, page. I don't know, you **could** put something like...

Unlike the teacher, the student remains preoccupied with the architecture of the website, with how it is structured and designed. She begins to pursue a course of action that the teacher is afraid may interfere with her success with the portfolio assignment. In this chain of utterances to students, the teacher uses lexical verbs to identify with the student's desires and needs in working through and on this assignment; the teacher registers and empathizes with the student in the first two bolded verbs below. The teacher then adopts a more explicit and direct position in the remainder of this utterance, informing the student directly what to do in terms of the service to achieve her goals. Though the teacher has primarily relied on possibility modals in this conference, the turn toward a focus on architecture and structure has resulted in the use of a

necessity modal: The teacher adopts a more authoritative role and acts more as an “informant.”

There is a shift in tenor.

T: So that’s going to end up deleting the page. I **don’t think** you want to do that. Um, but if you want to click on edit here. Okay, I **see** what, you’re done. So what I **think we need to do** is copy this information and then paste that into this visual page. So if you copy that and then go back to your home and click on edit under visual and copy and paste that information in there, and then you **can** retitle it about me. There you go.

After making these changes in the design of the portfolio website, the teacher and the student share together some thoughts on a photo the student has selected for and posted to it. Now the student and the teacher begin to discuss their attitudes toward and reactions to the picture. The result of this change in topic results in the use of more lexical verbs and hedging adverbs as the interlocutors process and articulate their immediate psychological impressions. In addition, the student uses a necessity modal to observe future action still needing to be performed upon the page and thus demonstrates ownership of and responsibility over the work ahead of her.

T: I **don’t know**, it makes me think of, **like**, Iowa in the winter **sort of**.

S: Yeah.

T: Yeah, I’m not too worried about the picture.

S: Okay.

T: **Like**, if the theme gives you that picture, that’s fine. And I like how you’ve set this up.

S: I **need to** switch those too.

The interlocutors turn their attention to another matter, that of earning extra credit for the class. Here again we see the student does not ask a question of the teacher; rather, the student presents a narrative filled with lexical verbs in an indirect effort to obtain feedback and

suggestions from the teacher. Both the teacher and the student use lexical verbs of uncertainty to mitigate the certitude behind their utterances. Along with lexical verbs, the teacher uses a hedging adverb to suggest the tenuousness of whatever conclusions they may draw together. The teacher does use a necessity modal in the context of identifying and articulating a course of action for the two interlocutors to pursue.

S: But I **didn't know** if you **think** it'd be worth it for me to.

T: Um, I **think** what we **need to** do is look at your grade and **sort of** decide, um, where you're at right now and where you'd like to be.

The teacher and the student spend a considerable portion of the conference discussing the dynamics of the grade this student could earn in this class. After doing this, they return to the students' work as a writer and analyze an assignment she is considering revising for the portfolio assignment. Once more the student avoids using questions to compel the teacher to give feedback and guidance, instead offering a narrative that calls upon the other party to proffer something meaningful and helpful.

S: So I feel like for assignment four it was just mostly organizational errors, so I don't know, I'm still trying to decide how I would revise it.

Diving further into this assignment, the teacher begins to identify higher-order concerns with which she struggled and experienced confusion. In articulating these, the teacher uses lexical verbs to present a think-aloud about what she underwent as a reader while processing the text written by the student. Besides using lexical verbs to express cognition and processing, it is important to note that the teacher hedges and mitigates the feedback and suggestions she gives to the student by inserting "a little" to modify the adverbs or adjectives that follow, as if to

communicate to the student that the instructions being given will not amount to too much of a burdensome task to undertake.

S: And I **don't think** this paragraph was a huge issue.

T: I **think** for me, um, it's good to provide that background information, but I **wonder** if you could make the connection to the act **a little** more strongly.

S: Okay.

T: Because I **think** as a reader, I was like, oh, wait, we're talking about obesity now. I **know** there's a connection, but that connection could be **a little** more explicit for the reader.

As the teacher and the student finish discussing this particular assignment, the student notes that there is another issue with which she would like to work so as to improve. The student uses necessity modals to identify it as an essential and important area in which she would like to grow and excel further. However, she is unsure about how to advance and develop in this area, topic sentences. As a result of her disorientation and uncertainty, she inserts an uncertainty verb, many fillers, and multiple expressions of *like* into her output. Whether she is using these consciously or unconsciously is uncertain, but their use does reflect her epistemic stance toward the journey ahead of her as a writer and as a learner: that of not knowing the roads to take, but only the destination at which she would like for those roads to ultimately arrive.

S: And that's what I **need to** work on for assignment three too. So, um, so, I'm just, uh, **don't know** how I would, um, **like** make my topic sentences more direct, because that's...

T: Okay.

S: I **need to, like**, better explain what I'll be talking about.



After discussing these concerns with the student, the teacher begins to draw the conference to a close, but the student interrupts her to draw attention to one last matter on her mind: that of citations. Perhaps due to the fact that these constitute a lower-order concern, the interlocutors discuss this matter with an abundance of necessity modals and imperatives.

S: So, quick question about this, so?

T: Yes?

S: Um, what exactly do I **need to** replace that with?

Upon successfully resolving the issues involving citations, the teacher and student finally draw the conference to a close. As she prepares to leave, the student articulates her aspirations and expectations for the work that awaits before her. In identifying her learning so far and what she still needs to do, the student uses certainty verbs and necessity modals. Both of these expressions, located in the context that they are, represent the agency and responsibility she is exercising as a writer and as student. Meanwhile, the teacher uses a certainty verb to express empathy for the experience of a student, showing that she identifies with what her interlocutor has undergone.

S: And transitions and I **know** my summary wasn't the best, so I **need to** work on explaining, just summarizing it [better (unclear) and your comments].

T: [Right, so remember] summaries are hard.

S: Yeah. (laughs)

T: And I **understand** that even though you worked on them for, what, **like** a week-and-a-half, two weeks at the beginning of the semester, they're still really challenging.

Like the NNS, the NS uses necessity modals throughout the conference, but for a considerably different purpose: to define and set an agenda for further work rather than to

ascertain or learn expectations or requirements of an assignment or obtain feedback explicitly. However, some necessity modals serving the latter function appear now and then as the interlocutors discuss lower-order concerns of writing. Other patterns that distinguish the NS conference from the NNS conference is the pervasiveness of lexical verbs as the two parties present engage with and process aloud the higher-order concerns that dominate in their conversation. These two conferences diverge from each other considerably in terms of the devices used and also in terms of the stancetaking performed.

Both conferences unfold in different directions, with the NNS conference displaying a student continuously seeking explicit input and direction from the teacher on the direction to take and the NS conference characterized by a student coming to exercise agency — while still wandering — through the infinite and rich territory of communicative possibilities. The patterns emerging, the constructs discussed, and the devices used in these two conferences may not embody, reflect, or conform to all conferences for the NS and NNS corpora, but they suggest some possible dispositions, habits of mind, and moves adopted and performed by the interlocutors. These dispositions, habits of mind, and moves may help better understand, explain, and analyze the forms' frequencies found at the beginning of this chapter and the functions that these forms serve.

Emerging through this analysis are some overall patterns for stancetaking that realize variation in power dynamics and in tenor. The frequency and functions of particular forms associated with a particular demographic suggest a tendency toward certain stance positions more than others. It is important to remember that none of the forms and functions occurs always with one demographic and never with another. These differences in stance and the use of a form do not constitute matters of kind so much as matters of degree. Nevertheless, despite the fact that

these differences exist on a spectrum rather in a binary, they do appear to affect the discourse that unfolds and the subject positions sought and experienced in conferences.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the corpus has found that NS conferences and NNS conferences do differ in terms of stancetaking; there were differences found in the frequencies with which students and teachers used stance devices and pronouns. However, it was also noted that these differences may emerge from the field, from the topic that is being discussed in the conference setting. For this reason, one cannot conclude that native-speaking status in and of itself affects stancetaking. Instead, native-speaking status may play a role alongside and interact with other factors.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

### General patterns of power and stance

This study sought to analyze the dynamic and variegated nature and performance of conferences through an analysis of the frequency of stance devices. In the process of gathering and analyzing the data, however, some patterns that did not involve these particular devices emerged, corroborating and supporting previous research into differences between conferences with NSs and conferences with NNSs. In terms of the proportion of number of words, the teacher produced more than students of both populations, but this increased amount of output expanded among NNSs for reasons to be discussed. Besides the mere quantity of words, the teacher also used twice as many mean words per minute as did students, though this gap between students and teachers widened as well in NNS conferences.

What becomes clear through both of these measures — the amount of words and the mean words per minute — is that while conferences overall are characterized by teacher dominance, this teacher dominance is especially pronounced in NNS conferences, something previous research has found (Thonus, 1999). The number of words overall and the mean words per minute are not the only way by which one may identify the reality of teacher dominance in conferences. The frequency of stance devices and pronouns used and the functions these devices perform may correspond with and help explain the disparities found between NS and NNS conferences in terms of overall output and mean words per minute. Before considering the significance and sources of the variation in the use of these stance devices in NS and NNS conferences, however, the overall variation in stance devices and how they distinguish the teachers and the students also deserves discussion.

The use of particular forms of these devices indicates variation in stancetaking and power dynamics by these interlocutors in the conference setting. As shown in Figure 3 at the beginning of the results chapter, students tend to use far more uncertainty verbs and hedging adverbs than does the teacher; these markers of hesitation and uncertainty, of tenuousness and disorientation, suggest students are positioning themselves in places of lower authority and power and are perhaps cultivating and building a more vertical relationship with the teacher. Pennebaker's (2011) pronoun-verb cluster, prominent among those with reduced power and status, may apply to and describe the use of these features. The more abundant use of hedging adverbs, especially *like*, may also reflect the increasing use of these polysemous forms among younger people.

In addition to verbs and adverbs, students and teachers distinguish themselves through the pronouns they use, as shown in Figure 4. Though the concentration upon the student in conferences would suggest the fact that students use the first-person singular predominantly and teachers use far more of the second person, Pennebaker (2011) also notes that the first person singular characterizes those in positions of inferiority and more subordinate status, while the use of the second person characterizes those more in power and authority. In this context, the variation in the use of these pronouns may show more than the focus of attention in conferences: It may also show how the interlocutors have positioned themselves and the stancetaking that has been performed.

These patterns in the use of stance devices and pronouns, distinguishing as they do the positions of the teacher and the students from one another, are not monolithic and absolute. The results section found that these overall patterns change and become more nuanced in the corpora based on native-speaking status. These differences suggest that the stancetaking done in conferences is not general or absolute, but may vary on the basis of the native-speaking status of

the student present. These patterns suggest that NSs and NNSs may position themselves and the teacher differently in conferences. The question that follows is why this is the case, why this transpires. To provide a sufficient and valid account of this variation, one that encompasses the patterns found, is, however, a multifaceted and complex exercise because of the number of factors that may contribute.

### **Differences in stancetaking in NS and NNS conferences among students**

NS and NNS students differ from each other in several ways. As noted in the results chapter, NNSs tend to use almost twice as many necessity modals and somewhat more of the first person plural. These frequencies would initially suggest that NNSs might like to conceptualize and approach the writing process as a matter of necessity, obligation, and requirements, of absolute tasks to be performed and done that apply to the class as a collective. NSs, on the other hand, tend to use some more uncertainty verbs and hedging adverbs and also are somewhat more inclined to address the teacher directly through second person pronouns. Such frequencies would seem to indicate that NSs may experience more confusion and uncertainty as writers, not sure about what to do or where to proceed; they may use more “downtoners” as a result, a pattern already found to be common in NS writing (Chen, 2010). With their lower use of uncertainty verbs and hedging adverbs, on the other hand, NNSs appear to show more certainty and certitude in what they have written, a behavior that previous research has found (Chen, 2010; Gilquin et al., 2007; Milton & Hyland, 1999). This affirmation of generalization and absoluteness may lead to the increased use of first-person plural pronouns as well.

This variation may thus reflect and index different and culturally constrained attitudes toward pedagogy, writing, and epistemology: NNSs from some cultures are possibly socialized

and educated to value, express, and embrace certitude and confidence, conformity and rigor, universalism and stasis, while NSs are maybe socialized and educated to appreciate and pursue uncertainty and possibility, openness and interrogation, contextualization and dynamism (Powers, 1993; Williams, 2004). These different epistemologies of NSs and NNSs may account for the disparities found in the amount of output produced by students in conferences: More uncertain and open students may engage with the teacher more over possibilities available, while certain and closed students may rely on the input of the teacher to dictate and guide the work they will do, of what is absolutely expected of the class as a whole. In addition to epistemology, pragmatics may differ by culture: NSs and NNSs would differ from one another in their proficiency with culturally appropriate politeness strategies and practices, something that may influence the use of the forms in question.

Nevertheless, one should remember to refrain from essentializing and stereotyping NNSs, as these students come from a plethora of cultural and pedagogical backgrounds. Most of the NNSs participating in this study came from East Asian countries; the tendencies in their linguistic behaviors identified in this study may better describe and reflect their backgrounds and should not be taken to constitute and represent all NNSs. Considering cultural backgrounds and experiences, one may wonder if NSs have been socialized to consider the teacher to be more of a collaborative peer engaged in the process of learning alongside and with them rather than an expert on whom to rely for information and knowledge to be deposited in empty and expectant minds (Freire, 1978). While NNSs may conceptualize their relationship with the teacher as being more vertical, NSs may consider it to be more horizontal.

Though they tend to express uncertainty and dubiousness, NSs may also see themselves as having more agency and power in the writing conference: An analysis of the more abundant

use of the second person to address the teacher based in Pennebaker (2011) would argue that this increase reflects students' coming to exercise a more horizontal relationship with their interlocutor. These two tendencies on the part of NSs — more uncertainty verbs and hedging adverbs in contrast to more use of the second person — seem initially to contradict each other until one realizes that both reflect more horizontal stancetaking: All of these devices position the interlocutors as horizontally aligned in making sense of the complexity in writing. In this context, the two tendencies common to NNSs — an increased use of necessity modals and a slightly increased use of the first-person plurals — reflects more vertical stancetaking, with the teacher in the position of informing the collective whole of the class what is required and needed.

While cultural backgrounds and influences on stance, pedagogy, and epistemology are crucial to consider, it is important to remember that the content of the conversation may affect the stancetaking performed as well. The concern being discussed may indeed contribute more than the aforementioned factors. The analysis of the concordance lines and of two individual conferences in the previous chapter found that what was being discussed may have exercised an influence on how it was discussed and which stance devices were used by the interlocutors. Previous research has also found that conferences and tutorials with NNSs tend to orient toward lower-order and language concerns (Nakamaru, 2010; Ritter, 2002). These differences in the field, in what is being discussed and covered in the conference, may exercise a profound influence over the linguistic choices made, the stancetaking done, and the positions adopted far more than native-speaking status itself. Native-speaking status may influence what is discussed, indirectly rather than directly affecting the linguistic choices made and the stance positions taken.



It is with this consideration in mind that the possibility emerges that these differences found with necessity modals, lexical verbs, hedging adverbs, and pronouns emerge from the *content at hand* rather than the *native-speaking status of the student present*. The variation in these forms may correspond with higher-order concerns and lower-order concerns, with what is receiving the attention of the interlocutors. Rather than indexing one's first language and the inevitable stance positions associated with these forms, these differences in the frequency of forms may index different places along the writing process and the dynamic and evolving stance positions writers may experience as they advance in their work. As a result of this different orientation toward the conference, as a result of the different questions and needs these students bring, they may position themselves and the teacher differently and pursue different stance positions.

It is impossible to determine the extent to which the discourse of students in these conferences and the different frequencies in the use of stance devices are a result of different cultural backgrounds and their influence on pedagogy, writing, epistemology, and stance, or a result of the content being discussed, for these two variables are not autonomous and independent but rather overlapping and mutually enriching. Both factors, it is probable, have affected the discourse and stancetaking of the students found. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the constructs being discussed influence the stancetaking done and that stance may evolve and prove dynamic as writers progress through and gain more agency and responsibility over their communicative work, a fact that will receive further discussion with the implications for further research.

Having considered the frequency of stance devices and pronouns among students and what these may represent, the next section will discuss the frequencies found in the teacher

corpora and what these may represent. The discussion of the students' practices has argued that it is impossible to reduce and consign the patterns found to a single variable and impose upon it one absolute and binding interpretation. Rather, the interplay of myriad factors may affect the trajectory of stancetaking and tenor. This reality will thus inform the analysis of the frequencies found for the teacher as well.

### **Differences in stancetaking in NS and NNS conferences by the teacher**

It was argued previously that the content at hand may influence stancetaking and the devices used just as much as, if not more than, than native-speaking status. To support this argument, the discourse of the teacher provides a helpful resource. As she is a native speaker, one would assume that the use of a seemingly automatic and unconscious devices, such as the filler *like* or the lexical bundle *I don't know*, would not vary substantially across the entire corpus for the teacher's discourse. However, uncertainty verbs and hedging adverbs are more abundant in the conferences with NSs, as is the first person singular associated with think-alouds. These differences also suggest that these features do not vary solely on the basis of one's native-speaking status, but also in relation to the construct being discussed. It is possible that conferences with NSs, with a general overall but not absolute tendency toward discussing higher-order concerns, may result in the greater use of these devices.

With regard to NNSs, it is likewise important to consider the higher proportion of necessity modals and the first-person plurals with NNSs in the discourse of the teacher. As with NSs, these features correspond with the patterns and practices associated with students. One could advance the argument that the teacher is adopting a more direct and authoritative stance toward and giving more explicit feedback and instructions to these students and that the native-speaking status of the students is encouraging the tenor of the interlocutors to turn more vertical.

However, it is also possible that an orientation toward lower-order concerns and assignment expectations and needs for the entire class as a whole may result in the somewhat increased use of these features in conferences with these students.

NNSs, it has been noted, are more oriented toward lower-order concerns in conferences and tutorials than are NSs (Nakamaru, 2010; Ritter, 2002), and these differing orientations may affect the frequency of particular stance devices used by both students and the teacher. In language-use conversations, it is important to recall, the teacher is usually the “primary knower” (Haneda, 2004). What emerges in the trajectory of these conferences, regardless of the ultimate cause, are the pedagogical actions of the teacher: Lower-order concerns lead to more explicit answers and directions, clear feedback and guidance, absolute destinations and points of arrival, while higher-order concerns lead to only further questioning and wondering, only further contemplation and bemusement, only further wandering and becoming even more lost.

The overall orientation and stance of these NS conferences, tending to focus on higher-order concerns and more advanced in the completion of the assignment, unleashes questions and possibilities, confusion and disorientation, the opening of more doors and rooms, and the exposing and seeing myriad new landscapes and glorious sights. Meanwhile, the overall orientation and stance of these NNS conferences, possibly tending to focus on lower-order concerns and only beginning to grapple with the assignment, prompts only answers and expectations, certainty and clarity, the establishment of what doors and rooms are available, and the drawing of a small circle upon the map of what landscapes and sights one may see. These different approaches may account for the disparities found between NSs and NNSs with regard to overall output and mean words per minute.

While these differences in approaches to thinking are not absolute — both questions and answers are present throughout all conferences and exist more as matters of degree than of kind for both NSs and NNSs — it is important to consider and to contemplate how these overall practices and habits may affect the learning experience of students. Nevertheless, the orientation toward lower-order concerns in NNS conferences does not constitute a categorical and absolute negative pedagogically. A Vygotskian account of conferences would argue that the more vertical relationship and the more explicit instruction given may prove most effective for achieving further progress and growth by the student at this point. Earlier in the process of an assignment, the teacher may operate as the primary knower, a position that the student increasingly takes over and embraces as they advance through an assignment and practice increased agency (Haneda, 2004; Strauss & Xiang, 2006). The pedagogical application and practice of such concepts as the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980) and Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave & Wenger, 2001) provides a possible explanation the disparities in the frequencies found. If the goal of the writing conference is to help students gain independence and responsibility of writing, moving from dependence to independence (Glasswell, Parr, & McNaughton, 2003), these variations in stance are but of a reflection of students at different points in this journey toward increased agency and creativity. Where students are in their learning and their writing may determine how that learning and that writing is discussed by both themselves and the teacher.

### **Overall interpretations of the discourse of conferences**

Though this study has identified some of the tendencies that differentiate NS conferences and NNS conferences, it raises as many questions as it does answers. One particularly resonant and intense question to be posed, deliberated, and explored is the significance and impact of

these tendencies pedagogically and politically on the subjectivities and agency that students encounter, inhabit, and perform. The differences and variation in stancetaking and tenor found in these conferences, upon which this discussion has elaborated, may either empower or marginalize students. Equally possible and valid, the two interpretations to be presented are neither absolute nor certain; neither may fully explicate nor constitute a full account of the realization of stance and the expression of power and agency in the conference setting. Rather, both of them supplement and enrich each other and encourage further inquiry and exploration into this area so as to ascertain the power dynamics that unfold within and beyond the scope of these writing conferences and the writing process.

One possible interpretation of the discourse and stancetaking of conferences adopts the perspective of critical discourse analysis to contend that all of the patterns found for NNSs — the increased teacher dominance, the greater use of necessity modals, the reduced use of lexical verbs and hedging verbs, a somewhat stronger orientation toward the class as a collective through the use of the first-person plural, and a stronger focus on lower-order concerns and assignment expectations that prevents actually *sharing* with the teacher — indicate a negative difference for these conferences. In particular, these patterns may align with more teacher-centered and traditional pedagogies; these conferences with NNSs may demonstrate more of a problematic banking model of education, in which the teacher serves the purpose of depositing unqualified information into the minds of students (Freire, 1978). However, it is important to recall that the teacher often asks students to set the agenda for the conference: This is what the students are orienting the conference toward.

Important to remember then is that the stancetaking done in conferences aligned with the agenda established for students. In addition, too critical an analysis may overlook how the

teacher, through using possibility modals and necessity modals calling upon students to think, may seek to return power to the student and assign them more agency and responsibility in the writing process, reversing the moves done by students. This interpretation would acknowledge that the students contribute as well, if not more so: they themselves have been socialized in their previous cultures and languages to position the teacher in this manner and to approach learning and writing with this limited and unimaginative epistemology. Students' experiences within both their first and second cultures, both within and without the school, may have instilled within them an excessive anxiety with lower-order matters and constructs and affected the possibilities they consider open to themselves in the writing conference and class.

In contrast to NNSs, NSs experience a balanced and more collaborative pedagogy, one that has achieved a spirit of shared inquiry and work as the interlocutors wonder and wander together about the journey undertaken and to be undertaken communicatively. The reduced amount of teacher dominance, the increased use of lexical verbs and hedging adverbs by both interlocutors, the increased use of the first-person singular by the teacher, and the increased use of the second person by the student all demonstrate this more horizontal playing field that characterizes NS conferences. Such a spirit of equality and collaboration endows more agency and creativity upon the student, enabling and empowering them to exercise agency and critical thinking about the paths they will take and make over the land before them.

As a result of these divergences in conferences, students may find themselves being led to experience different subjectivities, different subject positions as writers. NS conferences may result in creative and free agents who embrace the complexity and danger, the ecstasy and the uncertainty of the dance that is writing, while NNS conferences may see students conform to and practice the norm, step into line and stay on the path. Some conferences, predominantly those

with NSs, may allow students to experience a vibrant spectrum of possibilities and options with which to depict and represent reality, while others, often held with NNSs, may lead students to only recognize the boundaries and limitations of the canvas before them. What is even more frustrating is that these conferences with NNSs, characterized as they are by teacher dominance, may result in less substantial revision (Freedman, 1982; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997).

However, such an account of these differences across conferences, while convenient in explanatory power and compelling in its political case and agenda, is also limited in its adequacy and lacking in its imaginativeness. Such a critical interpretation, while powerful in its pedagogical implications and persuasive in its theoretical basis, is also deficient in its empathy for and consideration of students and defeatist in its analysis of the motives and aspirations of the interlocutors. Grounded as it is in a priori theoretical and pedagogical assumptions (that teacher dominance is absolutely wrong, that necessity modals giving explicit directions are stifling students, etc.) that then are imposed on the discourse of conferences, a critical interpretation may not adopt a critical position toward itself enough to appreciate that it itself may constitute a form of colonialism and suffer from its own epistemological arrogance in speaking for students and teachers rather than letting them speak for themselves about their pedagogical and compositional experiences. Such an interpretation refuses to consider the possibility that these differences actually are oriented toward serving and empowering students located at different places and with different needs in the writing process. Besides this, it takes similarity in the shape and discourse of conferences as an absolute good. However, such an assumption is problematic. Powers (1993) has argued that teachers may need to adopt more of an informant role in

conferences so as to better assist NNS students, something that may account for the differences found here and something that critical discourse analysis would ignore.

Another interpretation would adopt a position of humility and appreciation of the role of context in understanding, describing, analyzing, and evaluating the discourse of conferences and the use of stance devices. Rather than treat the variation found as indexing in and of itself absolute differences in power dynamics, it would rather treat the variation found as indexing learners situated differently in the process of this assignment. Through an exploration and consideration of the contexts in which writers may find themselves in the conference, the variation in the use of stance devices and stancetaking may emerge not as an absolute patterns displaying differential power dynamics among NSs and NNSs, but rather as natural and appropriate patterns into which all conferences will unfold on the basis of the *current place* of the student rather than the *home* of the student. Rather than identifying the past (native-speaking status and heritage languages and cultures) as the singular cause, it would instead focus on the present moment and the immediate reality of the communicative act.

Besides concentrating on the present reality and situation, such an interpretation would reject cynicism and have the audacity to have faith and to hold hope that these variations in stance, while constituting different points in a journey, all are moving toward the same destination, that of creativity and agency, of success and grace, of clarity and wonder, of power and beauty in the act of communication. While it is simple and easy to assume so, the different frequencies found do not in and of themselves indicate that students are being empowered or marginalized. Rather, they only indicate that writers are traveling along different roads or at different points on the same road to the same destination of communicative success; the different locations and positions in which they are located on their journeys may thus affect the



stancetaking performed and tenor experienced. Regardless of what stancetaking the interlocutors do, it is important to remember that stance may constitute a dynamic and developmental construct, one that evolves and changes as writers progress and grow in their work, something that was asserted earlier.

Needless to say, both of these accounts are inadequate and cannot account for all of the differences found. The unqualified imposition of either interpretation by itself alone on the variation in stancetaking found would quickly find itself challenged and interrogated. When combined and applied, however, these interpretations together provide a dynamic and complex analysis and description of these conferences. The interplay of these two variables — the construct being discussed and the native-speaking status or pedagogical background of the student — suggests that stancetaking is a highly complex and emergent property, one that is embedded and evolves in a rich and multifaceted ecosystem, just as life itself. Like life itself, stance may perhaps prove too complex and dynamic to receive an account that will ever fully satisfy and encompass. Nevertheless, this case study has presented possibilities, raised further questions, and encountered limitations and challenges regarding stancetaking that future research may help clarify and better explain.

### **Limitations and implications for future research**

This case study of one teacher's conferences on a final portfolio assignment has suggested that these two populations — NSs and NNSs — may engage in stancetaking differently for a number of reasons. While the patterns identified corroborate and enrich previous research into the power dynamics of writing conferences and tutorials, they also pose further questions and may require further research to achieve clarity and fuller answers. The variation in

stancetaking and the use of these devices that this study has analyzed remains an area in which more inquiry and study should take place.

This study relied on a very specific and particular setting: one composition teacher's conferences at one institution with students on a certain assignment. Though it is possible that the findings may appear in other contexts, the patterns that have been identified may reflect more upon this unique context than upon these populations and conferences as a whole. Due to the number of participants in this study, with fewer than ten NNSs included in the corpus, it is also possible that the patterns that emerge may not represent and reflect NNSs well. The construction of a more substantial corpus that incorporates more participants may lead to more valid and reliable conclusions.

Despite the small size of the corpora used here, the conclusions that have been drawn should remain in the mind of researchers and educators as they analyze stancetaking and tenor in conferences and among NSs and NNSs in the future. The various habits of mind and dispositions that this study has described may surface and affect discourse in other settings. How students and teachers position each other and how their positioning of one another relates to what they discuss remain objects of inquiry that, while contextual and dynamic, could prove habitual and characteristic of different populations.

What is especially important to note in this regard is the fact that these conferences involved a final portfolio assignment, a very complicated and multifaceted project whose numerous components may have overwhelmed students. The complexity of this assignment may have profoundly affected the discourse and concerns of students and teachers; what they discuss in these conferences and the patterns this study found may not hold for other conferences in which they may participate. In relying on conferences for this assignment solely, this study may

not describe stancetaking and tenor for conferences overall so much as stancetaking and tenor in conferences in which students are befuddled and confused by how to structure and build an entire collection of web-pages serving a number of purposes. The construction of a corpus that contains conferences on multiple assignments would perhaps prove more representative of the populations and the stance positions in question.

In addition to stance across conferences for a number of assignments, future research may like to expand its scope for the exact constructs being analyzed to index stance and power dynamics. This study analyzed only a few of the different categories through which stance is realized, such as possibility/permission/ability modals and necessity/obligation modals (Biber, 2006). In so doing, it did not incorporate, consider, and analyze other expressions of stance, such as modals of desire or of intention/prediction. An account of these other stance devices may better and more richly describe the dynamics of stancetaking and the evolution of agency in writing conferences.

Besides the lexical items used, other features of spoken discourse may help realize and express power dynamics and stance. This study, it should be recalled, analyzed a corpus of transcriptions that recorded the conference verbatim and did not include intonation features. However, intonation may function as another means by which power and authority or subordination or inferiority are conveyed (Ko, Sadler, & Galinsky, 2015). In order to describe the realization of stance as richly and thoroughly as possible, research may seek to consider these matters in further analysis of the discourse of conferences.

Regardless of the variables analyzed to construct a description of variation in stance, such analyses suffer from the limitation of articulating and imposing their own account and explanation of what is unraveling. As persuasive and well-argued as these accounts of

stancetaking may appear, including the one presented here, they neglect to incorporate the experiences and narratives of the interlocutors in the conference setting. Rather than giving interlocutors a voice about their understanding of the conference in which they have participated, these accounts exercise and practice a voice for them, denying the actual participants the opportunity of giving an account of the behaviors in which they have engaged, the needs and desires they may have harbored, and the empowerment or lack thereof they may have gained. By speaking for the experience of the interlocutors, this study and others may suffer from inordinate epistemological certitude and constitute its own form of marginalization of these populations.

The inclusion of self-reporting data, such as interviews or surveys, would instead empower participants by embracing rather than ignoring their voices and experiences. Such additional information, spoken and created by the research participants, would perhaps illuminate or problematize the analysis made, challenging or adding nuancing to the narrative that has been generated and given. Indeed, considering the reality of conferences as lived by these students and the teacher from their own perspectives may amount to the adoption and practice of counterstorytelling as a research method. A qualitative research method developed in Critical Race Theory, counterstorytelling involves the narration of those on the margins, of those whose stories have been dismissed or ignored, and challenges the dominant and standard accounts that pervade within society and academic writing (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

A counterstory presented by students would add nuance, ambiguity, and questions to the account given of the discourse of conferences. We may realize the overwhelming challenges and issues experienced as students navigate writing in an L2, a reality that compels them to consider the teacher a resource for success and proficiency. We may realize the confusion and ambivalence of the teacher as she faces the various needs of the students that come before, trying

to balance what constitutes best pedagogy and writing and what her students need and desire, what has been asserted to be best practice and what the immediate situation before her seems to demand. The accounts presented for the discourse of the students and the teacher in these conferences, it is probable, lack the imagination, richness, empathy, and compassion that such counterstories may provide and enable.

Another tenet of Critical Race Theory that may better inform and refine the analysis of stancetaking in conferences is intersectionality. A focus on one-dimensional categories, while convenient, overlooks the possibility that identities intersect and act together. Future research should also acknowledge that identities are not isolated and autonomous; instead, they interweave and are interwoven with, influence and are influenced by other roles we play and fill. This study and much other research may neglect to account for and consider how multiple social identities may converge and interact, fusing to affect experience and either empower or oppress in ways that one cannot reduce to merely one identity category (Crenshaw, 1991; Museus & Griffin, 2011). This study focused on native-speaking status, but could have also explored the role gender may play in the realization of stance.

As noted earlier in the literature review, women may use more devices from Pennebaker's (2011) pronoun-verb cluster than men, and Lakoff (1975) has advanced the controversial argument that women tend to be quieter, passive, and excessively polite in their language, due to the ways in which socialization and interaction have positioned them. The question then emerges how this difference found with gender may interact with the differences found with native-speaking status. One should not focus exclusively on native-speaking status in these conference contexts, but also consider how any variation found may interact with other variables, such as gender. Marginalization or empowerment in conference settings may ensue

from the intersection of these identity categories rather than from one in isolation. To focus on a single identity so would result in a narrow and reductionist analysis and interpretation of the data. A corpus-based analysis that acknowledges the reality of intersectionality will yield more accurate and nuanced results through affirming that native-speaking status, while it may play a strong influence, is not acting alone but rather in concert with other positions and identities held.

Table 8 shows the variation across the intersections of native-speaking status and gender.

Table 9

*Comparison of Frequencies for Students by Gender and Native-Speaking Status*

<u>Grammatical Device</u>	<u>NS-Male</u>	<u>NNS-Male</u>	<u>NS-Female</u>	<u>NNS-Female</u>
Possibility Modals	8.93	4.99	6.28	10.03
Necessity Modals	5.07	9.99	5.03	9.40
Certainty Verbs	2.65	2.14	2.30	1.25
Uncertainty Verbs	15.93	12.84	14.97	13.16
Hedging Adverbs	39.58	24.96	41.99	35.71
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Singular	101.59	89.16	89.94	98.37
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Plural	4.34	2.14	4.19	8.77
2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	15.93	17.83	19.27	9.40

A preliminary analysis of the use of stance devices and pronouns in the corpora of this study suggests that an intersectional analysis may prove fruitful and problematize assumptions and findings grounded solely on the basis of native-speaking status. Rather, one should analyze the frequency of devices through an intersectional framework so as to explore how multiple identities converge to affect the realization of stance and power in conference settings. The table shows variation that defies native-speaking status alone; instead, stark patterns converge at the intersections of native-speaking status and gender identity. Curious to note is that some of the devices traditionally associated with females, such as hedging (Lakoff, 1975) and greater use of the pronoun-verb cluster (Pennebaker, 2011), are more pronounced among NS males than NS females; these males attending the conferences appear to defy the gender-based expectations and patterns in pragmatics that previous research has found.

Defying and contradicting the normative patterns previously established in the literature, this variation among NSs may reflect and constitute an evolution into gendered subjectivities and possibilities in this particular context. These patterns subvert what previous research in sociolinguistics has ascertained as characterizing the genders. If, however, gender is a socially constructed and constitutive performance (Butler, 2006), then these NS students are linguistically realizing and performing gender differently and resignifying what these labels and categories may entail and encompass. Why and how this is happening merits consideration.

However, while the frequencies for NSs may challenge traditional gender-based expectations and behaviors in discourse, they do seem to hold more among the NNS corpus, in which devices for hedging are more prominent among the females. In addition, the first person plural, associated with we-statements, appears more with NNS females, while the second person, associated more with directly addressing the teacher, appears more with NNS males. Within these conferences, NSs seem to engage in stancetaking that contradicts what the previous literature has suggested with regard to gender, while NNSs may behave in ways that conform to the traditional expectations and norms for gendered language.

Due to the small sample size and unique context involved in this study, it is impossible to generalize about the use of these devices on an intersectional basis. Nevertheless, the differences that have been found at the intersections of native-speaking status and gender do merit and deserve further analysis and exploration in future research so as to ascertain the extent to which gender identification may affect the trajectory of conferences more than native-speaking status. In addition, such research may like to also analyze whether gender identity plays a role in the concerns discussed and covered in conferences.

Other variables besides gender may also influence the trajectory of stance in conferences. It has been asserted in previous literature in the field of literacy that a tolerance for ambiguity and a willingness to suspend closure characterize more proficient writers and readers (Blau, 2003). While these characteristics may emerge due to sociocultural contexts, they may also emerge on an individual level. Research could analyze the discourse of conferences with the consideration of this variable through the use of personality and psychological tests. Alongside a tolerance for ambiguity and a willingness to suspend closure, further research could account for the pedagogical practices of individual heritage languages and cultures. In so doing, one could better describe and analyze the variation found and avoid essentializing all NNSs as a monolithic group.

An analysis grounded in intersectionality would acknowledge that identities are neither autonomous nor static, but rather interacting and dynamic. In addition, as has been asserted in sociocultural theory, they may prove fluid: writers may come to exercise more agency, with the result that stance changes over the course of the writing process. Besides performing intersectional analysis of stance and tenor, future research may also like to incorporate a longitudinal analysis of the constructs. Because of the developmental trajectory of writing and the fact that writers may orient toward general assignment expectations before diving into higher-order concerns, stance positions may evolve and prove dynamic. The developmental nature of stance may indeed account for much of the variation that this study has identified as distinguishing NNSs from NSs.

In order to better understand the extent to which native-speaking status may indeed influence stancetaking in conferences, corpora may like to account for the progress of students throughout an assignment or class and consider including discourse from multiple points in their



work and learning. Such corpora could include a set of conferences taking place immediately after an assignment has been given and additional conferences or conversations with the teacher throughout the writing process and nearer completion. By controlling for the location of students in their work, such corpora may facilitate an analysis of not only the developmental trajectory of stance, but also help clarify the extent to which the variation found in this study may actually reflect differences on the basis of native-speaking status.

One last limitation of this study is the fact that the corpora it featured involved a number of student participants, but only one teacher participant. A dependence on a single participant for the teacher corpora prevents drawing any generalizable conclusions about how teachers may interact and construct stance with NS and NNS students respectively. The patterns found may more than anything display the idiosyncratic and individual characteristics and discursive and pedagogical habits of this teacher rather than general patterns in positioning and power dynamics. Through the construction of a corpus from multiple teachers' conferences, one may gain the ability to draw firmer conclusions about the discourse of teachers with NS and NNS students.

Besides more firmly analyzing the discourse of teachers on the basis of the native speaking status of students, one may also analyze the discourse of the teachers on the basis of their own identities. The teacher featured in this study, a native-speaking female, could differ from males and non-native speakers. One could analyze the intersections of these identities in the realization of stance and power in conferences. This study has found some patterns in the discourse of the teacher, but further work and inquiry could take place to account for these considerations. A more expansive and representative corpus of teachers' output would lead to

more generalizable, nuanced, and multifaceted conclusions. The discourse of teachers with these students remains an important concern to discuss and keep in mind.

### **Implications for educators**

As conferences are a common and pivotal part of composition classes, the patterns in stancetaking and tenor that this study has described may assist and inform the work of teachers as they engage with individual students over the writing process. Conferences are always a site to which students bring diverse needs, questions, and expectations and thus are thought to serve as a place that offers more personalized and individualized instruction. However, the patterns in the use of stance devices suggest that there are patterns and dispositions that characterize conferences with NSs and NNSs. Though alleged to be idiosyncratic and distinct, conferences share with one another the reality of stancetaking, power dynamics, and their relationship with the concerns discussed.

NNSs and NSs may differ from each other in multiple but overlapping ways in terms of the specific communicative needs they have and bring to the conference setting. Not as proficient and fluent in their L2, still developing in their interlanguages, NNSs may undergo more anxiety and concern about lower-order matters and show less proficiency with the lexical bundles and formulaic and automatic expressions that characterize spoken grammatical English. Besides the linguistic differences that distinguish these populations, teachers may also wish to remember that these students come from a variety of educational backgrounds and experiences that socialize within various epistemologies and pedagogies.

In order to understand and address these linguistic and pedagogical differences effectively, teachers may wish to educate both themselves and their students about them. Students may benefit from understanding how composition classes and the writing process differ

from the previous classes they have had and appreciate the basis for and reality of the orientation toward uncertainty, confusion, and openness that characterizes communicative success in Western education (Blau, 2003). Furthermore, students could gain insight and proficiency from more exposure to the behaviors and practices overwhelmingly typical and seemingly automatic in spoken grammatical English, including some of the devices that have been analyzed in this study, such as the polysemous *like*.

As for teachers, an awareness of these linguistic and pedagogical differences can facilitate an increased understanding and consideration of the behaviors that students may display and practice in conferences. By keeping in mind these differences that reflect these students' L1 and C1 and their academic and communicative performance and needs in an L2 and C2, a teacher may better serve and help these students as they navigate their own unique learning and writing situations. While an orientation toward lower-order concerns and a reliance on the teacher as an informant may contradict what are held to be best practices, allowing for, accepting, and adjusting to these facts thoughtfully and prudently may contribute to successful work with these students and ultimately empower them to succeed as writers. Accommodating for the unique needs and backgrounds of these students should not take precedence over these best practices; teachers should still aspire to bring their students' minds and attentions to higher-order concerns and to engage with them as much as possible in the tenuousness and ambiguity that is inherent to the act of making meaning. Therefore, a dynamic, thoughtful, and complex practice should inform and guide the work of the teacher.

An appropriate and effective practice for teachers to adopt and practice would consider the unique needs and contexts of the students present. While it would consider their overall situations linguistically and pedagogically, it would also consider the necessities and possibilities

of the assignment at hand as well. As a result, if any pedagogical praxis emerges for teachers to use from this study, it is not one that contains straight-forward answers but rather one that continues to pose and generate questions that vary and change across and within individual students' work. Acknowledging the dynamic and ecological nature of stancetaking and power dynamics in the conference setting, such a praxis would evolve and adapt continuously on the basis of the needs of the student and the assignment. There is not, nor should there be, a firm answer to the question posed by Williams (2004) regarding the efficacy of providing or eliciting information.

If teachers should modify their practice in any way, it is not through seeking to modify the output of their students to include more hedging adverbs and fewer necessity modals. It is rather through recognizing the unique locations of students in the writing process, using stancetaking and the concerns discussed as a means to ascertain where students are and assisting them to travel further in their respective journeys. The end of such a praxis should not involve necessarily immediate changes in stancetaking and the devices used; rather, such a praxis would seek to empower and enable students in their unique Zones of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980). Within such a praxis, more horizontal stance positions, reflecting a relationship grounded in contact rather than status, are desirable but not the end in and of themselves. A change in tenor should emerge from, rather than precede and dictate, changes in the field, the evolution of writers as they work. To take the former as the means of achieving the latter may disenfranchise and do a disservice to students.

Such a praxis of cultivating horizontal stancetaking indirectly rather than directly, of cultivating writers before level power dynamics, is neither simple nor clear. Thus, a critical and reflective praxis should inform our work as teachers. Such a praxis would account for

all of the ecological variables that face our students: their backgrounds, their needs, the assignment, and more. By considering and accommodating for all of these factors, such a praxis would never embrace absolute principles and strategies but rather, like stance itself, evolve and prove multifaceted. Teachers working with students would understand the interaction of these variables in influencing the location of the student and apply their wisdom and knowledge as educators in deciding the most appropriate and efficacious practice for the idiosyncratic situation before them. Stancetaking, writing, and pedagogy are all ecologically situated. They constitute states more than they do traits. To pretend otherwise would limit and constrain our students and our practice.

### **Closing remarks on the value of confusion**

This study has identified variation in stancetaking and tenor among NSs and NNSs. While the differing frequencies in the use of stance devices are important to consider, it has been argued that they also tend to reflect and derive from different functions and concerns in the writing process. Because of this, it was asserted that the variation in stancetaking and tenor may correspond with variation in the concerns discussed in the writing conferences. Stancetaking is a dynamic and ecologically situated behavior and not contingent solely upon native-speaking status, though one's language background may affect the constructs discussed. As much as these differences may present intriguing possibilities for differences between NSs and NNSs, it is crucial to remember that these differences are more a matter of degree than kind and that the variation constitutes less of a dichotomy than it does a spectrum.

What this study has found is that more dialogic conferences, in which heteroglossic and multiple voices approach writing with more ambivalence and uncertainty, tend to feature more possibilities for writers and emphasize higher-order concerns more. In contrast, less dialogic

conferences, in which the teacher might dominate and explicit and certain observations and directions are rendered, tend to contain fewer options and focus on lower-order concerns. While certainty and lower-order concerns may foster one form of stancetaking, uncertainty and higher-order concerns may foster another. This study has asserted that the linguistic instantiation of confusion may demonstrate writers more advanced and developed in their work, while the instantiation of clarity and necessity may indicate writers only beginning the process of making meaning. As writers advance in their work, rather than achieving clarity, they may lose themselves in a complex terrain of options and landscape of potential directions.

For NNSs, coming from cultures that may neither appreciate nor value a willingness to suspend closure and a tolerance for ambiguity, this confusion may prove to be an especially challenging component of Western educational discourse and practice. To pursue and cultivate confusion is something that these and other students may consider to be in direct conflict with the goal of educating oneself. Despite this fact, we should remember and acknowledge in our research and practice that “confusion often represents an advanced state of understanding” (Blau, 2003, p. 21). In terms of successful performance with literacy, the goal is not to achieve clarity and simplicity but instead to continuously think, to wonder, and to question. As Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956) would hold, what we do with all our students should enable them to practice and engage in this increased cognition and processing. As is the case with our practice with students, this study did not find clear answers with regard to the origin of stancetaking and its variation among NSs and NNSs. Rather than finding answers, it found more questions, a fact that is not interpreted as a failure. Rather, the tenuous and complex conclusions of this study align and are consistent with the tenuous and complex thinking that we would like to see in our students.

“The advancement of learning is often not marked by an accretion of answers and growth in certitude, but by the lessening of certitude and the addition of questions where there had formerly been answers” (Blau, 2003, p. 46).

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## APPENDIX A. CERTAINY AND UNCERTAINTY VERBS

Table 4

*Full List of Certainty and Uncertainty Verbs Identified Manually in Corpus*

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<u>Category</u>	<u>Members</u>
Certainty	<i>(be) certain, (be) confident, (be) sure, believe, bet, don't believe, doubt, figure, get, know, realize, see, understand</i>
Uncertainty	<i>(be) not certain, (be) not confident, (be) not sure, (be) uncertain, (be) unsure, (be) wondering, don't get, don't know, don't see, don't think, don't understand, feel (like), guess, suppose, think, wonder</i>

NOTE: Grammatical variation of these forms, such as *I am guessing*, were included.

## APPENDIX B. ADDITIONAL TABLES FOR WORD FREQUENCIES

Table 5

### *Comparison of Overall Frequencies (Per 1000 Words) for Conferences*

<u>Grammatical Device</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Teacher</u>	<u>T/S</u>
Possibility Modals	7.19	12.92	1.797
Necessity Modals	5.87	5.80	0.987
Certainty Verbs	2.28	3.15	1.382
Uncertainty Verbs	14.86	6.25	0.421
Hedging Adverbs	39.36	11.10	0.282
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Singular	93.57	39.95	0.427
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Plural	4.49	5.71	1.272
2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	17.37	69.18	3.982

Table 6

### *Comparison of Frequencies (Per 1000 Words) for Students*

<u>Grammatical Device</u>	<u>NS</u>	<u>NNS</u>	<u>NS/NNS</u>
Possibility Modals	7.08	7.67	0.923
Necessity Modals	5.04	9.67	0.521
Certainty Verbs	2.41	1.67	1.445
Uncertainty Verbs	15.26	13.01	1.173
Hedging Adverbs	41.26	30.69	1.344
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Singular	93.46	94.06	0.994
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Plural	4.24	5.67	0.747
2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	18.25	13.34	1.368

Table 7

### *Comparison of Frequencies (Per 1000 Words) for Teacher*

<u>Grammatical Device</u>	<u>NS</u>	<u>NNS</u>	<u>NS/NNS</u>
Possibility Modals	12.61	13.59	0.928
Necessity Modals	5.51	6.40	0.861
Certainty Verbs	3.15	3.14	1.005
Uncertainty Verbs	7.03	4.57	1.537
Hedging Adverbs	12.24	8.62	1.420
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Singular	41.33	36.97	1.118
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Plural	5.58	6.01	0.928
2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	69.63	68.20	1.021



Table 8

*Comparison of Teacher/Student by Native-Speaking Status*

<u>Grammatical Device</u>	<u>NS</u>	<u>NNS</u>	<u>All</u>
Possibility Modals	1.780	1.771	1.797
Necessity Modals	1.095	0.662	0.987
Certainty Verbs	1.308	1.880	1.382
Uncertainty Verbs	0.461	0.352	0.421
Hedging Adverbs	0.297	0.281	0.282
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Singular	0.442	0.393	0.427
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Plural	1.316	1.060	1.272
2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	3.814	5.112	3.982
# of Words	1.205	2.553	1.764
# of WPM	1.77	2.55	1.92