The University of Southern Queensland

SECOND LANGUAGE POSTGRADUATE WRITERS IN THEIR ACADEMIC COMMUNITY: LINKS BETWEEN DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE AND WRITING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Academic standards in higher education require that all students, including L2 students, are able to write fluently, accurately, clearly, and logically. At postgraduate level, students' competence in written communication depends on appropriate knowledge and use of the discipline-specific genre, plus awareness of the convention-specific phrasing in the discipline. In addition, students need to develop critical thinking and conceptual abilities to satisfy the faculty demands. This research aims to articulate the strong interdependence between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills at postgraduate level. Specifically, this study provides a more explicit description of the role of discourse knowledge and writing skills in academic writing in the business sector. It also provides insights into the skills and challenges of L2 postgraduate writers and their inclusion in their academic community through their writing practice.

The two main methods of data collection were: (i) in-depth interviews with students and their course lecturer, and (ii) text analysis of electronic corpora of two written assignments. These methods were chosen (a) to explore students' perceptions of the writing process and composing strategies in their academic writing production, and (2) to identify key rhetorical components recognising the complexity of the interaction among literacy and disciplinary elements in post-graduate writing.

Exploration of the students' and lecturer's perceptions about the students' writing practices as second language writers indicated students' experiences, difficulties, worries, weaknesses, strengths and learning processes. Their perceptions clarified the relationship between disciplinary knowledge about Management and Organisational Behaviour and successful writing skills.

Findings of this study led researcher to propose two new models: one is based on theoretical principles of academic writing in a discipline and the second addresses

specific applications in second language learning and teaching. The first, *"A model for L2 postgraduate writing process: A metadiscourse perspective''* identifies the factors involved in the writing process including the metadiscourse of academic writing (Hyland, 1998, 1999a, 2001a, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). The second is "A *model of learning academic writing: the second language writing process at post-graduate level"*. This second model involves the stages of knowledge development for a writer in the discipline to be accepted in the academic community. The latter model illustrates the functions, context, the role and relevance of writing within the discourse practices of an academic community.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analysis, and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

______________________________	______________________________
Signature of Candidate	**Date**

ENDORSEMENT

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Signature of Principal Supervisor	**Date**

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Signature of Associate Supervisor	**Date**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... **ii**

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS ..... **iv**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **v**

DEDICATION ..... **vi**

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **vii**

LIST OF TABLES ..... **x**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **xi**

Chapter 1 Introduction **1**

1.1 Overview 1
1.2 Motivation for this research 1
1.3 Background to the research problem 2
1.4 Research questions 3
1.5 Purpose of the study 4
1.6 Justification and importance of the research 5
1.7 Methodology 6
1.8 Organisation of the thesis 7
1.9 Definition of terms 8
1.10 Delimitations of the study 11
1.11 Conclusions 11

Chapter 2 Literature Review **12**

2.1 Introduction 12
2.2 Second language writing 14
2.2.1 Second language writing: a cognitive and linguistic skill 16
2.2.2 Second language writing in academic literacies 38
2.3 Theory and practice of academic writing 42
2.3.1 Writing demands at postgraduate level for L2 students 44
2.3.2 Difficulties in writing at postgraduate level for L2 students 47
2.3.3 Students' needs in L2 academic writing 51
2.3.4 Disciplinary knowledge and specific genre in textual meanings 57
2.4 Metadiscourse in academic writing 59
2.4.1 Contextual factors 60
2.4.2 Linguistic features 64
2.4.3 Motivational factors 72
2.4.4 Cognitive factors 73
2.5 A Model of L2 academic writing process 75
2.6 Conclusions 79

Chapter 3 Methodology **81**

3.1 Introduction 81
3.2 Research design 82

3.2.1 Stages of the research design ... 83
3.2.2. Qualitative method: in-depth interviews ... 89
3.2.3. Quantitative method: text analysis ... 92
3.4 Qualitative and quantitative inquiries ... 94
3.4.1 Analysis of interviews ... 94
3.4.2 Analysis of corpora ... 96
3.5 Reliability and validity ... 100
3.6 Conclusions ... 102
Chapter 4 Results ... 103
4.1 Introduction ... 103
4.2 Processes and composing strategies in academic writing ... 104
4.2.1 What makes a good assignment? ... 104
4.2.2 Process or processes ... 109
4.2.3 Composing strategies ... 111
4.2.4 Difficulties or worries for L2 students ... 114
4.2.5 Composition difficulties or worries in L2 academic writing ... 117
4.2.6 Students' concerns about their reader in L2 academic writing ... 120
4.3 Learning through academic writing ... 122
4.3.1 Strengths of L2 students ... 124
4.3.2 Weaknesses of L2 students ... 125
4.4 Deployment of linguistic features in academic writing ... 127
4.4.1 Pronouns ... 129
4.4.2 Logical connectors ... 139
4.4.3 Modal verbs ... 149
4.5 Conclusions ... 152
Chapter 5 Discussion ... 154
5.1 Introduction ... 154
5.2. Processes and composing strategies used in L2 academic writing ... 155
5.2.1 Analysing assignments ... 155
5.2.2 Process or processes in L2 disciplinary writing ... 161
5.2.3 Composing strategies in L2 disciplinary writing ... 166
5.3 Enhancing learning ... 185
5.4 Students' use of discourse features in academic writing ... 188
5.4.1 Presence and identity in academic writing ... 189
5.4.2 Writer's attitude through academic writing ... 196
5.4.3 Tentativity in academic writing ... 203
5.5 Proposing a new model of academic writing in a discipline ... 206
5.6 Conclusions ... 211
Chapter 6 Conclusions and Implications ... 212
6.1 Introduction ... 212
6.2 Overview of the research ... 213
6.3 Summary of the research method ... 214
6.4 Summary of the main findings ... 215
6.4.1 L2 students' processes and composing strategies: development of academic writing skills in a disciplinary field ... 215
6.4.2 Learning while writing assignments ... 219

6.4.3 Deployment of interpersonal features: metadiscourse in students' disciplinary texts ... 219
6.4.4 Linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features in academic writing ... 220
6.5 Limitations of the research ... 221
6.6 Research implications ... 222
6.6.1 Implications for theory ... 222
6.6.2 Implications for practice ... 224
6.6.3 Implications and recommendations for further research ... 226
6.7 Conclusions ... 228
References ... 230

Appendices ... 242

Appendix A Learning strategies in a writing process ... 242
Learning Strategy ... 242
Appendix B Communication strategies in a writing process ... 243
Appendix C Research Consent Form ... 244
Appendix D Interview-questionnaires ... 245
Appendix E Examples of categorisation ... 247
Appendix F Discourse markers - Pronouns ... 248
Appendix G Discourse markers - logical connectors ... 249
Appendix H Discourse markers – Modals ... 250

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3 1 Discourse markers selected for text analysis 98
Table 4.2: Process or processes in assignment writing (n=7)....................109
Table 4.3: Composing strategies in assignment writing (n=7)....................112
Table 4.4: Difficulties or worries in the writing process (N = 7) 114
Table 4.5: Composing difficulties in the writing process (N = 7)....................117
Table 4.6: Students' writing concerns about their reader (N = 7)....................120
Table 4.7 : Learning aspects during assignment writing (N = 7) 122
Table 4.8: Students' strengths in academic writing (N = 7)....................124
Table 4.9: Students' weaknesses in academic writing (N = 7)....................125
Table 4.10: Discourse markers selected for text analysis....................128
Table 4.11: Discourse markers 1 - Pronouns....................130
Table 4.12: Discourse markers 2- Logical connectors 141
Table 4.13: Discourse Markers 3 – Modal Verbs....................150

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Outline of Chapter 2, with section numbers and their interrelations 13
Figure 2.2 A proposed framework of communicative competence integrating the four skills adapted from (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006a) 26
Figure 2.3 Components of communicative language ability in communicative language use (Bachman, 1990, p. 81) 35
Figure 2.4 A model of language use proposed by Bachman (1990, p. 103) 37
Figure 2.5 Factors of academic writing in tertiary education, derived from a review of the literature 43
Figure 2.6 Metadiscourse components in L2 postgraduate writing (developed from a review of the literature). 60
Figure 2.7 Cognitive factors in a writing process (Developed from a review in literature). 74
Figure 2.8 Model for the L2 postgraduate writing process: a metadiscourse perspective (Developed from a review of the literature) 76
Figure 3.1 Outline of Chapter 3, with section numbers and their interrelations 82
Figure 3.2 Stages of the research design 84
Figure 5.1 Personal markers creating a writer and reader interaction and engagement. 191
Figure 5.2 A new holistic model: writing process of a L2 disciplinary text (Developed from this study) 210
Figure 6.1. Outline of Chapter 6, with section numbers and their interrelations 212

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter introduces different aspects of this research, starting with the motivation and presentation of the research problem (Section 1.2). In Section 1.3, the study is contextualised by establishing a theoretical background to the research problem. The main research question and sub-questions are identified in Section 1.4, followed by the research objectives in Section 1.5. A justification for this study is provided in Section 1.6, highlighting the main scholarly contributions and importance of this research. Later, the methodology used to collect and analyse the data in relation to the research purposes is briefly described and justified (Section 1.7). A brief description of the following thesis chapters is provided in Section 1.8, with key terms defined in Section 1.9. Finally, the limitations of scope for this research are explained (Section 1.10) and the conclusions of this chapter are presented (Section 1.11).

1.2 Motivation for this research

The research problem was to explore the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in second language postgraduate writing. Both personal and professional were the interests and motivation that moved the researcher to look for the solution of this research problem. As a non-English postgraduate student (NNPS), I have faced difficulties in writing academic papers in my discipline, and similarly, I have met other NNPS who have also faced difficult situations when they have been asked to produce their academic papers in their professions. This personal worry combined with my professional interest as a linguist led to a desire to add to the body of my knowledge and understanding about matters such as academic knowledge, second language (L2) competence, second language (L2) performance and academic writing in a postgraduate context. Exploring these areas led me to achieve the goals of this study and thus to contribute to current

understandings of the link between specific discipline content, L2 students' language production, and the writing skills at postgraduate level.

1.3 Background to the research problem

Last decade literature indicates that tertiary institutions focus almost exclusively on literacy skills, mostly on writing, and particularly on strictly academic writing (Candlin & Plum, 1999; Leki, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1994; Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, & Waschauer, 2003; Zamel, 1998b; Zhu, 2004a). Research also suggests that L2 writing skill is usually employed by students for various academic or professional purposes (Hyland, 2003). However one problem students find at university is related to the rich and complicated notion of language, where students have to recognise what language involves, and how it responds to the context in order to express something meaningful (Zamel, 1998b).

At postgraduate level, most students are conducting research in various forms, reporting results of their studies or completing other writing tasks in styles appropriate to and understood to other members of their discipline (Riazi, 1997). Zhu (2004a) states that what students need to write, mainly in upper division undergraduate and graduate level courses at university, is typically related to their disciplines. Further, Zhu (2004b) observes that research on writing in academic contexts has also highlighted the functions of writing, the context for writing, and the crucial role that writing ability plays in helping students to understand and learn the discourse practices of their discipline community. The important role of academic writing in terms of the values placed on communicating with other members of the academic community has also been found in graduate contexts. In this context, students need to learn how to write using appropriate discourse conventions in order to achieve their domain-specific knowledge (Riazi, 1997).

In many disciplines, discourse conventions are not directly taught, but may be implicit features and assumptions students learn through reading and writing practices in their field (Hansen, 2000; Lillis & Tuner, 2001). In an academic context, the process of accessing the disciplinary community and understanding

its metadiscourse implies several aspects that academic writers have to recognise and work with. Among those aspects are the discipline knowledge writers are dependant of, the language competence they have to develop, and the writing practices of the relevant discourse community they have to deal with (Dahl, 2004) . Metadiscourse, in this case, is the social interaction between writer and reader (Hyland, 2001a, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Thompson, 2001). It is understood as that discourse that goes further than and above the actual content of the simple propositional information being presented.. It indicates to readers how they may "organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react" to information presented in the text (Ifantidou, 2005, p. 1326).

In addition, it is important to point out that in a disciplinary environment, learning a language involves communicating with other people and thus demands not only use of suitable cognitive skills but also certain social and communicative skills (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Ellis, 1994; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c; M. Williams & Burden, 1997a)

In general, at postgraduate level, L2 students' perceptions, understandings, goals and social aspects interact with the specific and particular local culture of writing tasks in their specialised discipline to form a process where students may develop their disciplinary literacy in their second language (Riazi, 1997). These theoretical aspects provide the basis for the milestones proposed at the beginning of this study.

1.4 Research questions

Cognitive approaches to the writing process, academic writing and literacies, writing skills in discipline-specific genres as well as the metadiscourse in second language postgraduate writing have been discussed only recently in the literature by a considerable number of researchers. However, the literature has not paid enough attention to the link between those strategies that non-native English students apply in their disciplinary writing and their final disciplinary production. More particularly, few research studies show how postgraduate students develop

the ability to use discipline-specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions to perform as writers in their particular discourse communities. Consequently, this research project attempts to answer the following research question:

What is the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in second language postgraduate writing?

More precisely, the four sub-questions asked to address this question were:

1. What kind of process or processes and composing strategies do Non-Native English postgraduate students (NNPS) in the study employ in order to improve their academic literacy and develop academic writing skills in their disciplinary field?
2. What do the participants in the study think they learn while writing their assignment texts?
3. How do NNPS perceive and engage with their disciplines through deployment of interpersonal features of their texts?
4. What linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features are recognised in NNPS' writing?

The above sub-questions describe the main objectives of this study. The answers to these four questions will provide an understanding of the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills applied in the second language writing activities of postgraduate students. The research findings will indicate L2 postgraduate students' ability to use discipline-specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions in a specific discourse community.

1.5 Purpose of the study

By identifying and examining the link between disciplinary knowledge and the writing skills Non-Native English postgraduate students (NNPS) applied when they were producing their academic papers, it was possible to establish the significance of that relationship between the content knowledge that the students had about a particular discipline (in this case Management and Organisational

Behaviour) and the written strategies and genres required of them in that specific discipline to produce their academic papers.

In addition, exploring the link between disciplinary knowledge and academic writing showed that specific disciplinary courses require students to have not only discipline-specific knowledge, but also appropriate knowledge of the communication strategies required for shared understanding within their discipline community. Such communication strategies in a discipline require students to use different academic literacies, which involve, among others, particular language demands, specific writing requirements, precise communicative conventions, and explicit discipline-specific terminology. As consequence, findings of this study indicated different aspects that are involved in academic text production at postgraduate level. Students, EAP teachers, course lecturers and course planners need to know more about the relationship between course design, production and assessment of writing tasks in the discipline.

1.6 Justification and importance of the research

With increasing numbers of international students enrolling in universities in English speaking countries such as Australia, an analysis of the processes that non-English postgraduate students (NNPS) are acquiring, developing and applying in their academic literacy and written discourse becomes crucial to understand how these students develop their academic literacies in different academic disciplines. This study attempts to identify the relevance of linguistic and non-linguistic factors associated with NNPS writing in discipline-specific contexts, that is, the metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. It draws upon and extends the work of researchers such as Hyland (2004b), who observes that metadiscourse analysis "is particularly important at advanced levels of academic writing as it is represents writers' attempts to present and negotiate propositional information in ways that are meaningful and appropriate to a particular discipline community".

In particular, the research findings should help to explain the links between L2 teaching and learning processes, linguistic, non-linguistic, discursive and rhetorical factors, and L2 competence and performance potentially involved in writing processes of NNPS. Thus, further to Hyland's work, this research informs development of strategies, methods, and curricula to assist not only postgraduate students, but also undergraduate students in their disciplinary writing.

The findings should also increase the tertiary education lecturer's understanding of the students' L2 academic writing process and perhaps shed light on some of the beliefs underlying writing practices and instructions in content courses. This, in turn, could provide valuable information for academic literacy instruction in the English for academic purposes (EAP) context. This study identified aspects that have not been widely explored regarding second language writing production in the discipline of business management.

1.7 Methodology

As previously indicated, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with students and their lecturer in the Master of Business Administration – International Business (MBA) at The University of Southern Queensland (USQ). Further data were collected through detailed text analysis of L2 assessment produced by seven students participating in the study. The methodology was chosen to provide insight into both the MBA writing genre and the ways L2 writers negotiate their interpersonal demands in their roles as postgraduate students in that particular discipline.

The design for this study was conceptualised in three stages (see Figure 3.2 in Chapter 3). Stage one was related to the relevant literature review and indentifying relationships amongst theoretical concepts associated with the research topic. This relationship helped the researcher to explain and support the present L2 writing model. Stage one also implied the selection of the corpora program to be used in the study to make the text analysis of the students' assignments, which provided the quantitative data of the study. Stage two covered the design and development

of the face-to-face interviews and the collection of participants' texts, which allowed the qualitative data collection of the study. The interviews were conducted with the students after their assignments submission and the interview with the course teacher was made at the end of the course. Finally, in stage three, the interpretation of the results from the qualitative method (open-ended interviews) and quantitative method (text corpora) provided the results of this study, which led to the development of the L2 writing model at tertiary level.

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. A brief description of each of them is given below:

Chapter 1 introduces the background, purposes, justification and importance, methodology, definition of terms, and delimitation of scope for the research.

Chapter 2 conceptualises the theoretical principles to be considered in this study according to the research questions. Concepts and models concerning L2 writing skill, L2 communicative competence, academic writing, disciplinary knowledge, and metadiscourse at postgraduate level explained and contextualised through the literature review. *A model for L2 postgraduate writing process: A metadiscourse perspective* is proposed as a result of the analysis in the literature review.

Chapter 3 presents the research design for this study. Qualitative and quantitative approaches used to obtain the data for analysis are justified and explained in this research.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the qualitative and quantitative instruments used in this study. Findings from interviews are presented in tables, where a categorisation of the information was done, and results from the corpora analysis are indicated through statements selected from the students' written productions. The results are presented according to the four specific questions created to inform the primary research question (Refer to 1.4 Research questions).

Chapter 5 presents the analysis and discussion of the key findings of the study in relation to the proposed research questions and the existing literature on topics directly related to the research objectives. As a result of the discussion a new holistic and theoretical model is proposed: *writing process of an L2 disciplinary text.* This provides theoretical foundations to be considered in the L2 teaching-learning arena for constructing a disciplinary text in an L2 postgraduate context.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising findings and highlighting the theoretical and practical implications and contributions of the study. It also provides suggestions for further research.

1.9 Definition of terms

The key terms in this research are defined in this section to establish the meanings adopted in this study. These definitions attempt to minimise potential ambiguity where the same terms are used by other academics and practitioners.

Academic discourse is understood to be a specialised form of reading, writing and thinking done in the academy or other schooling situations (Zamel, 1998a).

Academic writing may be considered as "a process where an initial idea gets extended and refined, by approximating more closely and more accurately one's intended meaning" (Yasuda, 2004, p. 91).

Audience means those people who are outside of the text, but whom the authors have in mind when they construct their discourse, and make their rhetorical choices (Hansen, 2000; Hyland, 2001a, 2004b).

Communicative competence is an essential part of actual communication. It refers to both knowledge and skill in using this knowledge when a language user interacts in actual communication. Knowledge in this context means what one knows (consciously or unconsciously) about the language and about other aspects of communicative language use; skill means how well one can perform this knowledge in actual communication (Canale, 1983).

Communicative language ability (CLA) consists of "both the knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use" (Bachman, 1990, p. 84).

Communicative language use "involves a dynamic interaction between the situation, the language user, and the discourse, in which communication is something more than the simple transfer of information" (Bachman, 1990, p. 4).

Discourse community is a social group that shares behaviours and assumptions about language and its use (Blanton, 1998; Candlin & Plum, 1999).

Discourse markers are special words that not only have propositional meaning but fulfil pragmatic functions. They are discourse particles that must be analysed in terms of attitudes and expectations of the writer with respect to the propositional content and/or illocutionary force of text utterances (Risselada & Spooren, 1998).

Genre, under English for Specific Purposes (*ESP)* viewpoint, a genre comprises communicative events that are determined by particular purposes, which help to shape the structure, content and style to be used by the members of a particular discourse community. In this view, the purposes are the rationale of the genre (Bhatia, 1999; Hyland, 2002a; Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990)

Learning strategies "are specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language" (Oxford, 1999, p. 518)

Learning needs refer to what the learner needs to do in order to learn (Frodesen, 1995)

Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices which can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts (Tusting, 2000). New Literacy Studies (NLS) conceptualise literacy not in terms of skills and competencies, but as an integral part of social events and practices (Gee, 2000; Maybin, 2000).

Metadiscourse indicates that there is an author's linguistic and rhetorical manifestation in the text. Writers use social and functional aspects of the language in their discourse reflecting their attitudes and projecting themselves to their

possible readers, their audience, thus creating a text where writer and reader interact (Hyland & Tse, 2004a).

Metatext is understood as "text about text itself". It comprises those elements in the text which at least in their primary function go beyond the propositional content (Bunton, 1999, p. S43; Mauranen, 1993).

Second Language (L2) refers to the language that is learnt in a natural environment through communication that takes place in social situations or through study. The term 'second' generally refers to any language other than the first language (L1). L2 is frequently referred to in second language acquisition (SLA) (Asher, 1994; Ellis, 1994).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon whose theory might involve the description and explanation of the mechanism by which a learner moves from a state of not knowing *x* to a state of knowing *x*, where *x* is some aspect of an L2 (Asher, 1994).

Skill learning determines: contingencies; corrections; frequency effects; pattern abstraction; covariations between differential input and acquisition; and the continuity of development from the earliest to higher levels of language skills (Moerk, 2000a).

Strategies are tools for active and self-directed involvement that is necessary for developing communicative activity. They are especially important for language learning (Oxford, 1999). They are also defined by Ellis (1994)as the mental or behavioural activities that are related to some specific stage in the process of language acquisition or language use.

Target needs refer to what the learner needs to do in the target situation. These needs are categorised as necessities, lacks and wants (Frodesen, 1995).

Writing is "an engagement in a social process, where the production of the texts reflects methodologies, arguments and rhetorical strategies constructed to engage colleagues and persuade them of the claims that are made". It also helps to create a view of the world, influenced by the problems, social practices and ways of thinking of particular social groups (Hyland, 1999a, p. 100)

1.10 Limitations of the study

There were two main limitations of this study. The first limitation is related to the number of the student-participants. The data and analysis obtained from the investigation will not be representative of a larger population. Students' language competence and proficiency, cultural backgrounds, discipline areas and writing skills are different in nature, so each of them could provide elements to be analysed differently in a group of NNPS.

The second limitation refers to the sample, methods and processes, which were applied during the research: their findings will impact on the obtained theoretical models and implications. Thus, further research will be required to compare the results with other NNPS where the teaching and learning processes, students' perceptions of writings needs, teachers' perceptions of NNPS' productions, academic areas, cultural backgrounds and writing productions may be different.

1.11 Conclusions

In general, this chapter has introduced the research questions and sub-questions, which were investigated and led to achieving the research objectives of this study. This chapter has also laid the foundations of the study regarding its justification, importance and methodology from theoretical and practical perspectives. The definition of key research terms, the outline of the research structure and delimitations of the study were also briefly described in order to indicate their significant importance in the conclusion of this study. On these foundations, this thesis can now continue with an in depth description of the study starting with the literature in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research falls into the scope of second language (L2) writing and is particularly relevant to the identification of the link between writing skills in a second language and second language writing in the academic literacies context. Thus, this chapter firstly reviews the literature on the L2 writing process with a particular focus on L2 writing skills (section 2.2.1) and L2 writing in academic literacies (section 2.2.2). Then, literature on academic writing is examined in section 2.3 to determine writing demands for L2 writers at post graduate level (section 2.3.1), L2 students' difficulties in academic writing (section 2.3.2), students' needs in L2 academic writing (section 2.3.3), and disciplinary knowledge and specific genre in textual meanings (section 2.3.4). Metadiscourse literature in academic writing is then presented in section 2.4 to identify key elements: (a) contextual factors (audience, content and purpose in an academic writing process, section 2.4.1); (b) linguistic features (functional, rhetorical and discursive features in academic texts, section 2.4.2); (c) motivational factors (section 2.4.3): and (d) Cognitive factors in academic texts are presented in section 2.4.4. Finally, writing models are discussed and an academic writing model developed from literature in section 2.5 is used to discuss the results of this study. The proposed new model thus became one of the outcomes of the study. Figure 2.1 summarises the structure of this chapter.

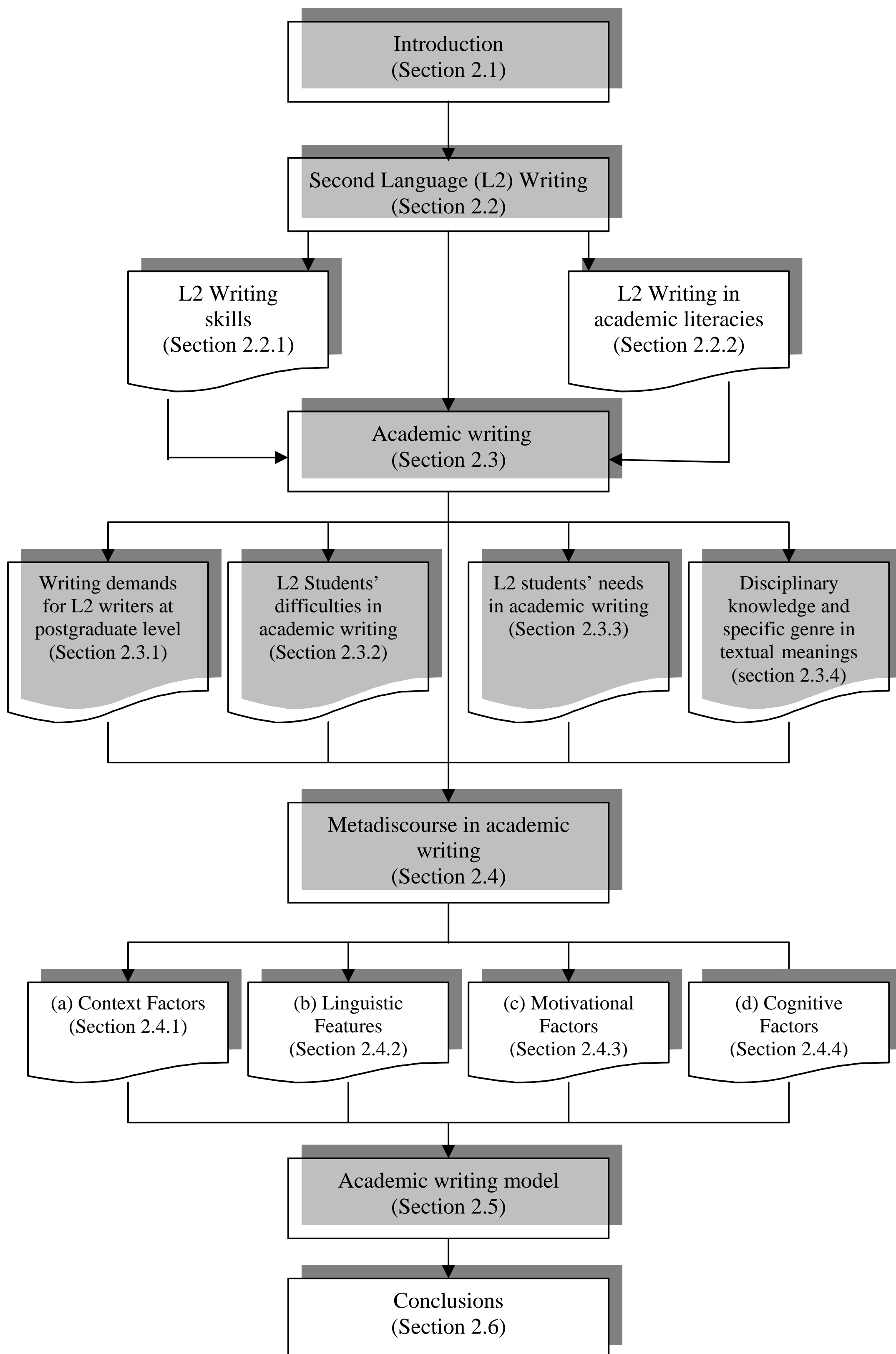

Figure 2.1 Outline of Chapter 2, with section numbers and their interrelations

This theoretical framework has been designed to identify the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in second language postgraduate writing. The concepts of L2 acquisition and academic writing are related to the L2 students' needs and difficulties. These are then applied of discipline knowledge and metadiscourse. By relating these concepts, this study aims to uncover the main and complex elements that build up writing academic production at postgraduate level and give answers to the research questions proposed for this research.

2.2 Second language writing

Literature identifies a difference between a second language (L2) and a foreign language. The difference depends entirely on the circumstances or context in which the language is learnt. In a foreign language context language learning takes place almost wholly in a classroom or in a self-instructional environment. The second language is not used extensively in the society outside the classroom so that language input is restricted to that provided in the classroom (or in self-instructional manual). In a second language learning context, the second language may be learnt in a formal context, such as a classroom, but it is also available for interaction outside the classroom, in wider society. Alternatively, in a second language context, the language might be learnt wholly from direct contact with the language users in society. This last case is often considered as the most natural way to learn a language and is frequently referred to as second language acquisition (SLA) (Asher, 1994). This study is principally based in the second language arena and it focusses on the second language writing process rather than second language product.

Second language writing-as-a-process, as opposed to a product approach, has been studied extensively in recent years. It has become a popular issue that spans both L2 writing theory and L2 instruction, thus requiring a theoretical foundation (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). In order to conceptualise this complex process of thinking, different studies have focussed on various L2 writing aspects. The

following list identifies the main aspects and some more pertinent studies: language competence and performance of L2 learners (Cumming, 1994, 1998; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996); L2 learners' proficiency (Jarvis, Grant, Bikowski, & Ferris, 2003); writing expertise and L2 proficiency (Cumming, 1994);L2 writers' needs (Gunning, 2002a, 2002b; Leki, 2003); English academic writing by non-native speakers (Braine, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1997; Marsella, Hilgers, & McLaren, 1992; Milton, 1999; Riazi, 1997); power and difference in L2 writing (Canagarajah, 2001; T Silva, 1993); L2 academic writing in tertiary education (Hamp-Lyons, 1990; Hyland, 2004b, 2005b; Johns, 1997, 2006; Lillis, 1997; Lillis & Tuner, 2001; Marsella, Hilgers, & McLaren, 1992; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Pecorari, 2006; Riazi, 1997; Samraj, 2004; Zamel, et al., 1998); structural and textual features of genres within and across academic disciplines as well as different relationships between the reader and the writer in various discourse communities (Chang & Swales, 1999; Conrad, 1996; Hyland, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2001b, 2002a, 2003, 2004b; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b); L2 teaching practices (Belcher & Braine, 1995; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Frodesen, 1995; Johns, 1995; Matsuda, 1999; Matsuda et al., 2003; Ruddell, 2001); L2 teaching and learning models (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c); L2 writing process research and theory on L2 writing (Joan Eisterhold Carson, Carrel, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehn, 1990; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Grabe, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

In order to explore the process that L2 writers are involved in when engaged in academic writing, this study will analyse the theoretical foundations of existing linguistic approaches from the perspective of L2 students and their teacher in the disciplinary subject of Management and Organisational Behaviour. The study has two primary goals. The first is to explore the participants' perceptions related to the writing process and composing strategies in academic writing production. The second is to identify key rhetorical elements that present the complexity of L2 writing in the context of a postgraduate program, and to elaborate the demands of academic literacy in the discipline. Consequently, this chapter starts presenting two main conceptual backgrounds that will help explain the theoretical principles

underpinning academic writing. The first conceptual background is related to the concepts that explain L2 writing as a cognitive and linguistic skill, while the second conceptual background is related to the concepts that explain the L2 writing process as an integral part of academic literacies.

2.2.1 Second language writing: a cognitive and linguistic skill

To explain L2 writing as a cognitive and linguistic skill it is necessary to review what many theorists and academics have presented about this matter. Generic definitions of skill are (1) “the ability that comes from knowledge, practice, aptitude, etc., to do something well”; and (2) “competent excellence in performance; expertness; dexterity” ("Macquarie Dictionary," 2005). In line with these definitions, Proctor & Dutta (1995, p. 1) state that “skilled behaviour is fundamental to all human activities”. For them, most of the everyday skills require coordination of processes of perception, cognition, and action, which together determine skilled performance across different kinds of tasks. For the purpose of this research, cognitive skills are especially studied in order to understand and explain the second language acquisition processes in general and L2 writing skills principles in particular under a cognitive and linguistic perspective.

2.2.1.1 Learning and language teaching: Cognitive theories

The term ‘cognitive’ refers to cognition, or mental activity, which describes the acquisition, storage, transformation and use of knowledge. Cognition includes a wide range of mental processes that operate every time one acquires some kind of information, places it in storage, then transforms that information, and later uses it purposely. Cognition is predominantly expressed by language (Matlin, 2002).

To explain the language development from a psychological viewpoint it is necessary to present an overview of the psychological theories that have informed practices and principles in language learning and language teaching. Gentner & Loewenstein (2002) indicate that traditional theories of cognitive development

can be grouped into four categories: *behaviourist, constructivism, the Vygotsky´s constructivism or social-interactionist and the nativist theories.*

Behaviourists (Skinner, 1957) believe that language develops using mechanisms of association and repeated responses to stimuli. These views about language development assume that language learning is not a problem-solving process, but a formation and performance of habits, where the principal impediment to learning is the interference from prior knowledge, where old habits interfere with the learning of new ones (Ellis, 1994). Chomsky (1957), from a linguistic viewpoint and rejecting the behaviourist approach to language acquisition, emphasised that mental processes were needed to understand and produce language. He stated that the structure of language was too complex to be explained in behaviourist terms. Along with Chomsky, many linguists have argued that humans have an inborn ability to master language. This idea has clearly contradicted the behaviourist principle that learning accounts for language acquisition (Matlin, 2002).

The second category of cognitive development is the constructivism (Piaget, and his followers). This approach postulates learning as internal, active, constructive and increasingly complex mental processes, which are achieved through learners' interactions with the world. Constructivism is characterised by different representational formats and logical operations, where the learning is meaning-based. Gentner and Loewenstein (2002) indicate that Vygotsky´s theory, as another constructivist approach, posits that cognition develops through a child's interactions with cultural and linguistic systems. This approach emphasises the importance of language in interacting with people; not only in terms of speech, but also in terms of signs and symbols. Thus, language becomes the main means to transmit culture, develop thinking and enhance learning. Learning in this sense lies in the nature of social interaction between two or more people with different levels of skill and knowledge (M. Williams & Burden, 1997b).

The fourth cognitive category mentioned by Gentner & Loewenstein (2002, p. 87) refers to a nativist approach, which "postulates that children possess nascent cognitive systems and theories that unfold through interaction with world". This approach proposes that, "there is a higher-order mental/cognitive function, called metacognition, which controls and manages the lower mental/cognitive functions. This enables the learners to self-regulate their learning and thinking, resulting in more effective and strategic learning and thinking" (Loke, 2003, p. 125).

In a cognitive approach, the learner is seen as an active participant in the learning process, using various mental strategies in order to organise and distinguish the system of the language to be learnt (M. Williams & Burden, 1997a). As mentioned before, in order to understand the second language acquisition (SLA) processes under a cognitive viewpoint, the above cognitive approaches should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. That is, each explains aspects of learning that if combined together can provide a wider illustration of how language learning takes place both externally through experience and interaction, and internally or mentally through active knowledge construction and internalisation (M. Williams & Burden, 1997a).

2.2.1.2 Learning and language teaching: Linguistic theories

Key approaches to language learning and teaching are presented below and should be viewed in relation to the aforementioned cognitive approaches. Therefore, theoretical views of language learning from a linguistic and psychological viewpoint provide the background to understand SLA principles from the behaviourist, the innatist or cognitivist/constructivist, and the interactionist theories: these correspond to the behaviourist, the mentalist, and the interactionist approaches distinguished by Ellis (1994). In short, understanding these theoretical linguistic and psychological approaches will help explain the nature and function of writing skills in a second language acquisition process.

On the one hand, Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006a) indicate that behaviourist theory is rooted in two parallel schools of thought, linguistics and psychology. In

linguistics, the nature of language learning follows the dominant psychology mainstream, that is, behaviourism. The structural-behaviourist approach (Bloomfield, 1933) considered that the target of language learning was to master all the elements of the system (language) and to learn rules by which these elements were combined, from phoneme to morpheme, to word, to phrase, to sentence. The learning of the rules was achieved by habit formation through repetition and reinforcement, by developing habitual responses to stimulus, by imitation or by memorisation.

On the other hand, Ellis (1994)explains that behaviourist theory proposes a direct relationship between input and output in an L2 acquisition process, where the idea of "mind" as an object for inquiry and the internal processing that takes place inside the learner are rejected. Thus, stimuli and feedback are part of the learners' input, and the learners' output is the language that they produce to receive any kind of feedback on their language production. Acquisition in behaviourist models is controlled by external factors, where the learner is seen as a passive medium. As mentioned in the behaviourist theory, from a psychological perspective, Chomsky (1965) and other linguists were against these psychological principles.

The innatist or cognitivist/constructivist theories, called by Ellis (1994) the mentalist theories of L2 acquisition, emphasise the role of innate knowledge, which takes the form of a language acquisition device that helps the learner to discover the rules of the target language grammar (Ellis, 1994). Asher (1994) states that this approach, in contrast to behaviourism, highlights the notion that the learner is an active and constructive individual, rather than a passive recipient of environmental stimulation. He also declares that a cognitivist approach includes recognition of the plans or strategies people use for thinking, remembering, and understanding and producing language. Within this approach, L2 learning is seen as the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill. In an SLA process various aspects of a task must be practised and integrated into fluent performance, and language learning demands the automatisation of component sub-skills. Thus, the cognitivist approach involves internal representations that regulate and guide

performance. In a language learning process, these representations are based on the language system and comprise procedures for selecting appropriate vocabulary, grammatical rules, and pragmatic conventions governing language use.

In line with the previous statements Chamot and O'Malley (1994) indicate that the strength of the cognitive approach in second language learning lies in four contributions. First, the theory allows researchers to describe the flexible and adaptive nature of language processing in both classroom and non-classroom settings, and it also lets them make statements about oral as well as written language skills. Second, the cognitive approach theory explains how knowledge and complex mental skills like a second language can be learnt, stored in memory, juxtaposed relative to first language knowledge and skills. Third, the theory can describe the role of learning strategies in all learning processes but also in a second language acquisition process. And fourth, the theory brings direct implications for instruction and for inclusion of strategies as part of the instruction.

Interactionist is the third linguistic theory to be described in this study to provide a complete theoretical background of second language learning. Ellis (1994, p. 243) states that the interactionist theory label has been applied to two rather different types of theory. In the first type of interactionist theory, the cognitive interactionist theories, "acquisition is seen as a product of a complex interaction of the linguistic environment and the learner's internal mechanisms, with neither viewed as primary". The second type of interactionist theory is more social in orientation. In these two types of theories, "the verbal interaction is of crucial importance for language learning as it helps to make the 'facts' of the L2 salient to the learner" (Ellis, 1994, p. 244). In an interactionist approach, language is acquired through, in and by interaction. It is an active and purposeful use of language for communication, interaction and socialisation with the assistance of and facilitation by the significant others (Loke, 2003).

Though this study associates cognitive theories and learning theories of language development to explain the writing skill development in a second language acquisition process, this research mainly bases the analysis of results and discussion of data on the perspective of the second type of interactionist theories abovementioned. Thus, this study is based on the premise that language learning underlines the domain of skill learning (Moerk, 2000a) where contingencies, corrections, frequency effects, pattern abstraction, covariations between differential input and acquisition, and the continuity of development from the earliest to higher levels of language skills are developed in social and communicative environments. In this milieu, writing skill is studied here in a socio-cultural context and the development of discourse analysis provides the theoretical foundations to understand the act of writing (Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor, & Palmer-Silveria, 2006).

To sum up, principles from cognitive theories and linguistic theories inform this study to understand and explain the writing skill as a process in terms of second language acquisition and academic literacies.

2.2.1.3 Writing in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

The theoretical background of the classroom, where L2 writing is taught, explains methods and approaches related to L2 teaching and learning models. These methods and approaches help to identify different concerns considered in the literature regarding L2 writing practices in the last two decades. These concerns seem appropriate, given that writing is an ability that is commonly developed in formal instructional settings, and is a skill most closely related to educational practices. However, it is necessary to recognise the development of L2 writing skills with an understanding of second language acquisition (SLA) because L2 competence enhances L2 writing ability in a fundamental way(Joan Eisterhold. Carson, 2001; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). To look at this relationship it is important to discuss first what SLA is.

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has come to mean different things depending on whether it takes place in either a naturalistic or an instructional setting (Ellis, 1994). A definition of SLA theory might involve the description and explanation of the mechanism by which a learner moves from a state of not knowing *x* to a state of knowing *x*, where *x* is some aspect of an L2 (Asher, 1994). "A cognitive theory of SLA seeks to explicate the mechanisms that underlie comprehension and production and the means by which that competence develops in the mind of the learner" (Harrington, 2002, p. 124). Accordingly, the goal of SLA is the description and explanation of the learner's linguistic or communicative competence, where aspects of the learner's usage or use of the L2 in actual performance are examined. Thus, SLA refers to all the aspects of language that the language learner needs to master, where the acquisition of an L2 feature may be considered when it is used for the first time or only when it can be used to a high level of accuracy and appropriateness (Ellis, 1985, 1994).

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to establish a relationship between theoretical concepts of SLA and L2 writing in terms of learners' competence and performance. Carson (2001) considers that while SLA theory aims to describe and explain the learners' competence, the L2 writing focusses on models of teaching and learning and is based on the learner's performance. According to Canale and Swain (1980) p.34) "communicative competence refers to both knowledge and skill in using this knowledge when interacting in actual communication". This viewpoint is rephrased by Canale (1983) who states that knowledge means what one knows about language and about other aspects of communicative language use; and the skill is related to the performance of this knowledge in a real communicative situation. That is, skill refers to how well one can perform the language knowledge in actual communication. Where actual communication is a preferred term to the earlier term performance or communicative performance used by Canale and Swain (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980).

In a further analysis regarding communicative competence Canale (1983) proposes that communicative competence is an essential part of actual communication but is reflected only indirectly, and sometimes imperfectly due to psychological and environmental limiting conditions such as memory and perceptual constraints, fatigue, nervousness, distractions and interfering background noises. He defines communication "as the exchange and negotiation of information between at least two individuals through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, oral and written/visual modes, and production and comprehension processes" (Canale, 1983, p. 4).

A strong background of communicative competence is also associated with the work of Hymes (1971) who argued that Chomsky's (1965) competence-performance dichotomy did not include any reference to aspects of language use in social practice(Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006a). Hymes (1971) pointed out the need to study the language considering not only its internal structure but also explaining the language behaviour for particular communicative goals. Therefore, Hymes (1971) believed that the notion of communicative competence could include both grammatical competence and the rules of language use in social contexts following norms of appropriateness (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006b). This notion is later applied to the concept of sociolinguistic competence used by Hymes (1981) when he declares that sociolinguistic competence is the ability that a language learner has to participate in its society not only through speaking, but also as a communicative member. This is, when the learner not only acquires the system of grammar, but also acquires a system of its use regarding persons, places, purposes, and other modes of communication, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding all the components of communicative events.

Ellis (1994), drawing upon Chomsky (1965); Hymes (1971), Canale & Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), defines communicative competence as that knowledge that the speaker-hearer (as used by Chomsky, 1965) has of what constitutes an appropriate and correct language behaviour, as well as what constitutes an effective language behaviour for particular communicative goals.

Another definition related to communicative competence is presented by Bachman (1990), who recognises the earlier work in communicative competence done by different specialists (for example, Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1971). Bachman (1990), bearing in mind previous concepts about language use, communication and communication interaction proposes a more inclusive description of communicative competence. Thus, he indicates that communicative competence involves the knowledge required to use language to achieve a particular communicative goal in a dynamic process. This conceptual background allowed him to describe what he named communicative language ability (CLA), which can be described as "consisting of both the knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualised communicative language use" (Bachman, 1990, p. 84). This occurs where communicative language use "involves a dynamic interaction between the situation, the language user, and the discourse, in which communication is something more than the simple transfer of information" (Bachman, 1990, p. 4).

The concept of communicative language ability (CLA) as involving two components proposed by Bachman (1990) was later adopted and redefined as language knowledge, and strategic competence by Bachman and Palmer (1996). Both components are described as a set of metacognitive strategies, which allow language users with the language capacity or language skill, to create, produce and interpret discourse, either in answering tasks on language learning environments or in real language use (Bachman, 2000; Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

In a model of language ability, language knowledge is defined as "a domain of information in memory that is available for use by the metacognitive strategies in creating and interpreting discourse in use" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 66). It comprises two categories: organisational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. The first includes subcategories of grammatical and textual knowledge, which enable language users to create and interpret grammatically well-structured

sentences or utterances and to organise these into cohesive texts. The second, pragmatic knowledge, comprises subcategories of functional and sociolinguistic knowledge, which enable language users to create or interpret sentences or utterances with meaning and intentionality, and thus fit to the particular language use situation (Bachman, 2000).

In this construct of communicative competence and communicative language ability, the writing skill plays a significant role in facilitating to language users the acquisition of their communicative competence. Writing, either in the context of communicative competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Chomsky, 1965; Ellis, 1994; Hymes, 1971, 1981) or in the context of communicative language ability in communicative language use (Bachman, 1990, 2000; Bachman & Palmer, 1996), is a complex cognitive skill that requires appropriate processes and strategies. It is an act of communication between the reader and the writer, which is determined by cultural models for finished texts and by cultural models for good writing in specific contexts. Writing involves three basic forms of required knowledge: semantic knowledge, knowledge of text models, and knowledge of social and cultural rules. These knowledge lead when it is appropriate to write and when it is imposed to write applying the right procedures in the activity of writing (Connor, 1999) .

Figure 2.2 depicts a framework of communicative competence proposed by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006a). It shows how the four linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are integrated.

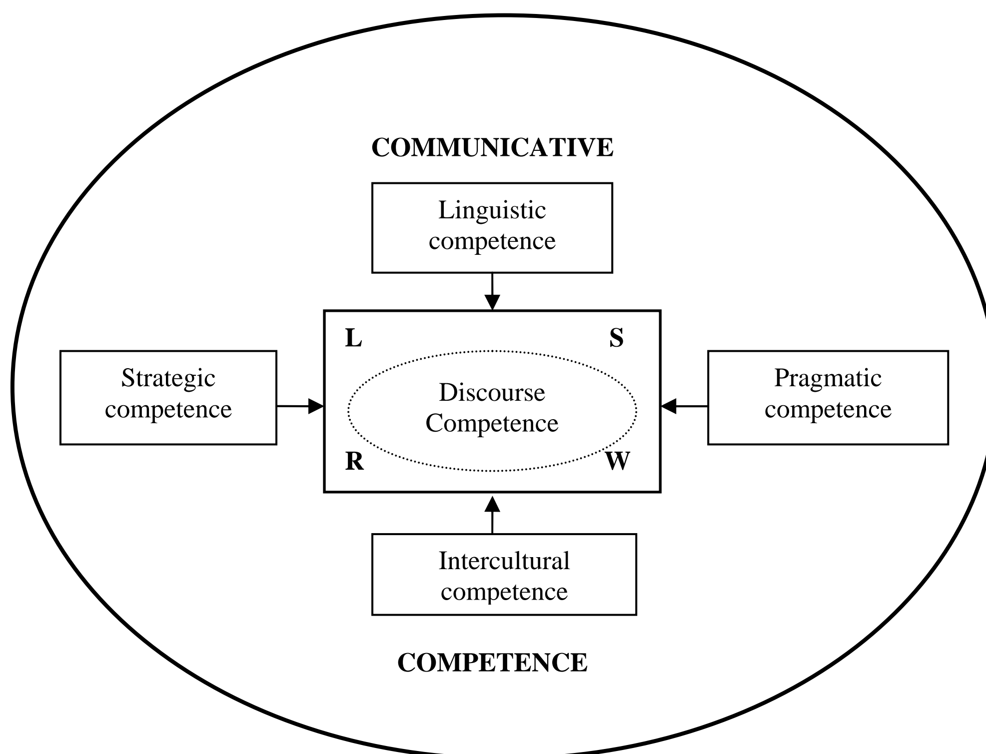

Figure 2.2 A proposed framework of communicative competence integrating the four skills adapted from (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c).

Usó-Juan (2006b) states that the framework contains five components, which make up the whole construct of communicative competence: discourse, linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural and strategic competence. These components cannot be developed in isolation; they interact with each other to produce overall communicative competence and involve the function of the four skills to build discourse competence. Discourse competence, in turn, also shapes each of the other competencies.

Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor's (2006a) proposed framework is used in this study to explore the relationship between L2 competence (Asher, 1994; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Chomsky, 1957, 1965; Ellis, 1985, 1994; Hymes, 1971; Widdowson, 1978), or communicative language ability (Bachman, 1990, 2000; Bachman & Palmer, 1996), and writing performance in an academic context. Consequently, it will be presented in the conceptualisation of each component of the framework keeping the Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor's (2006c) information;

further concepts from other specialists regarding each component will also be provided. Additionally, L2 writing skill will draw upon all the elements the proposed communicative competence framework has.

2.2.1.4 Writing skill in a communicative competence framework

Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006a), like Celce-Murcia and Elite (2000), propose ***discourse competence*** as the central component of the framework of communicative competence. For Celce-Murcia and Elite (2000) it is in discourse and through discourse that all the other competencies are realised. For them, discourse competence is related to the selection and sequencing of sentences to achieve a unified written text. Similarly, Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006b, p. 17), refer to discourse competence as "the selection and sequencing of utterances or sentences to achieve a cohesive and coherent spoken or written text given a particular purpose and situational context". It also assumes a user's ability to apply, discover and negotiate strategies to produce and interpret texts that follow cultural conventions of an interlocutor or negotiate intercultural texts for particular purposes (Byram, 1997). This definition of discourse competence can be complemented with that given by Canale (1983) who states that this type of competence derives from mastering how to combine structures and meanings grammatically to accomplish a unified spoken or written text in different genres.

In the proposed communicative competence framework (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006), the discourse competence allows writers to use discourse features to produce a well-formed written text according to a communicative purpose and context in which it has to be written. The discourse features used by the writer involve: cohesion, coherence and knowledge of the structure of written genres. In this type of competence, knowledge of cohesion involves producing and understanding the explicitly marked relationships among utterances in written texts. It also requires knowledge of rhetorical organisation and coherence plus the capacity to understand organisational development in written texts, and the ability to produce them (Bachman, 2000).

In academic contexts, knowledge of the structure of a written genre means the information that a writer has regarding the discourse conventions of the general academic community and how these conventions are adapted to meet the actual concerns of specific disciplines (Dudley-Evans, 1995). Genres are not models or patterns of words but certain socially accepted ways of using the language for communicative purposes (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006). Regarding cohesion and coherence Canale (1983) explains that cohesion deals with how sentences are linked structurally and facilitate the interpretation of the text; while coherence is related to the relationships among the various meanings in the text. These meanings can be literal meanings, communicative functions, and writer's attitudes.

Linguistic competence, the second component in the selected framework (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c) refers to the grammatical competence mentioned by Canale and Swain (1980), Ellis (1994) and Bachman (1990). It also involves all of the elements in the linguistic system: phonology, grammar, and vocabulary aspects (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006a). For Canale (1983), this type of competence relates to mastery of language code itself. Thus it includes features and rules of the language such as vocabulary, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics. In consequence, this type of competence centres on the knowledge and skill needed to understand and express accurately the literal meaning of utterances. Ellis (1994) refers to this competence as the implicit knowledge (unconscious and intuitive) rather than explicit (conscious and metalingual) of grammar that an L2 learner needs to construct discourse in appropriate ways.

Writing skill in a linguistic competence is related to the elements of written communication such as vocabulary or lexicon, grammar rules and structural conventions. In consequence, writers not only need to acquire the knowledge of the grammatical system but, they also need to become familiar with the basic word meanings and know how these meanings may connote according to the communicative context. Therefore, as they write, they need to keep in mind the

text structure considering the grammatical rules, and the syntactic relations as well as the structure of the clauses. Punctuation and spelling rules are also critical aspects to create legible written texts (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006).

Thus, mastering linguistic competence is essential for writing a text effectively. In fact, such competence helps writers to construct well-formed sentences and well-structured texts, highlighting the relationship between this competence and the discourse competence. It is also important to note that difficulties in linguistic-related aspects, namely vocabulary, grammar and textual structure, may cause problems when a writer attempts to produce a cohesive and meaningful text (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006).

The third component of the proposed communicative competence framework that has been discussed in this study is ***Pragmatic competence*** (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c). It refers to the user's knowledge of how to use linguistic knowledge for communicating (Ellis, 1994). According to Bachman (1990) and Usó-Juan with Martínez-Flor (2006b), this competence involves both illocutionary and sociolinguistic types of knowledge. For these authors, the former is the knowledge that is needed to perform language functions and speech acts; and the latter is the knowledge of socio-pragmatic factors that are involved in a communicative event.

In terms of pragmatic competence, Bachman and Palmer (1996) call functional knowledge what Bachman (1990) and Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006a) call illocutionary knowledge. Bachman and Palmer (1996) state that pragmatic knowledge involves two areas: functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. They observe that functional knowledge enables people to understand and interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and the intentions of the language users in terms of their experience of the real world; sociolinguistic knowledge enables people to create or understand language that is proper to a particular language use situation. Therefore, pragmatic knowledge for these authors is the knowledge that enables people "to create or interpret discourse

by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 69).

Fraser (1990) indicates three aspects that may be considered in pragmatic competence when the language is used (1) speakers or writers say something; (2) speakers or writers indicate how they intend the hearers or readers to take what they have said; and (3) speakers or writers have definite effects on the hearers or readers as a result. Thus, it is possible to talk of pragmatic competence when speakers or writers "internalize a set of rules that govern how language is used to construct discourse and to perform speech acts in socially appropriate ways" (Ellis, 1994, p. 437).

Though pragmatic competence plays a crucial role in spoken communication (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006), in written communication it is the functional knowledge that enables writers to express meanings in terms of their experience of the real world by using the language to write their texts about thoughts, knowledge, opinions, views or feelings. These ideas, opinions or views are presented through descriptions, classifications, explanations, and rhetorical expressions in the texts (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). On the other hand, it is the sociolinguistic knowledge that enables writers to identify the appropriate text conventions to be used in order to express the most appropriate meanings according to the sociolinguistic context of the text (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Regarding sociolinguistic knowledge, Canale (1983) refers to sociolinguistic competence as that linguistic component that include both socio-cultural rules of use and rules of discourse (Canale & Swain, 1980). Thus, according to Canale(1983) it is sociolinguistic competence that enables writers to produce written texts keeping in mind the importance of different sociolinguistic contexts which depend on contextual factors. Contextual factors in a writing situation are made up by discourse elements such as status of participants, purposes of the text,

and norms or conventions of interaction which serve writers to create texts and express meanings that may be understood by their readers.

Referring to the contextual factors in a text, Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor, and Palmer-Silveria (2006) discuss the features of situational contexts, which are clues to the illocutionary force of the sentences in a written text (i.e. their intended meaning). In writing, these contextual clues to meaning are expressed through the text structure, graphic devices (punctuation, italics, among others), syntactic devices (cleft constructions), linguistic devices (such as the selection of adjectives, adverbs or verbs), as well as the writer's awareness of the physical location where the text is to appear or appears. Hence, writers require mastery of how to use the contextual clues to help their readers derive a full understanding and meaning from a given written text, in order to fulfil the communication process through a written text. To conclude, the relationship between the pragmatic components with the discourse components in writing is clear, as texts always convey with them an intended meaning (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006).

Another competence considered in the communicative competence framework proposed by Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor, and Palmer-Silveria (2006) is ***intercultural competence***. This competence is presented by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006a) as the kind of competence that involves both cultural and non-verbal communicative factors. The former are related to the user's sociocultural knowledge of the target language community, which is the knowledge of dialects and cross-cultural awareness. The latter are related to non-verbal signals such as body language, use of space, touching or silence. Because this competence reflects the user's knowledge of cultural aspects Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006b) thought to name it cultural competence, but the term intercultural was employed instead to emphasise the cultural interrelation that exists in L2 learning, which involves not only the target culture but also the learner's culture.

This competence is also related to the sociolinguistic competence proposed by Canale (1983, p. 7), where he declares that sociolinguistic competence is

understood as “the extent to which utterances that are produced and understood appropriately in different sociocultural contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction”. He points out that appropriateness refers to both appropriateness of meanings, that is, when it is proper to perform an illocutionary act, and appropriateness of form, that is, when the given act is realised in a proper verbal or non-verbal form in a communicative situation (Canale, 1983; Ellis, 1994).

With this in mind, intercultural competence is related to the knowledge that writers have about how to produce written texts within a specific sociocultural context. This knowledge enables writers to understand and follow the rules and norms of behaviour that exist in a target language community, as well as to develop cross-cultural consciousness, given that each culture has different appropriate and non-appropriate cultural rules to follow (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006). The crucial dimension of social context in a writing process has been reflected in educational movements such as writing across the curriculum in America, and a National Writing Project in the British primary level, where writers are recognised, not as solitary individuals, but as members of a social and cultural group. So, aspects such as what and how writers write as well as how their writing is perceived are recognised (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c).

From the above view of writing as a social activity, the discourse community has been developed and notions of audience and genre are fundamental. Special attention has been focussed on tertiary-level writing where students have to fulfil the demands of producing writing acceptable to the academic community. “Debate centres on two main areas: defining a discourse community and whether it is necessary or even desirable, to oblige students to adopt the norms of a different community from their own” (K. Johnson & Johnson, 1998). In this respect and within a genre and discourse community approach to writing, Johns (2006), for example, argues that it is, in fact the specific situation in which the text appears that determines how it will be successfully written and interpreted.

As a final point, Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor, and Palmer-Silveria (2006) insist that the intercultural component is also essentially related to discourse competence, since written texts are always produced within a culture and they have been considered as cultural manifestations.

Strategic competence is added to all of the above-described competencies. This competence has been mentioned in previous models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c) because the knowledge of communicative strategies and how to use them help language users to avoid breakdown in communication.

The term strategy is defined by Ellis(1994) as the mental or behavioural activities related to some specific stage in the process of language acquisition or language use. Oxford (1999, p. 518) says that strategies "are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement that is necessary for developing communicative activity". In consequence, learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that language users apply to enhance their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies can facilitate the internalisation, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language (Oxford, 1999).

Brindley (2002), citing Bachman (1990), states that strategic competence is not part of language ability, but it involves the ability to identify the information required to achieve specific communicative purposes, planning, and production. Canale (1983) claims that this competence comprises a mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies. This is both (a) to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limited condition in a real communication or to insufficient linguistic competence in one or more of the other areas of communicative competence; and (b) to enhance the effectiveness of communication. Thus, language users not only use strategic competencies to solve

grammatical problems, but also to solve problems of a sociolinguistic nature and of a discourse nature.

In developing writing skills, strategic competence is considered to be as fundamental if writers look for a coherent text production (Celce-Murcia & Elite, 2000; Usó-Juan, et al., 2006). According to Skehan (1998), the conceptualisation of this competence as metacognitive components provides a crucial basis for understanding both designing and developing stages of the writing process as a task in an academic environment. This competence is conceived "as a set of metacognitive components or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use, as well as in other cognitive activities" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 70). In general, these authors declare that using language entails elements such as the language user's topical knowledge and affective schemata as well as the user's linguistic competences. The integration of all these components constitutes the language use when language users produce and understand discourse in situationally appropriate ways.

Skehan (1998), citing Bachman (1990), highlights the importance of recognising the crucial role of strategic competence in all kinds of communication. Skehan states that Bachman no longer presents this competence as compensatory and activated only when other competences are lacking, but he gives it a central role when communication is achieved. This central role is achieved because strategic competence is carrying out a mediating role between meaning intentions (the message to be expressed), underlying competences (those abovementioned), language user's background knowledge, and the context situation. Further, this competence plays a central role in a communication situation through: (1) determining communicative goals; (2) assessing communicative resources; (3) planning communication; and (4) executing this communication. These capacities are characterised by Bachman (1990) as metacognitive skills. They are cognitive because the nature of logical operations that they involve, and "meta" because there can be self-awareness built into their process (Skehan, 1998).

With reference to Bachman's work, Skehan (1998) also endorses the proposition that through strategic competence the relationship between competence and performance is redefined giving it more dynamic qualities, and realising the mediating role of strategic competence between knowledge of language structures, language competence and context of situation. This is depicted more clearly in Figure 2.3.

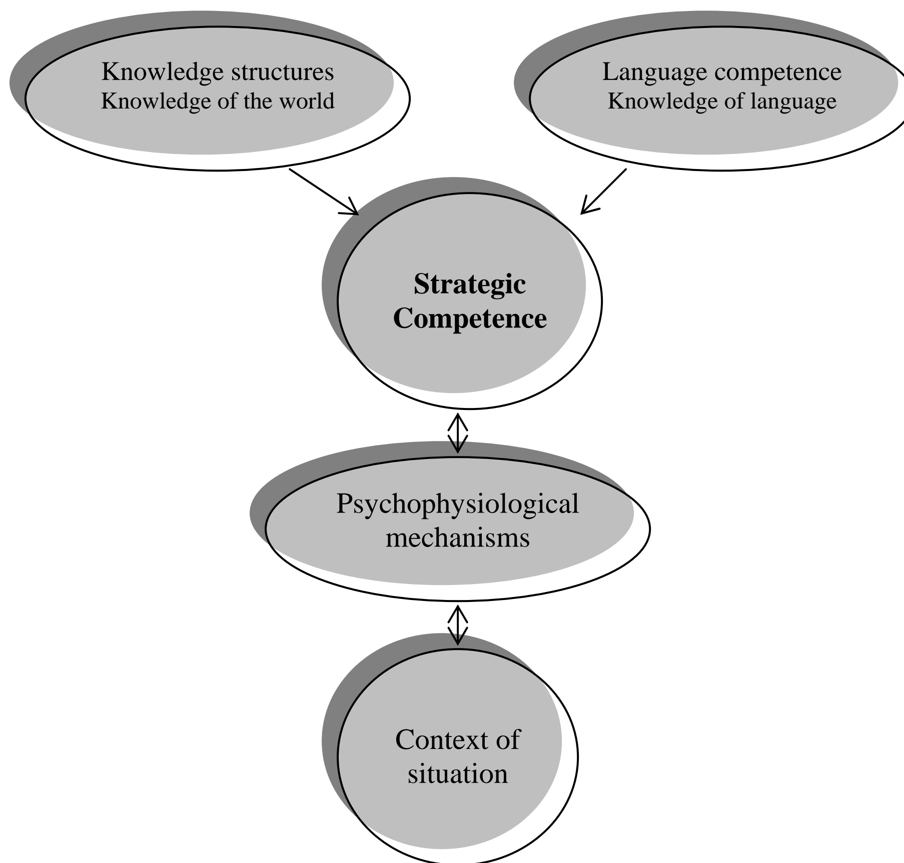

Figure 2.3 Components of communicative language ability in communicative language use (Bachman, 1990, p. 81)

Bachman (2000) associates the components of communicative language ability in communicative language use with strategic competence, when he wants to indicate that communication comprises a dynamic interchange between context and discourse. Thus the communicative use cannot be characterised only by the production or interpretation of texts, but also by the relationship that exists between text and the context in which it occurs. According to Bachman (2000) the

interpretation of discourse demands the ability to use available language competencies in order to evaluate the context for relevant information and later relate this information to information in the discourse. Therefore, "It is the function of strategic competence to match the new information to be processed with relevant information that is available (including presuppositional and real world knowledge) and map this onto the maximally efficient use of existing language abilities" (Bachman, 2000, p. 102)

In an academic environment, strategic competence refers to both learning and communicative strategies, so writers need to have strategic competence in addition to all the above-described competencies. Consequently, writers should not only apply a set of learning strategies to write accurately; but they also need to apply communicating strategies to overcome their language limitations and needs (Usó-Juan, et al., 2006). A number of learning strategies typically used by writers in their writing process are: (1) *metacognitive*: advance organisers, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, advance preparation and self-evaluation; (2) c*ognitive:* resourcing, translation, grouping, note-taking, deduction, recombination, imagery, key word, contextualisation, elaboration and transfer; and (3) *social/affective:* cooperation and questioning for clarification (Ellis, 1994). For a general description of these strategies see Appendix A.

As mentioned earlier, communication strategies are another set of strategies that a writer needs to know in order to write effectively. They are those potentially conscious plans for solving what an individual might perceive to be a difficulty in achieving a particular communicative purpose. These strategies are applied when language learners are faced with the task of communicating meanings for which they require a better linguistic knowledge (Celce-Murcia & Elite, 2000; Ellis, 1994; Usó-Juan et al., 2006). These strategies deal mainly with lexical and grammatical problems (Ellis, 1994). Writers use several of these communication strategies when they attempt to make themselves understood by their readers, namely: (1) *avoidance:* topic avoidance; (2) *paraphrase:* word coinage and circumlocution; (3) *conscious transfer:* literal translation and language switch;

and (4) *appeal for assistance*. A general description of these strategies is in Appendix B.

Thus, in the same way as that the previous competence components are interrelated, the strategic component is closely related to discourse competence. It has been shown that in order for writers to produce a coherent written text they have to use a series of strategies, such as identification of communicative goals, planning ahead to structure, organise ideas, provide connections and check the written text several times (Celce-Murcia & Elite, 2000; Usó-Juan, et al., 2006). Bachman's (1990) model of language use is a valuable representation of the mechanisms needed to implement a writing plan in the modality and channel fitting to the communicative goal and the context (Figure 2.4).

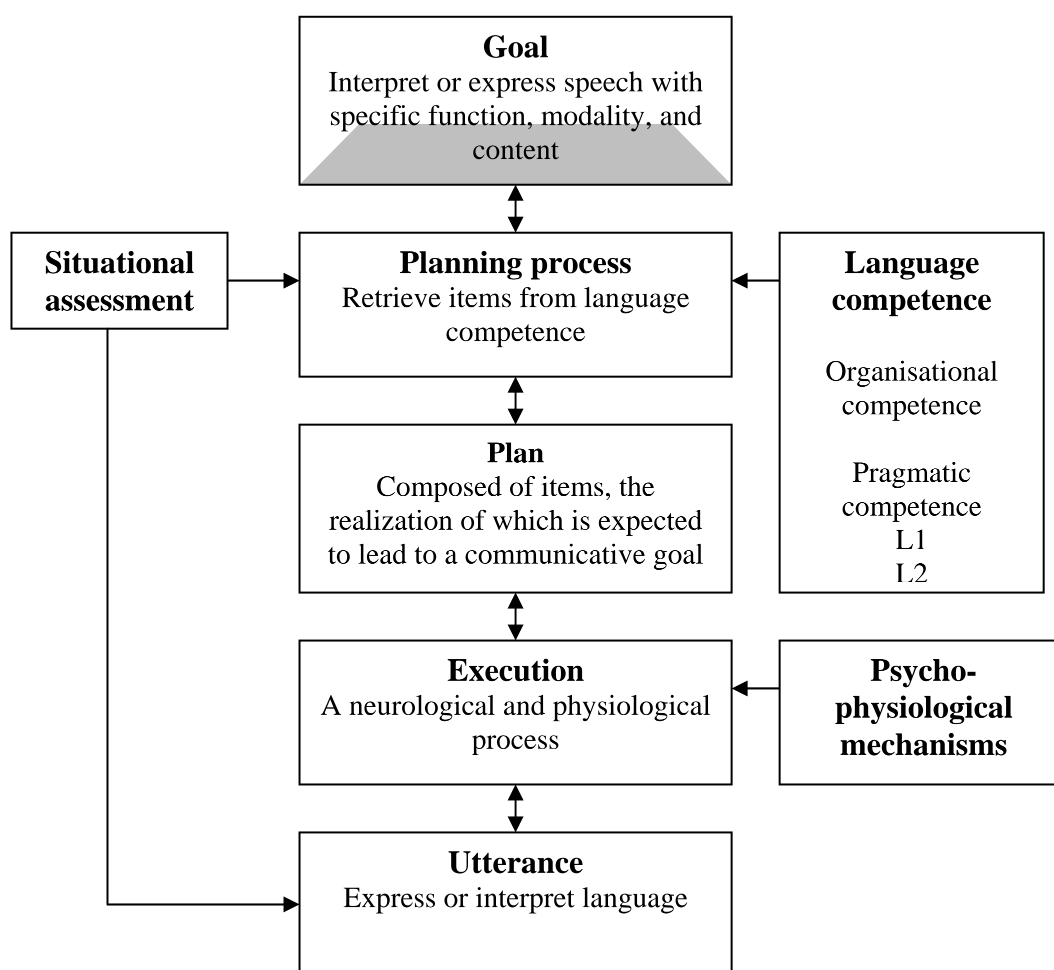

Figure 2.4 A model of language use proposed by Bachman (1990, p. 103)

This model is included to illustrate the interactions among the components of linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural, strategic and discourse competencies, and the language use context that make up the proposed communicative competence framework in this study. Bachman (1990) states that planning , execution and assessment are involved in a process of interpreting or expressing speech. With a communicative goal in mind, assessing the communicative situation means considering the topic, recognising the knowledge that the language users have about their audience and their own knowledge and abilities, then forming expectations regarding the utterances that they have to understand or produce.

The abovementioned literature shows how L2 learners use the forms they have acquired to perform their linguistic competence, strategic competence, pragmatic competence, intercultural competence and discourse competence. In addition, the proposed communicative competence framework (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006a; Usó-Juan, et al., 2006) shows how the different kinds of L2 learners' competences can interact one another, showing different aspects of the L2 learners' language acquisition.

As mentioned previously, writing skill (a part of the language skills) is seen as a dynamic, creative and contextualised process of communicating meaning. It implies that linguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural factors interact with one another to produce an accurately written text. In a communicative competence framework, writing is not only a manifestation of discourse, but also an expression of linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural and strategic components, which all interact when a language user needs to communicate or perform efficiently through a written text in a target language.

2.2.2 Second language writing in academic literacies

The term "literacy" has come to be used recently with different meanings. The simplest, the most direct definition but at the same time the most controversial definition is: "Literacy is the ability to read and write" (Blake & Blake, 2002, p. 8). This traditional sense of learning and knowing how to read and write is no

longer a single accepted definition (Halliday, 1996; Tardy, 2005), and in general, literacy is best understood as a set of social practices, which can be inferred from events that are mediated by written texts (Tusting, 2000).

In this study, the concept of literacy is explored from a linguistic point of view. "Linguistic" here has the same meanings given by Halliday (1996, p. 339); "(1) treating literacy as something that has to do with language and (2) using the conceptual framework of linguistics = the theoretical study of language = as a way of understanding it". Therefore, literacy here is understood as those formal language capacities that are deemed to be essential, though not sufficient cause for critical arguments in a written text (Lea & Street, 1999).

For present purposes, it is relevant to distinguish between functional, cultural, and critical literacies (Cummins, 1994). Functional literacy (1) means the level of writing that enables language users to function adequately in society and, by itself, is related to changing societal demands. Functional literacy implies a set of cognitive skills that allow people to function in social and work situations. Cultural literacy (2) is related to the mutual experiences and points of reference that are shared within an interpretive community in order to understand texts effectively. While functional literacy focusses on skills, cultural literacy focusses on specific and particular knowledge or content that is essential to meaningful understanding of text in particular cultural contexts. The third category, critical literacy, focusses on the potential of written language as a means of encouraging people to examine and analyse the levels of power and distribution of resources in their society, and to work to modify and transform discriminatory structures. "Cultural and functional literacies are related in the sense that the acquisition of the cognitive skills of literacy will be facilitated to the extend that the content of texts reflects a familiar cultural context" (Cummins, 1994, p. 305).

With reference to the subject of communicative competence in tertiary education, studies have found that L2 tertiary students face multiple writing demands, the complexity of the context in which they are embedded, and the difficulty of

organising and developing written texts in their majors. Specifically, as L2 writers, they face difficulties when they meet the eventual literacy needs and language demands of producing writing in their disciplinary field (Candlin & Plum, 1999; Lea & Street, 1999; Leki, 1995, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1994; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000). In addition, higher education places particular demands on students' language and literacy capabilities when they have to become part of the discourse community, which in turn can be defined as a social group that shares behaviours and assumptions about language and its use (Blanton, 1998; Candlin & Plum, 1999).

These factors associated with tertiary education expectations highlight the essential relationship between the literacy that students arrive with and the literacy required of them at university (Lea & Street, 1999). Indeed, tertiary institutions focus almost exclusively on literacy skills, mostly on writing, and mostly on strictly academic writing (Candlin & Plum, 1999; Leki, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1994; Matsuda et al., 2003; Zamel, 1998b; Zhu, 2004a).

"University requirements implicitly support the notion that ability to write well is integral to academic success; often the single institutionally mandated course at university, for both L2 and NES students, is a term to a year of composition" (Leki & Carson, 1994, p. 83). Leki and Carson (1994) declare that the ability to write well is necessary both to achieve academic success and to demonstrate that achievement. They make this observation in relation to Saville-Troike's (1984) work about writing practices at school. There, she stated that writing is the language skill that most likely develops the academic competence.

Other research findings about writing are also related to literacy demands for students. Grabe and Kaplan (1996), for example, consider writing to be the most complex composing skill valued in the academy, and one that involves training, instruction, practice, experience, and purpose. Other scholars have argued that writing has to be recognised as an activity that helps to create a representation of the world, is influenced by cultural practices, community-based norms, and ways

of thinking by particular social groups. For them, writing is a typically social process that involves authority, credibility and disciplinary appeals (Candlin & Hyland, 1999; Matsuda, et al., 2003).

A complement to these arguments relates to Gee's (2000) concept regarding new literacy studies (NLS). In it, he states that NLS are based on the view that reading and writing skills make sense only when they are studied in the context of social, cultural, historical, political and economic practices of which they are but a part. New literacy studies conceptualise literacy not in terms of skills and competencies, but as an integral part of social events and practices (Gee, 2000; Maybin, 2000).

To conclude, academic literacy may be considered from at least two different perspectives. One focusses on skills required for achieving academic success, which often is presented as a list of points required for functional competence. The second perspective focusses on an understanding of the discursive practices of an academic community, keeping in mind that there are different academic communities that share some aspects, but are diverse in others. While the first perspective may be the most familiar to students and educational establishments, the distinction between academic communities is not as evident to students, although their understanding may develop through time with exposure to particular and specific disciplines. In general the student's perceptions and knowledge about academic literacy tend to reflect their past and present experiences and concerns of their academic practices (de Pourbaix, 2000).

Understanding the above perspectives about academic literacies, and their close relationship with writing as an academic skill at a tertiary level of education is essential to develop the principles and functions of academic writing and academic discourse at postgraduate level that are presented next.

2.3 Theory and practice of academic writing

As mentioned in this chapter, literacy practices are a basic aspect of academic environments, where students read and write a range of texts as they make their way through the curriculum. Tardy (2005) says that at high levels of education, when literacy goes beyond simply an ability of read and write, students need to learn ways of thinking about, interacting with, and constructing knowledge of disciplinary communities and content. She states that it is competence in this level of literacy what enables students to become active members of their field.

In this context, writing practices in higher education require students to be able to write with fluency, accuracy, clarity, quality and organisation (Leki, 2003). Furthermore, the literacy demands of the faculty curriculum entail an appropriate use and knowledge of the discipline-specific genre and convention-specific phrasing, in addition to the students' critical and conceptual abilities when the faculty demands more critical thinking and organisational skills (Hyland, 2002a). Consequently, these concerns have led tertiary education to wonder how students must operate not just as communicators, but as thinkers, learners, problem finders, and to recognise how non-native speakers (NNS) develop what the literacy community calls higher-order literacy skills (Royster, 1992).

The recursive nature of the composing process indicates that higher-order literacy skills are required when writers are moving back and forth among different activities of composing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Tony Silva & Matsuda, 2001; Yasuda, 2004). This process comprises a number of stages such as rehearsing, drafting and revising, which interact together and repeatedly. From this perspective, academic writing may be considered as "a process where an initial idea gets extended and refined, by approximating more closely and more accurately one's intended meaning" (Yasuda, 2004, p. 91).

Bearing in mind the above information, the researcher has identified certain factors that make up the academic writing process in tertiary education (See Figure 2.5). L2 competence, L2 performance, communicative literacy skills, and

L2 literacy capabilities were taken into consideration. Their relevance to L2 writing in academic contexts includes the functions of writing, the context of writing, and the role that writing plays when L2 students are involved in the discourse practices of an academic community.

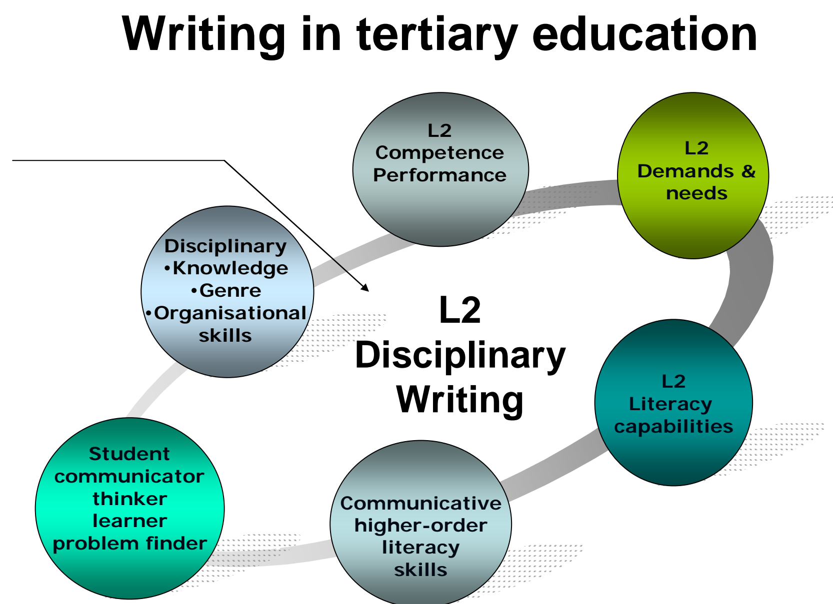

Figure 2.5 Factors of academic writing in tertiary education, derived from a review of the literature

Figure 2.5 depicts writing as an ability developed through conscious learning activities. It involves complex cognitive, language, social and academic processes (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Gee, 2000; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hyland, 2003; Ramírez, 1994; Skehan, 1998). Verifying this statement, Hyland (2002b) states that academic writing, like all forms of communication, should be considered as an act of identity which not only transmits disciplinary "content" but also carries a representation of the writer. Factors in Figure 2.5 will be further explained below when the four main sections for academic writing identified in this research are presented. The four sections are: (1) Writing demands for L2 writers at university = postgraduate level; (2) L2 students' difficulties in academic writing; (3) L2

students' needs in L2 academic writing; and (4) Disciplinary knowledge and specific genre in textual meanings.

2.3.1 Writing demands at postgraduate level for L2 students

Students beginning tertiary education usually face significant challenges as the academic environment may be particularly different from what they are used to. They are faced with a new discourse, which characterises the "specialised discourse" of higher education. This new discourse has to be properly learnt and practised in order to succeed and achieve recognition in the "academic discourse community" (Leki, 2003; Tang & John, 1999). Consequently, in recent times, researchers have investigated how students and other learners become members of their selected disciplinary communities. In so doing, researchers have analysed students' written productions as well as the processes they have undergone to learn new content, as well as linguistic and rhetorical conventions in their disciplines (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1991; Connor & Mayberry, 1996; Hyland, 1999c, 2002a, 2003, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Leki, 2003; Lillis, 1997, 2001; Zamel, 1998b; Zamel, et al., 1998; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b).

The literature raises different questions regarding L2 writers and the demands that L2 students can encounter at university. For instance, there are questions regarding the effect of the student's innate culture and the language on their L2 acquisition process, which in turn may be related to those aspects of the culture reflected in rhetorical conventions in their discipline (Zamel, 1998b). Concerns have also been discussed about the degree to which students' L2 competence is socially constructed in an L2 setting such as a specific academic environment (Connor & Mayberry, 1996). In addition, researchers investigating writing in academic contexts have examined not only the types and nature of writing tasks students face in university, but they have also analysed the tasks to identify the students' writing needs (Leki, 2003; Zhu, 2004b).

To help resolve these concerns, researchers have claimed that student writing has to be seen as the way in which students consolidate their understanding of subject areas, as well as the means by which teachers or tutors can learn and be aware of the extent and nature of the student's understanding (Lillis, 2001). This view, however, is inconsistent with the increasing function of student writing as a key assessment tool, where students pass or fail their courses depending on the ways in which they answer to, or engage in their academic writing tasks (Lillis, 2001).

To overcome this tendency, writing-researchers have sought a better understanding of the nature of communicative conventions that students use in different discourse communities as well as a comprehension of the student acquisition of those conventions (Zhu, 2004b). These communicative and academic conventions are strongly related to the study skills students bring to their university programs. On this issue, McKenzie & Schweitzer (2001) affirm that study skills have been found to markedly influence students' academic performance. McKenzie & Schweitzer (2001, p. 22) citing other authors' findings say that "students with poor study habits are more likely to withdraw from university or to have academic adjustment problems in the transition from high school to university".

Most recently, the quality of student writing in higher education is increasingly seen as a problem (Lillis & Tuner, 2001). Zamel (1998b) suggests that one problem students find at university is related to the rich and complicated notion of language, where both instructors and students have to recognise what language involves, and, how it can be used meaningfully and in context for effective communication with members of the community they address to. For different instructors in the faculty, the error levels in a written production will depend on their assumptions and expectations about the students' language use. In a case presented in Zamel's (1998b) paper, a student's potential was recognised when the instructor helped the student to focus on content issues more than on the student's language performance. This instructor's approach seemed to help the

student to become a “different writer”, a change that improved the content of his writing, and simultaneously had an impact on his writing errors.

The content of the students writing, as in the written assignments, requires that students cover both general academic and discipline specific genres (Zhu, 2004b). On this issue, Yasuda (2004) observed that L2 postgraduate student writers face struggles with their academic writing tasks when they are in a new academic discourse community. Zhu’s (2004b) research into academic writing in business courses indicated that they have been problem-solving oriented and have been designed to initiate students into a real professional world. These findings were achieved after a detailed analysis of the disciplinary genres. Consequently, students are required to use a variety of problem-solving tools and information sources as well as to apply strong analytical, problem-solving, persuasive, rhetorical, and teamwork skills to perform successfully in their disciplinary areas. Writing-researchers have also found that the purposes and features of writing tasks are seen as means to understand the discursive practices in different academic communities. These aspects indicate the values associated with those practices and the students’ involvement and socialisation into their discourse communities (Berkenkotter, et al., 1991; Yasuda, 2004; Zhu, 2004b).

In conclusion, literature in the academic writing arena highlights a sociocultural dimension of academic literacy at tertiary level. It provides evidence that writing in academic contexts is governed not only by shared communicative purposes, but also by communicative conventions endorsed by the members of specific discourse communities (Hyland, 2003; Lillis, 1997; Lillis & Tuner, 2001; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b). In fact, academic writing research in specific disciplinary areas has indicated that “writing serves different purposes in different courses and requires students to assume different social roles, and that communicative conventions are intricately intertwined with the content for, the aims of and the student roles in writing” (Zhu, 2004a, p. 30). Therefore, a proper use of both discipline-specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions is required of students when they enter their academic disciplines, when they engage in a specialised

literacy and when they need to play different social roles to achieve their purposes as academic writers. The students' assimilation of these conventions uncovers the difficulties and needs they have to overcome when they want to produce written texts appropriate for their academic fields.

2.3.2 Difficulties in writing at postgraduate level for L2 students

As mentioned earlier, writing is frequently a demanding task that calls upon several abilities, as well as upon more general metacognitive abilities for any language user. It is thus is a challenging and difficult skill for both native and non-native speakers to acquire (Kroll, 1990; Schoonen et al., 2003). Difficulty here is understood as part of the two notions proposed under behaviourist views = 'difference' and 'difficulty', where the early formulation of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) is still very much alive though widely criticised, "difference = difficulty" (Ellis, 1994). The CAH formulated by Lado (1957) was based on the following assumption: "…the student who comes into contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult" (Ellis, 1994, p. 306).

In addition, this research considers the definition of "difficult" argued by Kellerman (1987) and presented by Ellis (1994). Thus, "a 'difficult' structure is one that learners fail to learn despite plentiful evidence for the existence of the structure in the input" (Ellis, 1994, p. 308). Literature indicates that a structure could be "difficult" depending on its communicative significance to the learner, or the ease with which it could be processed and understood. These reasons are also related to "the extent to which the structure is similar to or different from a comparable structure in the learner's L1 or another previously learnt L2" (Ellis, 1994, p. 308).

Under a psychological/psycholinguistic perspective, difficulty is a concept that is inherent in the learner's mind, and relies largely on what significant and relevant

prior knowledge the learner has (Ringbom, 1999). However, it is important to note that attempts at establishing hierarchies of difficulty by reason of structural and functional-semantic correspondences have failed given that the linguistic notion is not readily compatible with notions from the psychology of learning (Ringbom, 1999).

Robinson (2001) distinguishes particularly between L2 task complexity on production, comprehension and learning from task difficulty. For him, task complexity depends on manipulable cognitive demands of tasks, while task difficulty depends on learner factors such as aptitude, confidence, motivation, etc. Task complexity and task difficulty added to task conditions (the interactive demands of tasks) impact particularly in different ways on task performance and learning.

In the case of academic writing, Kroll (1990) states that writing papers entails a complex process that involves multiple skills that contribute to the overall difficulty of writing. For L2 students, the challenge is learning how to create written productions that properly demonstrate their mastery over contextually appropriate formats for the rhetorical presentation of thoughts and ideas, as well as showing their mastery in all areas of language. Giving that academic writing conventions are not often explained and taught explicitly, students have to face the difficulty of approaching their academic tasks or assignments with an unclear notion of academic writing constructors (Hyland, 2002c; Leki, 2003; Lillis, 1997). Academic writing becomes an activity that must be mastered in order for students to express their knowledge effectively in a proper discipline discourse (Hyland, 2003; Lillis, 1997).

Hyland (2003), citing a comparative study made by Silva (1993), says that after Silva compared 72 studies regarding first and second language writing, he noted that there were writing and learning issues, which evidenced the strategically, rhetorically and linguistically important differences between the L2 and L1 ways of writing. These differences comprised various cognitive, social, cultural and

linguistic factors. They were: (1) different linguistic proficiencies and institutions about language; (2) different learning experiences and classroom expectations; (3) different sense of audience and writer; (4) different preferences for ways of organising texts; (5) different writing processes; and (6) different understandings of text uses and the social value of different text types. Understanding these differences might indicate some implications for L2 writing instruction and practice (Hyland, 2003).

Riazi(1997), referring to Silva's (1993) findings, defends the idea that the writing context plays a significant role in the likely differences of writing in L1 and L2. He points out that in a graduate context, for example, except for the students' language competence; the context presents the same difficulties to both L1 and L2 writers. The researcher considers that both the identification and understanding of the differences found by Silva (1993) as well as the Riazi's (1997) perception may indicate some of the basic L2 students' difficulties when they need to write successfully in their major areas.

Other researchers have also found that tasks of appropriate difficulty are probably more motivating for learners because they feel that they are being asked to respond to reasonable challenges (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Skehan, 1998; M. Williams & Burden, 1997a, 1997b).The difficulty of a goal may depend on whether the goal represents a learning or performance outcome. It is related to what knowledge and skills learners seek to acquire (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

Individuals (L2 writers for the purpose of this study) will decide to use certain kinds of strategies if they have a clear purpose for using them and feel that achieving a particular task has value and significance to them personally. Cognitive, metacognitive, social/affective and communication strategies are the learning strategies that language learners use to try to succeed in a complex task and are the same that L2 writers use in their academic writing process (Celce-Murcia & Elite, 2000; Ellis, 1994; Usó-Juan et al., 2006; M. Williams & Burden,

1997c). (See section 2.2.1.4 Writing skill in a communicative competence framework, and Appendices A and B of this document)

The use of these strategies includes an awareness of what language learners are doing and the strategies they need to apply, as well as the knowledge about the actual process of their learning they are going through (M. Williams & Burden, 1997c). With this in mind, and in terms of communicative competence, Bachman & Palmer (1996) refer to formulation of meaning, assessment of resources, planning and execution, as processes that must be undergone when language users need to achieve an appropriate communication outcome (Skehan, 1998). In short, if learners feel able to overcome difficulties in achieving their goals, their doubts about whether they will succeed may improve effort and lead them to better use of strategies (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

According to the above literature, it may be concluded that L2 students' difficulties in academic writing are closely related to each of the processes they have to follow to overcome task complexities, disciplinary community requirements, academic writing conventions and the academic writing constructors. In order to overcome these difficulties, L2 writers have to use communicative, metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies as potential conscious plans for solving what they see as a difficulty in reaching their academic writing goals (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Ellis, 1994; Skehan, 1998). That is, L2 academic writers in higher education can become self-regulated learners when they can approach new academic tasks with confidence and select the most appropriate strategies for completing their writing tasks involving both communicative competence and disciplinary knowledge aspects (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). The identification of the L2 students' difficulties in academic writing highlights the L2 students' needs in academic writing, which are discussed next in this chapter.

2.3.3 Students' needs in L2 academic writing

In education, need is a complex term to define, since it embraces many aspects. These aspects can involve what learners know, do not know, or want to know, and can be analysed in different ways (Hyland, 2003). Frodesen (1995, p. 335), citing Hutchinson and Waters (1987), says that in order to define the learner's needs these authors distinguish target needs and learning needs. The former refer to "what the learner needs to do in the target situation," and the latter refer to "what the learner needs to do in order to learn". Target needs are then categorised as necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities mean the forms of communication asked of the learners in the target situation as well as the linguistic features associated with these forms. Lacks are understood as the gap between what the learners already know and what they need to know. Finally, "wants" represent the subjective vision that learners may have of their needs and lacks, thoughts that may be different from the teacher's assessment (Frodesen, 1995).

Target needs and learning needs for academic writing can vary, given that L2 students are extremely diverse in language background, socioeconomic status, cultural integration, and a range of other factors, all of which should be accounted for in a assessment that is to be humanistically valid (Hamp-Lyons, 1990). Literature about L2 writers developing academic discourse asserts that in academic writing, there is a tendency for the writer to be forgotten in the difficulties and controversies surrounding matters such as topic knowledge, kind of language to be used, academic norms, sets of academic conventions, and modes of inquiry (Hamp-Lyons, 1990; Zamel, 1998a). In fact, "academic discipline has come to characterise a separate culture, one within which each discipline may represent a separate cultural community" (Zamel, 1998a, p. 187).

In this setting, the complexity of the academic discourse reveals a compound array of factors. These include individual teachers' methods, intentions and expectations, as well as individual students' approaches, interpretations and understandings of tasks, which constitute the academic writing work and often originate the difficulties writer-students experience as they struggle to meet and

satisfy their teacher's expectations (Leki & Carson, 1997; Zamel, 1998a). By examining these factors, students can discover their challenges and gradually enter their disciplinary community while overcoming their needs and difficulties, and retaining their own voice in the academic writing process (Hamp-Lyons, 1990). In this process, they need to satisfy not only the communicative competence requirements, their necessities, but also the discipline knowledge demands, their lacks, both of which demanded in their academic community. These kinds of needs are described below.

2.3.3.1 Communicative competence in L2 academic writing

At postgraduate level, most students are conducting research, reporting results of their studies or fulfilling tasks in written forms that are accessible to other members of their discipline (Riazi, 1997). Literature indicates that what students need to write, mainly in upper division undergraduate and graduate level courses at university, is related particularly to their disciplines (Zhu, 2004a). Academic writing thus plays a particularly crucial role in graduate contexts in terms of the values placed on communicating with other members of the academic community using appropriate discourse conventions, as well as students' learning and understanding of domain-specific knowledge (Riazi, 1997). At postgraduate level, L2 students' perceptions, understandings, and goals interact with the specific and particular local culture of writing tasks in their specialised discipline to form a process where they may develop their disciplinary literacy in their second language (Riazi, 1997).

Regarding L2 development in academic writing environment, it has been argued that pushing L2 writers to access forms that are part of their L2 knowledge is considered a means of building their language fluency. This, however, will happen naturally if the L2 writer has at least a partial mastery over the form. In this case, teachers cannot bring out what the L2 writer does not really know (J. Williams & Severino, 2004). Findings in academic writing have also indicated that not all L2 writers have the same profile or the same language competence. It has been said that the L2 writers "know more grammar" than L1 writers do. The

implication of this statement may be that L2 writers have a wider knowledge of grammatical metalanguage to be used in their academic productions (J. Williams & Severino, 2004, p. 168). In fact, the link between L2 development and learning to write in L2 is found as the L2 writer is able to negotiate meaning. This active role of an L2 user may facilitate the acquisition of writing as a literacy skill (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Ellis, 1994; Riazi, 1997; Skehan, 1998; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c; J. Williams & Severino, 2004).

From a cognitive viewpoint, it is clear that learners are far from passive in their learning processes: rather, they are actively involved in understanding and making sense of the academic tasks or problems with which they are faced in order to learn. When students are confronted with a learning task, they have different resources available to use in different ways. Cognitive strategies as well as a variety of other processes are possible resources students have available to help them learn something. Then, they use not only their minds, but also their feelings, plus their social and communicative skills in active ways when they need to solve a particular task of learning (M. Williams & Burden, 1997c). It is important to recognise that in a disciplinary environment, learning a language comprises communicating with other people and thus demands not only use of suitable cognitive skills but also certain social and communicative skills (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Ellis, 1994; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c; M. Williams & Burden, 1997a).

Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman (1991, p. 191), referring to other researchers who have studied the difficulties that young writers meet when they enter the university culture and more specifically their major fields, claim that "students entering academic disciplines need a specialised literacy that consists of the ability to use discipline-specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions to serve their purposes as writers". According to these authors as well as to Zhu (2004a), the research findings on academic writing of the last two decades have highlighted the sociocultural dimension of academic literacy. The findings have also disclosed that academic writing in academic contexts is controlled by the communicative

purposes and communicative conventions that are shared and endorsed by members of specific discourse communities.

Accordingly, literature acknowledges that writers need to have communicative competence (i.e. discourse, linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural and strategic competence) to create a good and successful text if they wish to express an idea or thought to their reader. In fact, in academic writing practices, communicative competence is a complex concept which is fundamental for understanding social and communicative interactions (Asher, 1994; Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bratt Paulston, 1990; Byram, 1997; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia & Elite, 2000; Chomsky, 1965; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Ellis, 1994; Halliday, 1996; Schoonen et al., 2003; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c; Usó-Juan et al., 2006). (See section 2.2.1.4 Writing skill in a communicative competence framework).

In summary, the above mentioned literature highlights the complexity of the writing process in terms of writing as a logical process where both cognitive and linguistic recourses are needed (Candlin & Plum, 1999; Schoonen, et al., 2003). In addition, it is recognised that communicative competence is strongly influenced by broad aspects related to discipline knowledge, professional context and the discourse community where the writers belong. Consequently, L2 students have to face particular communicative needs when they are writing in their discipline.

2.3.3.2 Disciplinary knowledge in L2 academic writing

Literature recently has drawn attention to the fact that each discipline has different views of knowledge, different research practices and different ways of seeing and understanding the world. These disciplinary differences are directly reflected in ways of argumentation and expression among academic disciplines. These differences also make up a variety of subject-specific literacies from which members of disciplines communicate and interact with peers, and students interact with professors. Through written communication, for example, members in an academic community adopt an appropriate identity when they present their

thoughts in ways that make more sense to their readers. In view of this, learning how to write at university involves the process of creating a new identity (Hyland, 2002c).

Casanave (1995, p. 86) observed that students learn to speak like members of the discipline and to represent in conventional ways "whether or not they eventually adopt the language practices, and values of the discipline by themselves" when they write discipline-based papers. Writing can thus be the way to introduce novice community members to discipline-specific issues that are linked to specialised terminology, discourse conventions, and research activities. Such issues are essential aspects of what it is to identify oneself as a member of a discipline or profession, and can offer a vision of disciplinary writing and socialisation.

Regarding this perspective, Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman (1991) and Casanave (1995) pointed out that it is by learning the discourse conventions of a community that student-writers can participate as members of their academic community, can introduce themselves to the particular values and practices of the community, and are thus able to contribute to the communicative interactions of that community. Researchers have found that acknowledging this social context in academic writing has led to the identification of a variety of "community" metaphors (e.g. discourse, academic, speech, interpretive, disciplinary), which have been widely used to help explain and understand how people come to be characterised as members or participants of specific academic groups (Casanave, 1995). Woodward-Kron (2004), reported that according to Hyland & Hamp-Lyons (2002g) the problem with the concept of discourse community was that researchers and practitioners faced difficulty in conceptualising the participants, texts and knowledge when building practices that contribute to a discourse community.

In addition to the academic conventions literature, recent research in L2 writing indicates that academic writing entails not only thinking strategies used by L2

writers to write effectively in academic tasks, but also L2 proficiency, knowledge in academic domains, and a potential for L2 learning (Cumming, 1995). Hyland (2003) asserts that every act of writing is in a sense both personal and individual, interactional and social. It is an act that also indicates a cultural purpose, reflects a specific kind of relationship, and acknowledges an engagement in a particular community. Further, Hyland claims that L2 writing is more than a set of cognitive or technical abilities or a system of rules, that it is more than a simple learning process of learning how to write in a second language, compose and revise. He subsequently argues that L2 writers bring five kinds of knowledge to produce meaningful texts. They are: (1) content knowledge of the ideas, principles and concepts in the topic area the text will address; (2) system knowledge of the syntax, lexis and proper formal conventions required; (3) process knowledge of how to plan and produce a writing task; (4) genre knowledge of communicative purposes of the genre and its importance and value in specific contexts; and (5) context knowledge of readers' expectations, cultural preferences, and related texts and contents.

In brief, in academic writing, the production of texts considers different processes, arguments and rhetorical strategies that are constructed to engage members of the same academic community, and convince them of the arguments that are made. Academic writing also considers disciplinary and genre-specific differences and conventions, where authors as well as members of the audience to which it is addressed, play a crucial role and create identity. In so doing, textual and disciplinary meanings are socially related and influenced by the communities to which authors and audience belong. Consequently, L2 writers need to use different kinds of rhetorical, discursive, linguistic, and non-linguistic devices to create a convincing reader-environment, as well as to draw upon all their knowledge to create effective texts in order to introduce themselves in their academic community (Cumming, 1995; Currie & Cray, 2004; Hyland, 1999a, 2002a, 2003, 2004b).

2.3.4 Disciplinary knowledge and specific genres

Zeus (2004, p. 3) defines disciplinary knowledge as "part of the overall specialisation pervasive in modern society for the sake of differentiation, efficiency, and organic solidarity". In the same article, Zeus (2004) states that disciplines are not only characterised by their content, but also by their methodology, which he also comments can be questionable. Zeus (2004) states that "disciplines are as much *what* they study and they are about *how* they study 'reality'" (p. 4).

On the other side, genre is a type of written discourse recognised by a discourse community (K. Johnson & Johnson, 1998). This definition encompasses the definition adopted by Swales (1990) and Martin(1984) in most of their discussions about genre. For Swales (1990, p. 58, 2004, p. 61), a genre "comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes". For Martin (1984, p. 86) a genre is "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (Heather & Dudley-Evans, 1998). For both authors, it is the communicative purpose that validates the genre, shaping the schema and structure of the discourse, and influencing the selection of content and style according to the intended audience (Heather & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Swales, 1990).

Hyland (2002f) mentions that usually there are broad approaches to genre, in order to conceptualise and analyse it in terms of the formal properties and particular typical schematic structures. Thus, genre can be analysed from different perspectives: (1) a systematic functional perspective, (2) an ESP viewpoint; and (3) a new rhetorical view. From a *systematic functional* perspective, a genre is defined as a staged, goal-oriented social process, which involves the interaction of participants using language in a conventional, step-wise structure, where the language is systematically linked to context (Hyland, 2002a; Martin, 1984). Through an *ESP* viewpoint, a genre comprises communicative events that are determined by particular purposes, and which help to shape the structure, content and style to be used by the members of a particular

discourse community. In this view, the purpose of a text is the rationale of the genre (Bhatia, 1999; Hyland, 2002a; Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990). To finish, the (3) the third form of analysis a *new rhetorical* view, "gives less emphasis to the form of discourse and more to the action it is used to accomplish, seeking to establish the connections between genre and repeated situations and to identify the way in which genres are seen as recurrent rhetorical actions." Hyland (2002f, p. 17).

Hyland (2002a) also points out that the notion of genre and its applications have a dual purpose both in language teaching and learning process. Thus, on the one hand, genre involves the attempt to understand the relationship between language and its context of use. That means it is crucial to understand how individuals use language to project and interpret actual communicative situations and the ways these communicative uses change over time. On the other hand, the genre application refers to the use of the genre knowledge in the service of language and literacy education. In consequence, genre approaches have a strong impact on the knowledge of the language use, on the recognition of the social character of literacy and in the research of texts and contexts backgrounds.

Literature has identified that there are rhetorical actions, which facilitate exploration of the lexico-grammatical and discursive patterns of particular genres. Therefore, genre approaches seem to offer the most effective means for language learners to both acquire and assess cultural and linguistic resources (Hyland, 2002a). In addition, given that the genre theories validate a social perspective of language use, they may indicate that literacy changes according to the context and cannot be distilled down to a set of cognitive or technical abilities. Thus, "literacy is revealed as a relative term, representing a wide variety of practices appropriate for particular times, places, participants, and purposes" (Hyland, 2002a, p. 125).

Literature also indicates that structural and rhetorical features of genres vary both within and across academic disciplines and that such variation represents different social relations between the reader and the writer. This variation also indicates

values and beliefs that are behind the discourse practices in different discourse communities (Chang & Swales, 1999; Conrad, 1996; Hyland, 1999a, 1999b; Zhu, 2004a). In short, an academic paper can be considered to constitute a genre within the academic literature and scientific world, which may vary conventions in different disciplines. At the same time, it represents a social activity within a community; this social relationship is explored in the next section where metadiscourse is presented.

2.4 Metadiscourse in academic writing

Research in academic writing has shown that written texts embody an interaction between the writer and the reader (Thompson, 2001). This interaction is achieved through affective factors and the discursive features, which are elements that make up the written text. So, there are linguistic traits in the texts that writers use to either highlight or diminish the presence of their audience and themselves (Hyland, 1999a; Lea & Street, 1999; Thompson, 2001). The way in which the text is organised and that organisation is indicated is clear evidence of the audience awareness developed by the writer in a written text (Thompson, 2001). "Audience" means that people who are outside of the text, but are in the authors' minds when they accommodate their discourse, and make their rhetorical choices (Hansen, 2000; Hyland, 2001a, 2004b).

To engage the audience, the writers use functional, rhetorical and discursive elements that help them to express their arguments, represent themselves and engage their audience through the texts. This is referred to the metadiscourse aspect in academic writing (Hyland, 1998, 1999a, 2001a, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). Essentially, metadiscourse in academic contexts consists of the use of linguistic and non-linguistic resources that refer to the text itself, to the writer and to the potential reader of that text. In addition, it allows for discovery and understanding of rhetorical, discursive and functional features that are directly involved in social issues of the disciplinary communities (Hyland, 2004b, p. 43). Academic writers' use of metadiscourse evidences a key concern with expressing arguments explicitly and with appropriate attention (Hyland, 1998). Figure 2.6

depicts metadiscourse components in L2 postgraduate writing, developed from a review of the literature.

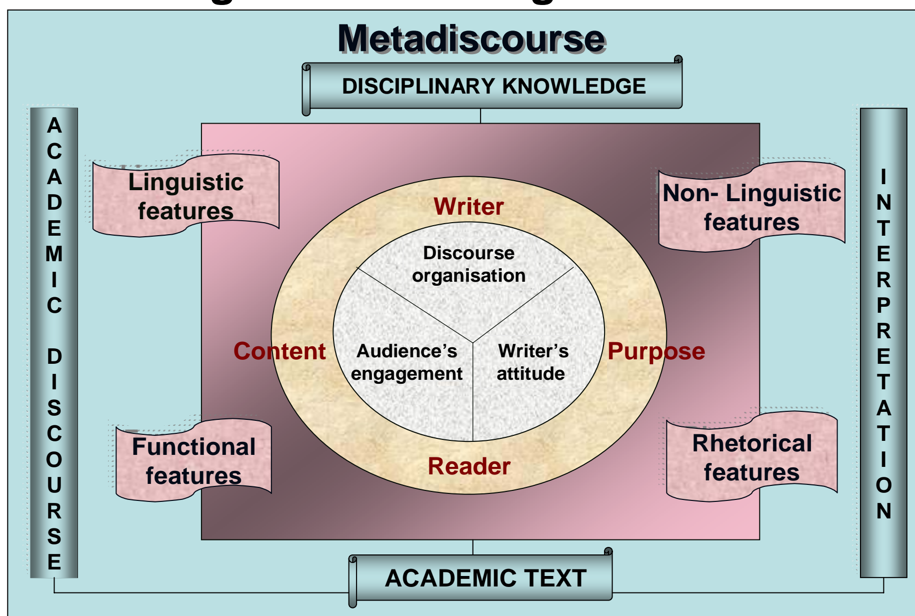

Figure 2.6 Metadiscourse components in L2 postgraduate writing (developed from a review of the literature).

According to Figure 2.6, the production of an academic text at postgraduate level involves different cognitive, linguistic and discursive components, which interact to create a meaningful written product. Among these components, there are contextual factors (audience, content and purpose), linguistic features (functional, discursive and rhetorical devices), motivational factors (a social context, writer's and reader's beliefs and attitudes, and linguistic and interactional competences) , and cognitive factors (communicative literacy skills – organisational skills, L2 communicative competence and knowledge bases). All these components constitute the metadiscourse aspect of the L2 writing process in an academic environment. The metadiscouse factors are explained below.

2.4.1 Contextual factors

As mentioned above, metadiscourse in writing is a self-reflective linguistic component referring to the evolving text, to the writer and to the imagined readers

of that text (Hyland, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). Accordingly, writing is recognised as an act of communication involving a social activity based on social engagement, which in academic contexts reveals the ways writers project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitudes and commitments towards both the propositional content and the audience of the text (Bunton, 1999; Hyland, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). Hyland (2003, p. 23) expresses this as follows "Writing is a socio-cognitive activity which involves skills in planning and drafting as well as knowledge of language, contexts, and audiences". The assumption that writers are addressing others when they write points out a social orientation to matters of form, self, audience and contents in a writing process (Bunton, 1999). Audience, content and purpose make up the contextual factors in a written communication

2.4.1.1 Audience

According to Hyland (2002f), the notion of audience has been widely debated in literacy studies and discussed in rhetoric. For this author, audience is, "in fact, rarely a concrete reality, particularly in academic and professional contexts, and must be seen as essentially representing a construction of the writer which may shift during the composing process" (Hyland, 2002f, p. 35). The relevance and consideration of audience influencing all aspects of the text from the very beginning of the writing process, as presented by Hyland, is afforded the same importance by Canagarajah (2002).

Canagarajah indicates that the audience awareness in a text composition may involve a compass of concerns such as: identifying the proper language to fit readers' proficiency, considering their background knowledge, maintaining interest and motivation, or using better and suitable cohesion devices and paragraph structuring to facilitate the text comprehension of the written text. These aspects of audience awareness indicate that the audience is integral to the composing and writing process, noting specifically that "matters such as knowledge, conventions, genre, and register are defined and used differently by each community or audience" (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 161).

2.4.1.2 Content

In writing, content refers to *what* writers are required to write about. Typically it comprises a set of themes or topics of interest that establish a coherence and purpose for the written text (Hyland, 2003). Grabe & Kaplan (1996) stated that what is written in a text has to be discussed in terms of content, genre and register, while content can be thought of as background knowledge that writers need to have for writing. Schema theory suggests that background knowledge consists of specific sets of knowledge stored as integral units, which are accessible for retrieval or reconstructing and are used in understanding and producing content knowledge. Consequently, the appropriate cognitive schema or knowledge of topics will allow writers to create an effective text (Hyland, 2003). Schemas will also provide frameworks for the writer's knowledge of appropriate register in different contexts as well as their knowledge of genres, which will indicate to the writer the ways to organise discourse for specific purposes. Background knowledge then provides content and genre-structure resources for writing (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

In academic texts, content refers not only to theoretical knowledge or propositional content, but also to linguistic devices; these devices are often referred to as metadiscourse by which writers attempt to persuade readers of the validity of the propositions they are adopting (Hewings & Hewings, 2002; Hyland, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). They are also used to help readers to organise, interpret and evaluate the propositional content of the written text (Hewings & Hewings, 2002; Ifantidou, 2005).

Hyland & Tse (2004a, p. 160) challenged the views of other authors who have drawn the line between metadiscourse and proposition content (for example Vande Kopple 2002). They argued that it was difficult to see how metadiscourse could represent a different level of meaning, and that it was certainly possible "to distinguish the propositional content of a text from the particular way it is expressed". Consequently, these authors considered that the meaning of the text would depend on the integration of its component elements (propositional content

and metadiscourse), and these elements could not be separated into independent meanings. This means that both propositional and metadiscoursal elements occur together in texts, in the same sentences and "such integration is common with each element expressing its own content: one concerned with the world and the other with the text and its reception". The integration of both elements according to the purpose of the text is seen as an integral process of communicating meaning (Hyland & Tse, 2004a, p. 161).

Ifantidou (2005) on the other hand, argues that metadiscourse is not merely a matter of style. It is not necessarily distinct from propositional content and does not merely influence interpretation of the text but that it has a relevant linguistic function in the interpretation of academic discourse when it is explained under a pragmatic perspective. For this author, a pragmatic framework of metadiscourse provides a coherent explanation of its essential and central contribution to the interpretation process of a written or oral text. Culture and profession-specific factors (Hyland, 1998, 1999b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a) as well as some notion of 'least effort' (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990) are crucial when interpreting written or oral text.

The interpretation of a written text as a process indicates that writers have created propositional content, interpersonal engagement and have kept the flow of the text as they wrote, which shows that their linguistics choices might often perform more than one function in the text. This interpretation involves the readers' processing abilities, contextual resources, and intertextual experiences (Hyland, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a).

2.4.1.3 Purpose

Literacy indicates that a common characteristic of academic texts is to present their principal purpose in an objective way (Hewings & Hewings, 2002). Thus, students can write texts from different genres such as summaries, abstracts, scientific material, and textbooks, for example. They can also write for different purposes, or more than one purpose, as well as practice writing for different

audiences. In the academic arena, students can also be asked to write in and for different kinds of contexts, they can be encouraged to evaluate or assess a literacy context, explain an academic topic, reflect upon an academic experience and so on. Academic writing, then, requires students to be aware of specific writing features where the outline, content, audience, conceptual framework, purpose and detail of the written text have to be considered (Johns, 1997).

Many academic texts, however, contribute insights regarding to an ongoing academic debate about students as writers engaged in an attempt to persuade readers of the validity of the positions they adopt in their written texts (Bazerman, 1988; Hewings & Hewings, 2002; Swales, 1990). As such, the academic text includes, then, not only propositional content, but also linguistic devices by which readers are helped to organise, interpret and evaluate this propositional content (Bazerman, 1988; Hewings & Hewings, 2002; Swales, 1990). As mentioned before, the linguistic devices are often referred to as metadiscourse and are selected and used by writers according to their writing purposes (Hyland, 1998, 1999a, 2002a). Linguistic features are classified as functional, discursive and rhetorical devices which make up the discourse coherence in a written text. They allow coherence relations in the text for a simultaneous realization of semantic and pragmatic coherence links (Fraser, 1999).

2.4.2 Linguistic features

In metadiscourse or metatext literature, linguistic features are lexical expressions whose main function is to guide the reader through a long text (Bunton, 1999). Mauranen (1993) uses the term "metatext" rather than metadiscourse and defines it as "text about text itself", stating that it "comprises those elements in the text which at least in their primary function go beyond the propositional content" (Bunton, 1999, p. S43).

The linguistic features or lexical expressions are known as logical connectors or discourse markers. Logical connectors, discourse connectives or discourse markers are conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional phrases that connect two

sentences or clauses together (Fraser, 1999). Discourse markers are the most frequently studied markers to sign coherence relations. Taboada (2006) points out that the first difficulty in examining these markers is in finding the definition of exactly what they are, and what to call them.

In the same line as Fraser (1999), Taboada (2006) states that in the last years, discourse markers have been given a variety of labels by different groups of researchers. Among other terms, they are usually identified as: coherence markers, discourse markers (Fraser, 1999; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Taboada, 2006; Wang & Tsai, 2007); lexical markers (Cortes, 2004); metadiscourse markers (Ifantidou, 2005); metadiscourse features (Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995); connectives (Renkema, 2004); semantic connectives (Wang & Tsai, 2007); discourse operators (Redeker, 1990, 1991); sentence connectives, adverbial markers (Hinkel, 2002); linguistic markers and cue phrases (Knott & Sanders, 1998); clue words, discursive features (Magnet & Carnet, 2006; Samraj, 2004); logical connectives (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990); discourse connectives, pragmatic connectives, linguistic and rhetorical devices (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Hyland, 1999b, 2001b, 2002b, 2004b, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a); and discourse signalling devices (Hyland, 2001a).

Definitions for discourse markers are equally diverse. Redeker (1990, 1991) proposes that these discourse markers link not only adjacent sentences, but also the current sentence or utterance within its immediate context. Hyland (1998) working within the framework of pragmatics of academic metadiscourse, uses the term “logical connectives” (a term borrowed from Crismore & Farnsworth (1990)), to refer principally to conjunctions which help readers to interpret pragmatic connections between ideas by signalling rhetorical functions such addition, exemplification, consequence and contrast in the writer’s thinking. Taboada (2006) on the other hand, considers that discourse markers signal a particular rhetorical relationship as being used by a speaker or a writer in a text.

In writing, coherence relations might, but need not, be explicitly pointed out by writers. The interpretation of a particular coherence relation is not generally indicated by linguistic properties. It depends on the reader's interpretation of the content of units involved, on the content and structure of the surrounding context, as well as on relevant aspects of the communicative situation and knowledge of the extra-linguistic world. Writers, however, tend to assist and to guide this process of interpretation, when they deploy discourse markers in their texts (Knott & Sanders, 1998; Renkema, 2004; Risselada & Spooren, 1998). Research on discourse markers focusses mainly on discourse analysis and a methodological outcome of this orientation is the current and wide use of corpus-based data (Risselada & Spooren, 1998). A discourse analysis identifies functional, discursive and rhetorical language features in written and oral texts.

2.4.2.1 Functional meanings of the language

Halliday (2002a, 2002b) states that language is used to serve a wide diversity of different needs. However, when the potential meaning of language is examined it is easy to identify vast numbers of options embodied in it, which can be combined into a very few relatively independent networks; these networks of options in turn correspond to specific basic functions of language. By analysing these networks language researchers can give an account of the different functions of language, which is crucial to the general understanding of the linguistic structure of the language itself rather than a particular psychological or sociological perspective.

Halliday (2002a, 2002b) outlines three key functions of language: (a) ideational; (b) interpersonal; and (c) textual. The *ideational function,* indicates that language serves for expression of content. That is, language gives structure to experience and helps users to determine their way of looking at things: it requires intellectual efforts. This function helps language users to express their experience of the real world, including the inner world of their own consciousness. The *interpersonal function,* indicates that language serves in the expression and development of the language user's personality. That is, language enables the user to interact with others, to establish and maintain social relations including the communication roles created by the language itself. Finally, through its *textual function*, language

serves to establish cohesive relationships from one utterance to another one in a discourse. That is, language enables users to construct texts and distinguish a text from a random set of sentences. This function recognises that language allows making links with itself and with features of the situation in which it is used. According to Halliday (2002a, 2002b), all these functions are reflected in the structure of clauses.

2.4.2.2 Discursive elements of the language

The functions of the language described by Halliday (2002a, 2002b) as ideational, interpersonal and textual are components of the semantic system, presented in the text as lexicogrammatical entities. Here, patterns of wording in a clause display various meanings when the semantic system is expressed, and the structural shape in a particular case is a natural product of the semantic functions of the language. A functional grammar and use of the grammar patterns of the language thus serve to understand the semiotic purposes and the different ways in which meanings related to these different purposes tend to be encoded.

In a discursive background, writing is a purposeful and communicative activity that should not simply emphasise the formal accuracy and particular aspects of language, but should be situated in meaningful contexts with authentic purposes. Therefore, language in writing is structured according to the demands and expectations of the target discourse communities and audiences through authentic texts and specific genres (Hyland, 2003).

2.4.2.3 Rhetorical aspects of the language

In written texts there are components of the semantic system that are related to the texts' organisation, so they indicate rhetorical relations such as the writer's intention and the reader's text construction. They also indicate coherence relations such as exemplifications, comparison, contrast, cause, consequence, or discourse relations such as writer and reader relationship, writer's purpose, and content development in the texts (Hyland, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Taboada, 2006)

Organisational patterns of language, based on grammar, make it possible to construct complex open-ended networks of semantic potential in which meanings are defined, modified and also changed in response to the changing environments. Thus meanings are brought into contexts of function. The ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of the language in a written text are marked by grammar and non-grammar components. Grammar components include: pronouns, conjunctions, adjectives, relative clauses, conjoined, serial and sequenced phrases, verbs, and complement clauses (Halliday, 2002a). For this study the grammar components or linguistic features that have been selected for corpora analysis are: (a) pronouns, (b) connective adjuncts and (c) modal verbs (See Table 3.1 in Chapter 3). They have been chosen because of their ideational, interpersonal and textural function as discursive markers in written texts.

(a) Pronouns are a subcategory of the term "noun". Syntactically, pronouns function as the head in noun phrase (NP) structure and for that reason belong to the large category of nouns. What makes them different from other nouns is that they involve a much narrower range of dependents. Normally, they form full NPs by themselves and represent a closed category of words whose most central constituents are generally used deictically or anaphorically. Most distinctively, they do not take determiners (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

Pronouns have close association with deixis and anaphora. Personal pronouns or core members are classified according to the deictic category of person, where the first and second person pronouns are associated with the speaker and addressee roles in the utterance-act. There are eight core members of this category, classified also for number and gender (in the third person singular). They are: *I, you, he, she, it, we, you, and they.* Each core member has up to five inflectional forms such as: *I, me, my, mine, myself* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

Pronouns are reference markers that indicate the writer's presence and the reader's involvement in the text, and whose reference is determined by the context in use. They are linked with the writers' identity and their interest for creating and achieving a successful interaction with their readers. Analysis of pronouns as

reference markers is important because of their discourse function (Fortanet, 2004; Hyland, 2001b; Kroeger, 2005; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Tang & John, 1999).

(b) Connective adjuncts are modifiers in the clause structure or a supplement to a clause. The adjuncts are named and distinguished on a semantic basis. So, they include various semantic categories such as manner, means, frequency, purpose, condition, exemplification, cause-consequence, concession, and duration. They serve to relate the clause to the adjoining text or, in the limiting case, to the context. Thus, they are not only related to the situation or proposition expressed in the clause but to the speech act performed in uttering the clause or to the speech act that is expected as a response. There are various kinds of adjunct that can relate to the speech act as well as functioning usually to give information about the situation described in the clause (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). This paper is concerned with adjuncts of the kinds of: exemplification, comparison, contrast, and purpose.

(1) Exemplification**:** Logical connectors are present in the texts according to the function that they fulfil. In order to exemplify a representative member, connectors such as *for instance, for example, like, such as, as,* or *as illustration* are used. They can occur in clause initial, clause medial or clause final in a sentence; their position will depend on the meaningful discourse context.

(2) Comparison: Concessive adjuncts also occur in comparative constructions, where the adjunct has the distinctive properties of comparative clauses with respect to its internal form and consequently belongs in the default category of content clauses. Comparative clauses function as a complement to *than, as*, or *like*. Prepositions like a*s* and *than* occur in comparisons of equality and inequality respectively. *Like, as* and *similar to* are the comparative elements selected in this study (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

(3) Contrast: The concessive prepositions *but, however, or, whereas, although, though* and *meanwhile* express a contrast between two subordinate clauses. Concessive adjuncts have the form of propositional phrases (PPs), mostly headed by *although, though, despite, in spite of, notwithstanding*, or *albeit*, or adverbs such as: *nevertheless, nonetheless, still* or *yet*. Contrast adjuncts indicate a relation of choice or a selection between concession and reason. Such a contrast indicates the fact that a concessive construction can be generally paraphrased in terms of reason in combination with negative subordinate clauses involved in the construction (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The words *but, however, or, whereas, although, though,* and *meanwhile,* were selected to analyse the contrast function in this study.

(4) Purpose, reason or result: Purpose and reason are subtypes of a more general category "cause". Huddleston and Pullum (2002) indicate that from a grammatical perspective, adjuncts of cause are very much more important than those of result in terms of both the frequency and the variety of constructions available for expressing them. The central cases of purpose imply intention and design; purpose is usually part of the agent of the matrix clause. Reason, by contrast, the subordinate situation is usually earlier or simultaneous with the matrix, though it is also possible for it to be later. Adjuncts of reason mostly have the form of PPs, but there are a few adverbs, such as *consequence, therefore, thus* that express reason as well as having a connective function. There is a close relationship between purpose and reason, which is reflected in the fact that a clause with the reason adjunct very often implies one with a purpose adjunct, and vice versa.

Adjuncts that explicitly express result are either expressed by a PP with *so* as a head and a content clause as complement, or by a PP with *with* as head and an nominal phrase (NP) complement with the form: the result + content clause. The purpose, reason and results adjuncts selected for analysis in this study are: (a) to express purpose and reason - *because of, due to, as, since, so;* and (b) to express result - *so, thus, therefore, hence, as a result.*

(c) Modal verbs: The verbs, w*ill, would, may, might, can, could, shall, should, and must* are hedges. Grammatically, they are modal auxiliaries. Modality is essentially concerned with the speaker's attitude towards the factuality or actualisation of the situation expressed by the rest of the clause. Modality also applies by extension to the attitude of persons referred to in the clause or to something more objective(Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

Modals express different meanings. For example: *Must* expresses necessity; *may* and *can* express possibility if used subjectively; *must* and *may* are most often used objectively to express the speaker's judgment where it is a matter of public knowledge; *should* is usually subjective, indicating what the speaker considers "right" whether morally or as a matter of convenience; *should* is weaker than *must* in that it allows for non-actualisation; *should* is used to express instructions; *will* is strong, involving the factuality of the situation; *will* has the same semantic strength as *must* with a little change of meaning; *will* is more a matter of assumption or expectation, very often with a suggestion of future confirmation; *Shall* is used to express the speaker's guarantee, to pose a direction question or to express a constitutive or regulative statement. The word, *could* is currently used to express permission, potential ability, actualised ability, acceptance, existential or circumstantial possibility; and *would* is used to indicate futurity in the past; the use of *would* is restricted to narrative and similar genres (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

Hyland (1999b) states that hedges are signalled by terms such as *possible, may, might, clearly* and *perhaps,* which indicate the degree of commitment, certainty and collegial deference a writer wishes to convey. For the writer, hedges are also items that mark the writer's reluctance to present or evaluate propositional information emphatically. Hedges play a significant role in academic prose because they can indicate the writer's commitment to the text content, recognise the reader's needs, observe the academic community's rules concerning rhetorical

aspects for colleagues' views and seek to involve readers as participants (Hyland, 1998).

Hunston (2002. p.204) refering to Hyland's work states: "In short, for Hyland, hedging allows the writer to negotiate a set of relationships: between the proposition and the world, between the writer and the proposition, between the writer and the reader, and between the writer and their peers". In addition to the functional, discursive and rhetorical factors of the language a written text is marked by motivational factors and cognitive factors.

2.4.3 Motivational factors

Hayes (1996) states that writing is a communicative act requiring social context and a medium. He also says that writing is an intellectual activity that requires motivation, cognitive process and memory. Johnson's (1995) concept of extending classroom communicative competence to the writing process as a communicative act, suggests another scenario, where communicative competence means enabling L2 students to develop a wider range of linguistic and interactional competencies for greater participation in a broader range of communicative events.

Therefore, through writing in the communicative competence context student-writers can adjust the academic written norms that regulate patterns of communication and acquire the prerequisite competencies needed to eventually participate in the writing instruction. This context should also motivate and encourage student-writers to use a wider range of linguistic and interactional competencies where the structure and content of the interaction (in this case the written text), can be constructed and controlled by the students themselves. That means it should motivate student-writers to extend discourse, to use more meaning-focussed interactions, to perform a variety of language functions, and to reflect on the structure and organisation of the language. In so doing, the students' productions will depend on their personal and/or professional needs and goals and on their motivation to communicate (K. E. Johnson, 1995).

In this respect, Graham and Harris (1996) indicate that skilled writers use strategies such as goal setting, seeking information, reviewing notes and previous drafts of text, evaluation, organising and transforming ideas, and checking and monitoring to help them adjust their written output and strengthen their motivation. Ellis (1994, p. 542) also determines that "the strength of learner's motivation can be expected to have a causal effect on the quality of learning strategies they employ". Literature thus indicates there are important links between motivational factors and strategic choice, which are related to the cognitive factors in the writing process.

2.4.4 Cognitive factors

Writing, as an act of communication between the reader and the writer, is a complex cognitive skill that involves a variety of plans, appropriate processes and strategies (Connor, 1994). Connor (1994) observes that both L1 and L2 researchers have based their studies on the mental states of writers, their problem-solving strategies and decisions when they consider their writing purpose, audience, language use and their stylistic decisions and composing processes (planning, decisions during writing, and revising) in order to determine what is involved in the act of writing and what skills are required.

Flower and Hayes's (1981) cognitive process model, for instance, represents writing as comprising four interactive components: – task, environment, the writer's long term memory, and the composing processes themselves. For these authors, the task and environment comprise the writing topic, the audience, the degree of the task and the text produced. The writer's long term memory retains definitions of the topic, identity of the audience, and potential writing plans. The writing processes includes planning, translating and reviewing, where planning implies generating ideas, writing purposes, and procedures. Translating involves expressing ideas and goals in verbal forms, while reviewing considers evaluating and revising the written production (Bachman, 1990; Connor, 1994).

Bachman (1990) proposes another model representing the cognitive mechanisms for implementing a writing plan in the modality and channel matching the communicative goal and context (See Figure 2.4 in this Chapter). In his model of language use, Bachman presents integration between goals, planning process, plan, execution utterance, language competence, psychophysiological mechanisms and situational assessment. In Bachman's (1990) model, all components have a crucial role in language production. Referring to writing as a cognitive process, Hyland (2002f) says that interest in the writer's composition processes has been extended and developed by research which focusses on the cognitive aspects of writing and identifies writing as essentially a problem-solving activity. In sum, cognitive factors influence the cognitive process in a writing activity; these factors presented by different authors above are adopted in this study and are depicted in Figure 2.7.

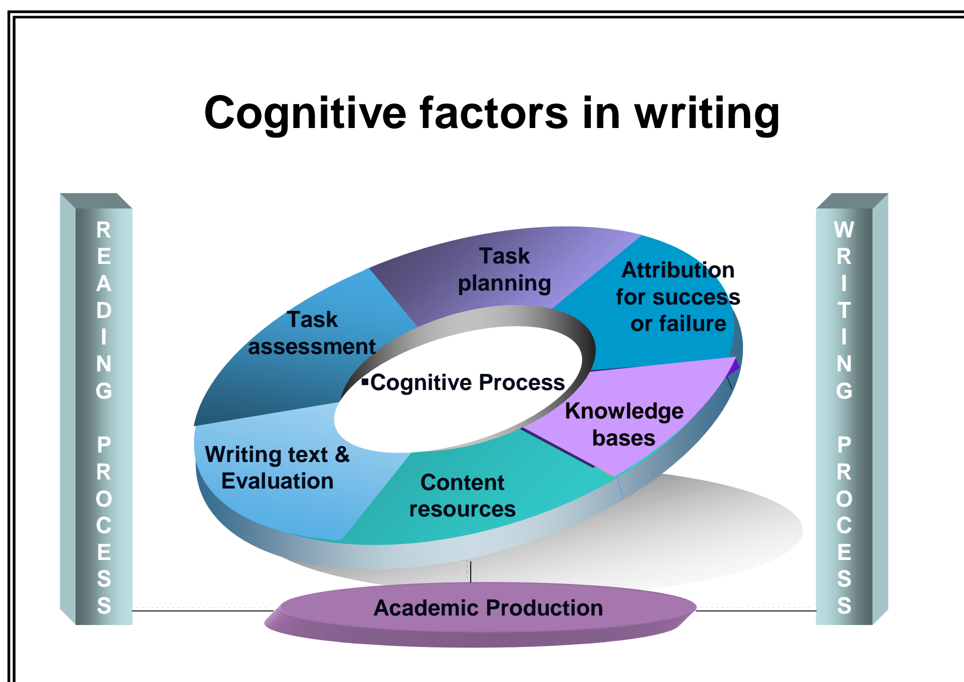

Figure 2.7 Cognitive factors in a writing process (Developed from a review in literature).

Key themes identified in the literature relating to contextual factors, linguistic features, motivational factors and cognitive factors are integrated with the L2 writing, academic writing, disciplinary knowledge and metadiscourse in academic writing concepts to present the L2 academic writing process model proposed in

this study. The model also values the perceived relationship between the reading process and the writing process to produce an academic text.

2.5 A Model of the L2 academic writing process

Literature on L2 writing in the last two decades has maintained the position that the process of writing in L1, such as illustrated in the Hayes and Flower (1980) model, is basically the same as that for writing in L2 (Woodall, 2002). Although L2 writing researchers have found some differences between L1 writing and L2 writing in terms of processes, these differences appear to be more quantitative than qualitative in nature (Hyland, 2003; Riazi, 1997; Silva, 1993; Woodall, 2002). In fact, models of writing as a process show writers as making selections among information sources, text formats and features, organisational plans, goals, and strategies in order to create a text that is completely understood by their intended audience (Marsella, et al., 1992) .

The L1 and L2 literature also carries evidence of different, alternative approaches, specifically: (1) *linguistic* which focusses on the syntactic-rhetorical features of a text; (2) *psycholinguistic* which deals with the writer's thinking and composing behaviours; and (3) *sociolinguistic* which focusses on social contexts and readers (Riazi, 1997). However, Riazi claims that though these three approaches have been constructive in their own respects, they barely indicate the actual nature and complexity of writing. Thus, he validates the bigger picture given by Silva (1990) when he mentions that writing "must, at least, meaningfully account for the contribution of the writer, reader, text, and context, as well as their interaction." (Riazi, 1997)

Accordingly these three approaches (linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic) plus the social interaction that occurs in a written text, are essential to understand and construct a model of L2 writing which can be adjusted to meet academic requirements at postgraduate level, as is the case in this study. The proposed model illustrated in Figure 2.8 takes account of current key issues in academic writing and is created to extend what is known about writing.

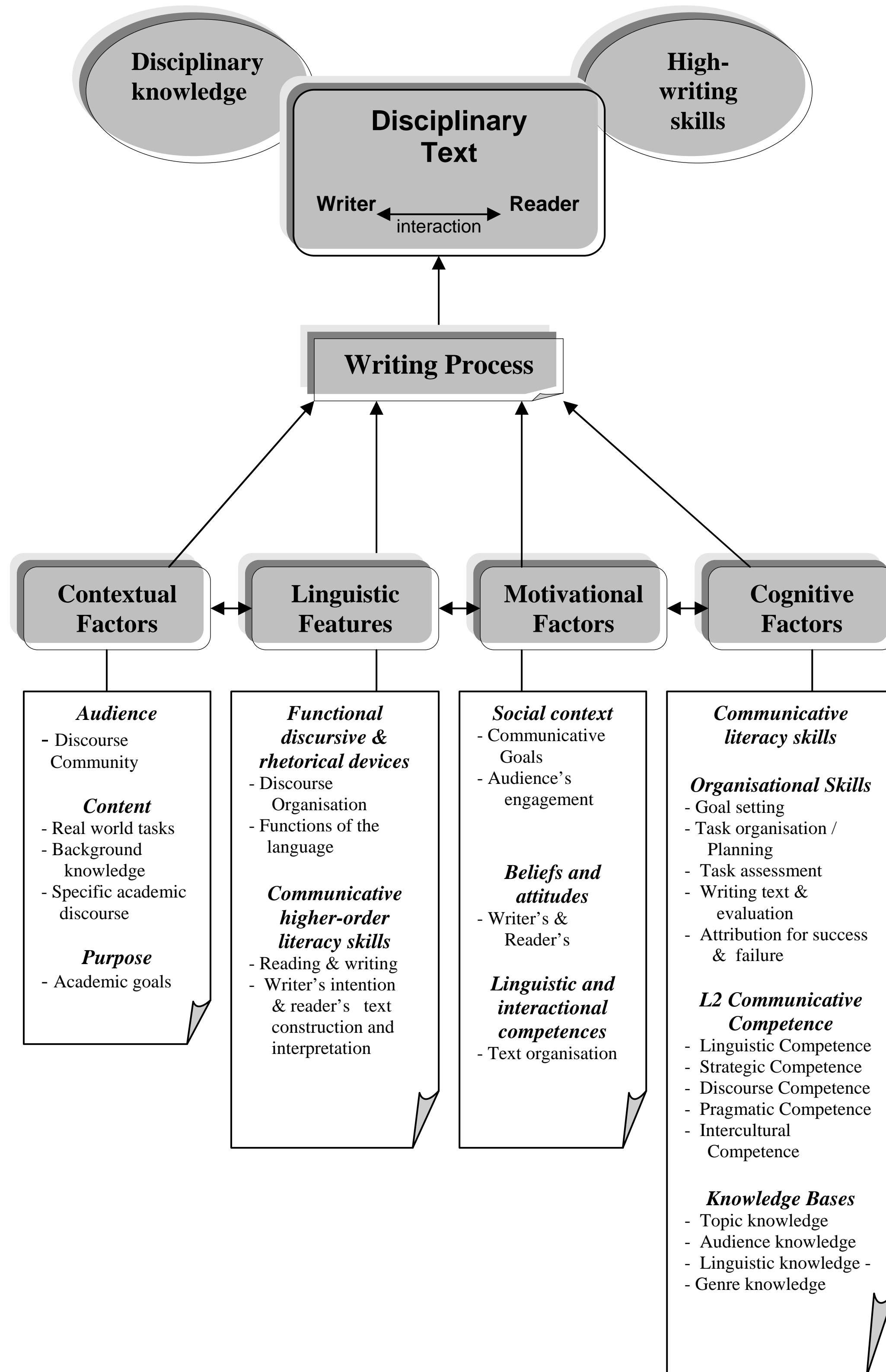

Figure 2.8 Model for the L2 postgraduate writing process: a metadiscourse perspective (Developed from a review of the literature)

The proposed model for the L2 postgraduate writing process (See figure 2.8) incorporates a number of components where disciplinary knowledge and higher order writing skills converge to create a disciplinary text. The disciplinary text is built up with three main components: the context factors, the motivational factors and the cognitive factors. The ***contextual factors*** consist of audience, content and purpose. *Audience* refers to the reader-awareness that the writer has while writing the text. *Content* refers to the specific content information the writer has to deal with to write the text. In an academic environment, the content should be led by real work tasks, proper background knowledge and should keep a specific academic discourse. *Purpose,* refers to the writer's focus on the specific academic discourse, discourse community and academic goals while producing the text.

Linguistic features, on the other hand, consist of the *functional*, *discursive* and *rhetorical devices* and the *communicative higher-order literacy skills* writer and reader apply to construct and understand a text. These components assist writers to express their intention and organise their discourse. They also assist readers to understand and interpret the text. The linguistic features indicate the writer's and reader's experience of the real world, the social relations created and maintained within the text, and the cohesive relationships between the written clauses. ***Motivational factors*** involve the *social context*, *writer's beliefs and attitudes* as well as *the writer's linguistic and interactional competences*. The motivational factors govern the individual aspects of writing and support the writer-reader interaction plus engagement in the written text that is produced. These factors will be also part of the discourse organisation of the text that is produced according to the writer's needs and motivation to communicate adequately.

The contextual factors, linguistic features together and motivational factors are in turn influenced by the ***cognitive factors***, where in L2 postgraduate writing, the communicative higher-order literacy skills, L2 communicative competence, organisational skills and knowledge bases are absolutely essential for the full process of writing. Organisational skills include the goal setting, task planning, task organisation, tasks assessment, writing text and evaluation as well as the

writer's attributions for success or failure. Topic knowledge, audience knowledge, linguistic knowledge and genre knowledge compose the knowledge bases in a writing process. In particular, *reading* and *writing* are literacy skills that complement each other in the academic writing process. Goal setting and purpose focus the processing system of writing and contextualise the writing process to make it relevant to the major field of study. In fact, successful writing depends on an appropriate and effective combination of cognitive, affective, social, and linguistic conditions that writers must deal with while they are writing (Hayes, 1996).

The writing processes interact closely with reading processes, which are involved in reading, so reading becomes a central component for the L2 writing process model. The writer's memory processes engage knowledge bases, so writers are able to transform their knowledge in written production of any specific field discourse. Finally, the specific academic discourse is derived from the interaction between three dimensions of language: form, meaning and use. Thus, the academic text should contain non-linguistic, linguistic, functional and rhetorical elements that will contribute to the accuracy, meaningfulness and appropriateness of the academic text that is produced. Together, the discursive elements characterise the metadiscourse aspect of the final disciplinary written production (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Grabe, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Johns, 1997).

In order to explain the second language postgraduate writing process model it is necessary to explore and understand the social cognitive theory of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and the cognitive process theory of writing (Cumming, 1998; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Grabe, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Kaplan, 1987). These theories were crucial in developing the model for this research because they provided insightful views of writing, and in particular, writing processes with a consideration for social and disciplinary contexts, task variation, motivational factors, and contextual factors, learning theories, language knowledge, and even variability in the language processes themselves. In addition, theoretical

perspectives on the nature of writing, writing instruction and writing as academic literacy provided the researcher with a better understanding of L2 writing development, writing constraints, second language acquisition (SLA), and second language proficiency, competence and performance in disciplinary writing (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Candlin & Hyland, 1999; Joan Eisterhold. Carson, 2001; Lea & Street, 1999; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki & Carson, 1994; Mangubhai, 2000; Tony Silva & Brice, 2004; Tony Silva & Matsuda, 2001).

This study attempted to understand and describe the L2 postgraduate writing process from a set of theories that influence writing construction. These theories were: (1) Theory of language; (2) Theory of conceptual knowledge and mental representations; (3) theory of language processing (writing process); (4) Theory of motivational and effective variables; (5) Theory of social context influences; and (6) Theory of learning (Grabe, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Johns, 1997).

2.6 Conclusions

In summary, the wide theoretical background cited in this chapter clearly led this researcher to: (a) recognise the principles of SLA and L2 competence as fundamental factors in a writing process; (b) explore and identify the core characteristics of writing as a cognitive, linguistic and communicative skill, and its vital role within the academic literacies arena; (c) identify and explain different cognitive, linguistic and communicative strategies that L2 students can use to overcome their L2 communicative needs and difficulties at tertiary education; (d) recognise the fundamental factors L2 students have to face and adopt regarding their disciplinary knowledge, disciplinary community, academic genres, academic demands and academic literacies when they are involved in a postgraduate program and need to produce a written text, (e) understand the metadiscourse elements that L2 writers employ in their academic production according to their discipline; and (f) identify the significant literature, which could provide the foundations to create a model of L2 academic writing under a metadiscourse perspective. Thus, the literature foundations presented in this chapter added to the

findings of this research (Chapters 4 and 5) may support the strong relationship between disciplinary knowledge and writing strategies non-English postgraduate students (NNPS) apply in their academic production, which was the main goal of this study. The methodology and research design adopted in this research is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

With the core constructs of this research identified in the chapter 2, this next chapter presents the methodology applied in this study. It includes research design, participants, instruments, ethical considerations, data collection procedures and data analysis.

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to solve the main research question and sub-questions proposed for this research (See chapter 1). In-depth interviews and text analysis of two electronic corpora were the main methods selected to collect the data. These methods were chosen because the two main purposes of this study were: (a) to explore students' perceptions relating to the writing process and composing strategies in their academic writing production; and (b) to identify key rhetorical elements that could show the complexity of writing in L2 in the context of a postgraduate program, and account for demands of literacy within the discipline.

Thus, this chapter consists of five main sections as shown below in Figure 3.1. After this first, introductory section (section 3.1), operational issues of the qualitative and quantitative inquiries are described in the research design of the study (3.2) and the stages of the research design (3.2.1). The design comprises two main methods: in-depth interviews (section 3.2.2) and text analysis of two electronic corpora (section 3.2.3). Data analysis and interpretation of findings from qualitative interviews and quantitative results of the text corpora are reported in sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 respectively. This study attempts to supplement quantitative results from the corpora in a more qualitative way, by studying linguistic features selected for this investigation through a pragmatics and discursive approach in the written texts. In addition, the concepts of validity and

reliability are discussed in relation to the appropriateness of the findings (section 3.4), followed by the conclusions in section 3.5.

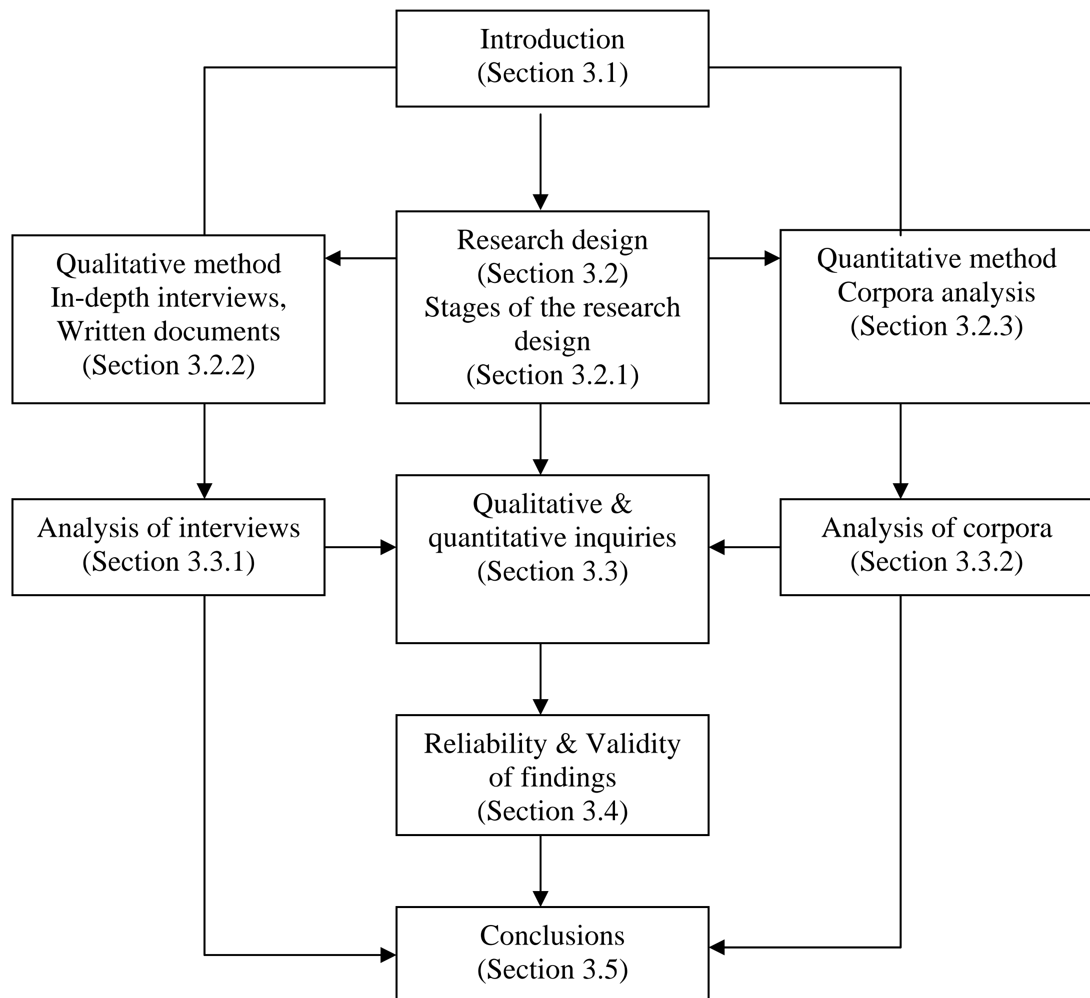

Figure 3.1 Outline of Chapter 3, with section numbers and their interrelations

3.2 Research design

The working design for this study was the framework plan, by which methods and procedures were selected for collecting and analysing the needed information (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Wiersma, 2000; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Qualitative research is understood here to be a systematic and empirical strategy, used to answer questions about any person or group of people in a particular

social context. This aspect of the methodology made it possible to describe and attempt to understand the observed regularities in what a group of people did, or in what they reported as their attitudes, opinions or achievements in natural settings (Locke et al., 2000; Wiersma, 2000; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Qualitative research usually involves a logical analysis of data, which lead to answer the research questions. Its analysis implies the identification of topics, categories and patterns that lead to interpretations, from which conclusions are reached concerning the proposed research questions. This method allows the use of different forms of data which in this study included in-depth, open-ended interviews. The data from interviews offer direct quotations from people about their experiences, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge (Best & Kahn, 1998; Mertler & Charles, 2005). In this study, interviews enabled data gathering where participants presented their perceptions, experiences and knowledge regarding L2 writing practice in an academic environment.

A quantitative research approach is usually related to statistical procedures, where numerical descriptions of tendency, variability, correlations, and differences are identified as the result of the data analysis. Document analysis may include primary and secondary sources (Mertler & Charles, 2005). Quantitative data in this study were obtained from written documents produced by the student-participants, and were used to build up two electronic corpora. The quantitative analyses of the corpora were done using MonoConc *Pro (MP 2.2).*

3.2.1 Stages of the research design

This research was conducted in three stages (See Figure 3.2). Stage one was related to the literature review and establishing a relationship between theoretical concepts concerning the research topic. This relationship helped the researcher to explain and support the present L2 writing model. Stage one also involved the selection of the corpora program to be used for text analysis of the students' productions. The students' productions are written assignments they have submitted in a discipline course, Management and Organisational Behaviour

(MGT5000) in this case. Stage two involved the design and development of the face-to-face interviews and further data collection from students' assignments. Finally, in stage three, the interpretation of the results from the qualitative method (open-ended interviews) and quantitative method (text corpora) provided the results of this study, which led to the development of the L2 writing model at tertiary level.

The research stages were important in the development of this study because they identify how this research was achieved and indicate how this study would be different from previous studies.

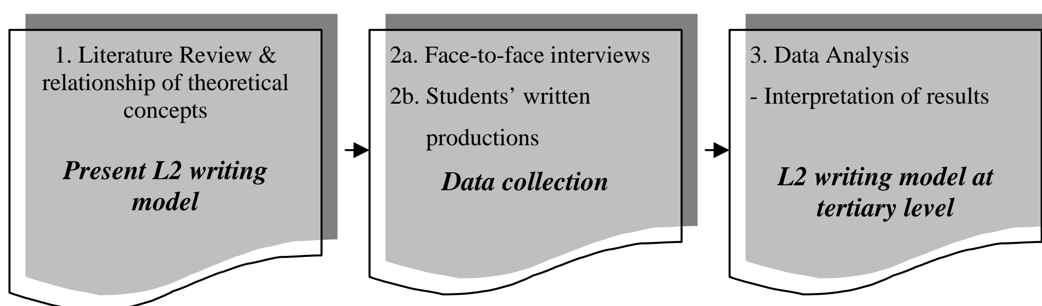

Figure 3.2 Stages of the research design

3.2.1.1 Research methods and literature review

The main objective of stage one was to explore the methods and literature review that previous researchers have conducted in terms of second language writing and disciplinary knowledge. Next, the researcher created the research question and the design for this study. The research question established the possible link between second language competence and academic writing at postgraduate level. The literature review explored the relevant concepts and the methods from previous research that could guide this study and also helped to focus the research sub-questions (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Candlin & Plum, 1999; Hyland, 2001a, 2001b, 2002b, 2002c, 2003, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Ifantidou, 2005; Leki & Carson, 1994; Lillis, 1997, 2001; Lillis & Tuner, 2001;

Matsuda & Tardy, 2007, 2008; Robinson, 2001; Thompson, 2001; Zamel, 1998b; Zamel, et al., 1998; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b).

This study acknowledges previous valuable research on academic writing domain particularly on L2 writing by various authors, noting in particular that, the approach and methods used by Hyland in several of his studies were also selected here (Hyland, 1998; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). This choice was made considering the way in which Hyland explored topics such as metadiscourse, academic discourse and textual interactions in academic writing. All of these are concepts that are also applied in this research which focus is on postgraduate L2 writing.

In summary, the literature review not only led to the theoretical framework, key concepts and research methods that were applied in this study, but also, it allowed the exploration of processes not yet identified or covered in academic writing theory at postgraduate level. This exploration also highlighted the significance of the new findings in this research project.

3.2.1.2 Research questions

The second stage of the research design involved choosing the most appropriate method to address the research question and sub-questions (See Chapter 1). Two methods were selected. The first used in-depth interviews as a qualitative method driven by sub-questions one and two that demanded the exploration of perceptions and opinions about academic writing from a number of participants. The sub-questions one and two were:

1. What kind of process or processes and composing strategies do non-English postgraduate students (NNPS) in the study employ in order to improve their academic literacy and develop academic writing skills in their disciplinary field?
2. What do the participants in the study think they learn while writing their assignment texts?

Secondly, the *MonoConc Pro* (MP 2.2) concordance program was chosen for quantitative analysis of grammar, plus functional and discursive features in academic writing from the students' written scripts to answer the research sub-questions three and four. They were:

3. How do NNPS perceive and engage with their disciplines through deployment of interpersonal features of their texts?
4. What linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features are recognised in NNPS' writing?

3.2.1.3 Data analysis

The third stage consisted of organising, categorising, and interpreting the collected data. This complex process allowed the researcher to build a coherent interpretation of the data through an evolving understanding of concepts and development of research strategies appropriate for analysing students' spoken and written texts which sometimes presented confusing, ambiguous and time-consuming data. At this stage, the theory review, the data collection strategies and the structured analysis of data allowed the researcher to develop a second language writing model at tertiary level as the main result at the end of the study.

The next aspect to be considered in the research design is related to the participants and context of the study

- **Participants and context**

This study was conducted at The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) in Toowoomba campus. Data were collected during Semester 1, 2005 from seven volunteer students who were undertaking graduate studies in business, in the USQ Master of Business Administration (MBA) program, and were enrolled in the MGT 5000 Management and Organisational Behaviour course. All participants were in the project until it was completed. Data were also collected from the course leader of the MGT 5000 course.

A Faculty of Business program was selected for this research because it represents a discipline that is one of the most attractive professional areas to international students. The MGT 5000 course assessment requirement comprised two written assignments with marks weighted 50% each to attain the final grade of the course. The assessment requirement offered favourable research conditions to collect writing texts from students to explore their writing production and fulfil the main aim of this study.

The selected student-participants were studying the first courses of their program and were selected on the basis of English as a second language. Initially, it was planned to include three students who were also participating in the MBA academic writing support program offered by Office of Preparatory and Academic Support (OPACS) at USQ, and three who were not in the program. Ultimately, inclusion in the OPACS program was not part of the final selection criteria, although three of the volunteer students selected had previously participated in University Preparation Program (UNIPREP) at USQ while other three students had not participated in the above mentioned program.

Age, gender, first language and previous educational backgrounds were not criteria for the recruitment of participants because they might generate more variables for data analysis and because the focus was the academic writing in the discipline by on campus students cohort However there were similarities that were used as homogeneity criteria for the recruitment of participants (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). The selected students were a homogeneous group because: They shared the same academic context; all of them were just starting their graduate program; all were international students with English as their second language; and all were facing new academic challenges and experiences regarding their academic skills. These factors thus made their perceptions and opinions regarding their writing experience valuable for this study. The main requirement to select the participants for this study was that students did not have previous experience of academic writing in English in their major area of study.

The course leader of the MGT 5000 course was also recruited as a participant because the study required having the examiner's perceptions about the students' writing production. It also counted the course leader's wide previous experience in teaching and leading the course to be included as participant. Her significant experience as a reader of L2 students' texts brought remarkable insights to this study. In general, both students and course leader cooperated positively with this study.

- **Ethical Considerations**

This study was given the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Southern Queensland and the aims of the study were fully communicated following the USQ research protocols. An ethical clearance was also sought through the Office of Research and Higher Degrees, and finally a recruitment of participants was taken.

The Faculty of Business at USQ gave permission to approach MBA students to obtain data for the proposed research project. Before agreeing to participate, potential student-participants and their MGT 5000 course leader attended a course session where this researcher presented a verbal overview of the study. The aim of this session was: (1) to explain and describe the study; (2) to point out the research goals, expectations and procedures of the study; (3) to tell the participants about their role in the study; (4) to explain and give a general description of the consent form; (5) to ask for voluntary participation in the study; and (6) to state that the participants might withdraw at any time (Best & Kahn, 1998; Gray, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Wiersma, 2000; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Participants were encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that the researcher was using in the study. In addition, they were assured that their suggestions and concerns were also important to develop the study and that they might withdraw from the study at any time.

Students were advised that if they chose not to participate in the study, or to withdraw from the study it would have no bearing on their marks.

At each interview, the participants signed a consent form where aspects such as: demographic information, written records and reports, interview records, publication of responses were guaranteed to be kept under special confidential conditions. The consent form also stated that each participant would receive a copy of the final report, so they would have the opportunity to know the results of the research (Best & Kahn, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Wiersma, 2000; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

The consent form also conveyed that audio taping information, written information and participants' contact information would not be shared with anyone. It stipulated that the research data would not be used for any purpose other than the study, and at participants' discretion, the tapes would either be destroyed or returned to them at the end of the research (Appendix C).

The objectives, significance, and validity of findings from the selected methods will be presented below.

3.2.2. Qualitative method: in-depth interviews

3.2.2.1. Description

The in-depth interview is one of the major forms of data collection in qualitative research (Vockell & Asher, 1995). In-depth interviews are useful way to access individual perspectives and enable gathering a wide variety of data quickly across a number of participants, (Best & Kahn, 1989, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In addition, interviews serve many different purposes, namely: (1) to gather information regarding a person's knowledge, values, preferences, attitudes and perceptions; (2) to test hypotheses or to identify variables and their correlations; and (3) when used in conjunction with other research methods to explore in more depth any particular issue (Gray, 2004).

3.2.2.2. Justification

With the above information in mind, interviews in this study led to collection not only about the student-participants' perceptions regarding their writing skills, strengths, weakness, and the process or processes and composing strategies that they used when they had to write a particular academic task. As well, they were used to gather the course leader's perceptions about the students' writing productions, their composing strategies, strengths and weaknesses in academic texts. The interview approach used in this study was also used in previous research within similar contexts (Leki, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki & Carson, 1994; Riazi, 1997; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b)

3.2.2.3. Interview: data instrument

In this study, the open-ended interviews demanded the design of two questionnaires (See Appendix D). One questionnaire was designed to be used in the students' interviews and the other one was used in the interview with the course leader. The same students' questionnaire was used in both interviews with each of the seven students.

The students' questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, where the first 3 were about writing processes, strategies and academic skills students had to apply when they were producing an assignment. Questions 4 and 5 enquired about students' difficulties and any worries they faced when they were writing their assignments. The next 2 questions explored the students' needs concerning their academic literacy and disciplinary knowledge required to produce an academic text. Questions 8 and 9 sought the students' perceptions about their reader and the possible influence of the reader in their writing production.

Question 10 explored the linguistic expressions students used to engage the reader in their texts or what kind of expressions they might use to express their opinion through their texts. The next 3 questions invited students' comments about their learning, plus strengths and weaknesses experienced during their assignment writing tasks. Finally, the last question asked students to add any other

information related to a postgraduate student writing process that might have been omitted during the interview or had not been mentioned in any of the preceding questions (See Appendix D).

The course teacher's questionnaire consisted of 11 questions that were aligned with the students' questionnaire. Though question 5 also referred to the students' needs, this questionnaire explored the students' needs from another perspective. It looked for the content teaching that the course leader might have presented to students in order to help them to decide what to include in their assignment. Questions regarding linguistic expressions were not considered in this questionnaire.

3.2.2.4. Interview: data collection

As mentioned before, there were two questionnaires to collect information in this study. One questionnaire was used to search out the process or processes and composing strategies that the students applied to produce their academic texts. It also sought insights into the students' thinking regarding their learning while they were writing their academic texts. The interviews with the students were done after each assignment submission and were designed to be done in about 30 minutes per student per section. The other questionnaire sought the course teacher's comments and concerns about the academic writing of L2 students', with specific reference to the cohesion, coherence, text structure, and metadiscourse, contextual, rhetorical and communicative features used by the students in their academic written production.

As such, the research design was intended to identify specific aspects of the complexity of writing in L2 in the context of a postgraduate program (an MBA in this case), identifying key elements and accounting for the interaction among literacy and disciplinary elements. Identification of aspects such as: writing processes, composing strategies, students' difficulties and needs in writing, students' weaknesses and strengths was the main aim of this study. (Bunton, 1999; Currie & Cray, 2004; Hansen, 2000; Harwood, 2005; Hyland, 1998, 1999b,

2002b, 2005a; Lillis & Tuner, 2001; Mauranen, 1993; Pecorari, 2006; Riazi, 1997; Taboada, 2006; Tench, 2001; Zhu, 2004a).

3.2.3. Quantitative method: text analysis

3.2.3.1. Description

A corpus is a collection of utterances that reflect actual behaviour, spoken or written performance. However, a corpus is not itself the behaviour; it is a record of this behaviour, the record of written or spoken language, or both, in one or many similar contexts (Stubbs, 1996).

Because a corpus is designed to sample different text types in one stage, it becomes a record of performance: (1) It is a sample of the language use of many speakers or writers, not of one individual's performance; (2) It embodies a theory: corpora are mainly made up according to theories of language variation; (3) It can describe how a language works and what language can show about the context in which it is used; and (4) It can exist in several copies, on paper and in computer-readable form. Thus because the data of linguistics can become publicly accessible, studies done on the corpus are also open to criticism (Hunston, 2002; Stubbs, 1996).

3.2.3.2. Justification

Corpora analysis was selected as a research method because it allowed combined collection of instances of words or occurrences of linguistic features presented in real participants' writing texts. Using corpora analysis enhanced the reliability of the study because it allowed analysis of the metadiscourse that students used in their academic writing. Though this method has been widely used by other language academics in similar contexts, it has not been applied to postgraduate students' assignments in a specific discipline.

In addition, the corpora analysis method helped to answer the third and fourth research sub-questions proposed in this study. Though the number of participants taken as a sample for this study, the metadiscourse features in the students'

written texts allowed them to disclose their knowledge about the content of the assignments, to engage their reader with their texts, to negotiate meaning across their written discourse and to express the social and academic interactions between students and their reader through academic writing. Thus, the selected corpora method was crucial for achieving the research goals.

3.2.3.3. Corpora: data instrument

MonoConc Pro is an American concordance program that has been used extensively by academics for teaching and research. It allows building up a corpus with one or more text-only files to be analysed. It can reveal frequent patterns in a text quickly, affords comparison with other corpora, and can explicitly identify particular aspects of the text if the program is enhanced with mark-up or tags (Barlow, 2003). This concordance program was used by Hyland (2004b) in postgraduate master and doctoral dissertations to explore linguistic expressions that indicate metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. Similarly, in this study the concordance program was used to examine the purposes and distributions of metadiscourse in two electronic corpora from two written assignments produced by the seven L2 postgraduate student-participants.

3.2.3.4. Corpora: data collection

In this study, participants were asked to provide two electronic written assignments, which corresponded to the first and last assignment in MGT 5000 course. The assignments were submitted in the middle and at the end of the subject period respectively. Students received at the beginning of the course the assignment descriptions, which might have given them the opportunity of working on them during all course development. The written products were collected from each volunteer student after they had submitted their assignments to their lecturer. Then, each collection of assignments made up an electronic corpus per assignment, which was later analysed using *MonoConc Pro*, a text analysis and concordance program (MP 2.2). Therefore, the analysis of the electronic corpora using MP 2.2 made up the second data set collected for this study. The number of words was 30,848 for the first corpus, and 29,433 for the second corpus.

3.3 Qualitative and quantitative inquiries

Both qualitative and quantitative methods used in this study provided the two set of data for this study. Analyses of both methods are presented as follows:

3.3.1 Analysis of interviews

In-dept interviews conducted with the participants of this study were characterised by their qualitative nature. Thus, analysing and interpreting the data was the most challenging concern, because the data were subjective. In terms of objectivity, the researcher faced challenging the analyses of data because of her not long experience in academic writing as an L2 postgraduate student. Similar to the students-participants, the researcher applied academic process and strategies, faced difficulties and worries, and recognised strengths and weaknesses when writing the documents that support this study (Best & Kahn, 1998; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mertler & Charles, 2005; Vockell & Asher, 1995; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005; Yin, 2003).

Analysing and interpreting the qualitative data entailed a sequence of processes to develop a structure in the data and to interpret the findings (Best & Kahn, 1989, 1998; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The issues addressed in this section include content analysis and interpretation, and objectivity in terms of validity and reliability. A content analysis of interview transcripts made up the first data set (Best & Kahn, 1998; Cohen et al., 2000; Mertler & Charles, 2005; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005; Yin, 2003).

Bouma (2000) defines content analysis as the different way to examine records, documents or publications since it enables researchers to determine the frequency of certain ideas, words, phrases, images or scenes in a recording, a text sample or a film. Using recorded material allows the researcher to review the material several times to complete and check the accuracy of the content analysis. It provides an opportunity for several people to do a content analysis of the same material, and it helps them to assess the material to see what elements can be observed and counted. Cohen (2000) states that content analysis is a method that

serves as a basis of inference from word counts to categorisation. Content analysis can help the researcher to identify appropriate categories and units of analysis, which reflect the nature of the document.

Content analysis was the most appropriate method to study the gathered information. The interview transcripts became documentary sources, which guaranteed the authenticity and validity of all data. The content analysis helped the researcher in seven key areas: The first was in interpreting the students' and lecturer's information regarding processes and strategies students applied when writing for academic purposes. Secondly, the analysis helped to identify the relative importance, worries, difficulties and learning processes students underwent when creating their texts. Thirdly, the researcher was made aware of students' academic needs when writing their assignments, specifically, in terms of content knowledge, writing knowledge and communicative knowledge. The fourth outcome was in recognising the level of difficulty students faced in terms of linguistic competence and performance, when producing their assignments in English (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). The fifth outcome for the researcher was being able to identify the academic expressions students' used in their texts when expressing opinions, commenting or arguing. A sixth outcome was being able to recognise the weaknesses and strengths students' perceived in their own academic writing skills, and seventh was gaining insight into the lecturer's awareness about her students' writing practices.

A qualitative data analysis demands organisation of information and data reduction. This organisation was made by categorizing data and then comparing information with statements from the students' interview transcripts. Categorised data led to another process called coding (See Chapter 4). A content analysis was later applied to the achieved categories. In general, a qualitative research is a sequence of processes toward an accurate description or interpretation of the phenomenon (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Regarding categories Cohen (2000) indicates that they are normally determined after initial evaluation of the text and will cover the main areas of content.

The students' statements obtained by interview were analysed and then grouped into categories (See Chapter 4). Each category was then coded to facilitate the analysis and discussion of the results. The subsequent information was then presented in tables as results for each question in the next chapter. The lecturer's statements were also categorised and coded similar to the categories and codes used with the students' statements; they are presented in the next chapter, keeping the order given to each question in the interview. Coding helped the researcher to compare results obtained from students and lecturer according to topic, for example: writing strategies, writing processes, writing difficulties, weaknesses and strengths. Codes were also allocated to the second data set of this study to aid further analysis.

To sum up, both categorisation and coding were important processes that facilitated data organisation and interpretation according to the research questions of this study.

3.3.2 Analysis of corpora

In order to solve the third and fourth research questions ((3) How do NNPS perceive and engage with their disciplines through deployment of interpersonal features of their texts?; and (4) What linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features are recognised in NNPS writing?), the two electronic corpora created from students' productions were analysed. The text analysis helped to identify both the social and functional orientation that students deployed in their discourse. Specifically, these findings helped to explain the postgraduate students' ability to use discipline-specific discursive, rhetorical and linguistic conventions to serve their purposes as second language writers within their particular discourse community, in this case, their lecturer.

The selection of the electronic corpus for the data of the study allowed: (1) to explain the notion of writer's identity and presence in academic texts; (2) to explore the most visible expressions students' used to interact with their reader;

and (3) to analyse how students used the discourse markers to engage their reader, and to project their attitude into their discourse. Discourse markers in this study are understood as signals that link a piece of text to some other piece of the text in a particular way (Taboada, 2006).

Bearing in mind that discourse markers point out not only pragmatic connections between ideas but also rhetorical relations between writer and reader, the logical connectors (i.e. pronouns, connective adjuncts and modal verbs) were chosen in this study to show how and when they marked not only coherence relations, but also rhetorical and discourse relations in the students' writing products (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990; Hyland, 1998). Consequently, the discourse markers were analysed for their propositional meaning and discourse functions (Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Taboada, 2006) to demonstrate how students deployed the discourse markers not only to capture their reader's attention, but also to project their attitude, values, knowledge, and viewpoints in their discourse.

Further, the analysis helped to explain the textual and interpersonal functions of the discourse markers when the students' intended purpose was to acknowledge, construct and negotiate content knowledge with their reader through their texts. Finally, the analysis of these discourse features also showed how students, as writers, engaged and interacted with their reader and how they could argue, discuss, criticise, explain and demonstrate their academic knowledge through the deployment of linguistic features and discourse organisation. This analysis indicated that the discourse functions of the discourse markers overcame their propositional meaning.

The same analysis was done to each corpus and a correlation between the obtained results was made considering the purposes and contents of the students' texts. According to Wiersma and Jurs (2005) a correlation is the degree of relationship or association between the two distributions of scores that represent two variables. The relationship between the two distributions is based on how the pairs of scores vary together, that is, how changes in one variable compare with changes in the

other. Therefore, correlational studies are concerned not with a single distribution but with two distributions of scores.

The correlation made to both corpora results in this study allowed identification of how students modified the use of discourse markers according to the objectives and content of their assignments. Moreover, the distribution of occurrences of discourse markers obtained from each electronic corpus also revealed that students became aware of their role as writers. This awareness meant that they tried to create meaningful and clear academic texts for their reader. Thus, the correlation of the frequency and distribution of discourse markers between both corpora brought insights concerning writer, reader, purpose and content in the texts produced by students.

Table 3.1 depicts the discourse markers selected for this study. They are: pronouns, connective adjuncts and modal verbs.

Table 3 1 Discourse markers selected for text analysis

Pronouns	**Connective adjuncts**	**Modal verbs**
I, me, my, mine, you, your, yours, we, our, us, they, their, them	***Exemplification*:** For instance, for example, like, such as, as, as illustration. ***Comparison*:** Like, as, similar ***Contrast*:** But, however, or, whereas, although, though, meanwhile. ***Cause*:** Because of, due to, as, since, so ***Consequence:*** So, thus, therefore, hence, as a result	Will, would, may, might, can, could, shall, should, must

Pronouns were selected in this study because of their close association with deixis and anaphora. The analysis of pronouns was deemed important because of their discourse function; they are reference markers that indicate the writer's presence

and the reader's involvement in the text. They are linked with the writers' identity and their interest for creating and achieving a successful interaction with their readers (Fortanet, 2004; Hyland, 2001b; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Tang & John, 1999). Therefore, pronouns selected in this study allowed exploration of the writer's or the reader's presence in the students' texts. Frequency and occurrence of such referents in the corpora analysis also served to identify the social interrelation between the writer and reader and how they helped writers to engage their reader in the texts.

Other discourse markers chosen for the text analysis in this study are related to the text organisation, that is, the connective adjuncts. The selected markers variously indicated *rhetorical relationships* (such as the writer's intention and the reader's text construction), *coherence relations* (such as exemplifications, comparison, contrast, cause, and consequence), or *discourse relations* (such as writer and reader relationship, writer's purpose, and content development in the texts) (Hyland, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Taboada, 2006).

In other words, the discourse markers were selected to verify that when students deployed particular logical connectors in their texts, what they intended was to discuss, argue, describe, explain, inform, demonstrate, illustrate, suggest or express their reasoning about any particular content and knowledge of that content of their discipline. Analysis of discourse markers was also expected to indicate that when students used these markers, they were organising their texts to be well understood by their reader. Finally, the analysis revealed the writer's consideration of the reader in their texts. To conclude, it can be said that identification of the discourse markers identification in the studied corpus reveals the students' intentions, their communicative goals, and the effect of the relationship with their reader.

The third group of discourse markers selected for this study is related to hedges. *Will, would, may, might, can, could, shall, should,* and *must* were the hedges

selected for this study. Grammatically they are modal auxiliaries. Modality is essentially concerned with the speaker's attitude towards the factuality or actualisation of the situation expressed by the rest of the clause. Modality also applies by extension to the attitude of persons referred to in the clause or something more objective (See Chapter 2). Considering the importance of the different meanings of the modal auxiliaries in communication, this study selected the modal auxiliaries to denote their use in the students' academic writings. Their analysis indicated how students were reluctant to indicate their presence or directly express a judgment about any information in their assignments. An analysis of these markers showed that students made statements using modal verbs to express hypothesis, to suggest possible contexts or to explain possible theoretical applications in different contexts. Then, it was up to their reader to interpret the students' judgements or actualisation of their statements (Ferguson, 2001; Hyland, 1999b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a).

3.4 Reliability and validity

Validity and reliability are applied to judge the quality and the credibility of scientific research. In qualitative research, data validity is based on the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached and the objectivity of the researcher. In qualitative research processes, the subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives together contribute to a degree of partiality. In quantitative research, data validity is based on careful sampling, appropriate research instruments and appropriate statistical treatments of data (Best & Kahn, 1998; Cohen, et al., 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Mertler & Charles, 2005; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Altheide and Johnson (1998) suggest that validity in qualitative research is tied more to the researcher, design and academic audience(s).

Data from interviews with students and their lecturer, as well as the selection of text for analysis in real academic situations support the validity of this study. Similar results could occur if similar analyses and methodology were applied again to data. Data obtained from interviews after assignment writing, and

assignments that were submitted for assessment, represented the students' perceptions and students' writing in real task situations. These facts guarantee the validity of this research.

Reliability on the other hand, refers to the consistency and replicability of the methods in the research. That is, that the conditions, instruments, groups of respondents can be replicated. For research to be reliable it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context then similar results would be found (Cohen et al., 2000; Mertler & Charles, 2005; Wiersma, 2000; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Concerning replication, Yin (2003) states that if similar research processes find similar outcomes, researchers can be more confident in their overall results. Thus, the development of consistent findings, over multiple studies, can then be considered a more robust finding.

To ensure the validity and reliability of this research, several measures were applied.

First, understanding background theories and previous studies were crucial to prepare the interview questions. The initial questionnaires were subsequently revised by supervisors, and other academics and research practitioners.

Second, interviewees expressed their willingness to participate in the study and share their knowledge and experience of L2 academic writing in a postgraduate context.

Third, the objectives of this research were presented to the interviewees before conducting the interviews. The questionnaires were read and explained to participants before each interview. This served to improve construct validity.

Fourth, for data verification and to improve the correlation of data, the same questionnaire was used in both interviews with the student-participants which meant that they became familiar with the questions they were asked. In addition,

the same corpora program was used to analyse both electronic corpora in the study (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005)

Fifth, multiple data sources (Hansen, 2000; Hyland, 1998, 1999b, 2002b; Leki, 2003; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki & Carson, 1994; Lillis, 1997; Lillis & Tuner, 2001; Tench, 2001; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b), and data analysis techniques were used in this study in order to increase the reliability and validity of the research (Bunton, 1999; Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2001a, 2001b, 2002e, 2004b, 2005a; Magnet & Carnet, 2006; Pecorari, 2006; Silver, 2003; Tang & John, 1999; Yasuda, 2004) .

Sixth, the same questionnaires were used with the participants and the results carefully compared. Both data sources and research results were compared with prior similar research in the L2 academic writing field. These comparisons improved the external validity of the research and overcome potential problems with generalisation of the data (Cohen, et al., 2000; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Seventh, the original raw data are presented (e.g. chapter four and appendices) for readers to see thus improving the validity of the study and allowing readers to make their own interpretations (Yin, 2003).

Finally, both research methods, interviews and corpora analysis, were documented systematically for retrievability (Yin, 2003), and to increase the reliability of this study.

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter identifies and confirms appropriate measures to operationalise the proposed research design by conducting qualitative interviews and quantitative corpora analysis. The research design helped to achieve the proposed objectives of this study by providing reliable data that helped to answer the proposed research questions. Results of the research are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the results of the interview and analysis of the written texts in this study. The findings are presented according to the research question formulated at the beginning of the study. It is:

What is the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in second language postgraduate writing?

More precisely, the findings address four sub-questions, identified as sub-sets of the main question. They are:

1. What kind of process or processes and composing strategies do non-English postgraduate students (NNPS) in the study employ in order to improve their academic literacy and develop academic writing skills in their disciplinary field?
2. What do the participants in the study think they learn while writing their assignment texts?
3. How do NNPS perceive and engage with their disciplines through deployment of interpersonal features of their texts?
4. What linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features are recognised in NNPS' writing?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the above sub-questions point out the main objectives of this study. The answers to these four questions will provide an understanding of the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills applied in the second language (L2) writing of postgraduate students. In particular, the findings will indicate the postgraduate students' ability to use discipline specific rhetorical and

linguistic conventions to serve their purposes as second language writers in front of their particular discourse communities.

Below is the description of the first data set collected for this study. Data are presented according to the sequence of the research questions and their corresponding interviews questions used with the students and their lecturer. The same questions were asked in face-to-face interviews with the students after each of the two assignments that they had to complete. Related questions were formulated in the lone interview with the lecturer at the end of the semester.

4.2 Processes and composing strategies in academic writing

In order to talk about process or processes and composing strategies, one has to understand what students and their teachers think makes a good assignment. Therefore, this results section begins with views from the students and their lecturer on this issue.

4.2.1 What makes a good assignment?

Table 4.1 provides the eight categories of responses collated from item 1 on the questionnaire. It indicates the key categories (a-h) of assignment issues presented by the students in both interviews.

Table 4.1: Process or processes in assignment writing (n=7)

Assignment Issues	Number of respondents Interview 1	Number of respondents Interview 2	Total
(a) Write the assignment so it is well understood by the reader.	6	7	13
(b) Make a good selection of information from sources.	6	6	12
(c) Write following an appropriate assignment structure.	6	6	12
(d) Show understanding and acquired knowledge about the topic.	5	7	12
(e) Have a good understanding of the assignment questions.	6	5	11
(f) Present the writer's viewpoint clearly.	4	6	10
(g) Have previous knowledge about the topic.	1	7	8
(h) Have job experience to relate to the theory in the assignment.	0	5	5

Categories [d] and [h] are not students' actual words but they capture what students have said in the interviews. For example, category [d] 'Show understanding and acquired knowledge about the topic', was expressed through the following statements:

(1) "Like the knowledge of the topic, I mean ah. When you go to class you have the knowledge, and when you read the chapters in the book, in the text books, you will have the knowledge." **(S11Int12)**

(2) **"…** Ah, I think if you don't know something you cannot write." **(S3Int 2)**

(3) "You have to know about what you are going to write, you have to have knowledge. The knowledge you have from the books or from your job experience. In assignment 2 my experience…ah…was very important. My, my knowledge from my experience and I had to relate that to the information there is in the books." **(S7 Int2)**

Under (h) for example were the following statements:

(4) "When I'm reading or basically when I'm doing the research for me the books are not new, I already know what are they talking about 'cause of my background." **(S2Int2)**

(5) "…Eh, maybe for my experience…I have not that kind of experience so I couldn't emerge … Reference is…ah…is necessary. It's one of the necessary aspects. The working students, yeah also it needs… I said you I need to…It's easy for people who has so, working, working experience is good, yes." **(S3, I2)**

Further examples of the categorisation can be found in Appendix F, "Examples of categorisation".

Table 4.1 shows there is a marked change between interviews 1 and 2 in two cases i.e. categories [g] and [h]. Category [g] refers to the previous knowledge students perceived that they required to write about the topic, and category [h] refers to the job experience students required to relate to the theory in their assignment. Both results refer to the students' views regarding the role of assignment objectives, assignment contents as well as the students' writing production and their needs. From interview 1, which focusses on assignment 1, students indicated that previous knowledge about the topic was not required. For them, the knowledge would be acquired during the course development. This is evident from the

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[1] In the examples above, the letter "S" represents "student" and 1 identifies a particular student in the data analysis. That is, S1 is a code that will be kept for the same student in the study.
[2] The abbreviation "Int" means "interview" and "1" indicates that the data belong to the first student interview. Similarly, the number "2" indicates that the data belong to the second interview conducted with the students of the research.

interview statements where S4 and S5 focus on reading to develop further knowledge.

(6) "Yes, yes knowledge and eh…because I I'm learning, actually, I'm learning about Business, International Business, yeah. I mean reading, reading, reading, reading, and acquiring good knowledge in order to write." **(S4Int1)**

(7) "For me it's a difficult question. For me to do a good assignment is to understand and read a lot. In the assignment one, parts A and B you needed to read a lot, but they were not too hard to do. And to understand about the assignment you have to discuss about it, the lecturer must give more data about the assignment." **(S5Int1)**

From interview 2, by contrast, a requirement of the second assignment was to draw upon previous knowledge and job experience to develop the content and topic of the assignment.

(8) "… so what makes this assignment good I…maybe, ah…this second assignment was based in the experience of the students. So, for me to make it a good was only required to remember what I did before in my work experience and translate it to my…to the second language, that it's in English. But finally, ah…most of the information came from my experience, so it made…made good my assignment this time." **(S1Int2)**

(9) "For the second assignment I didn't have more experience, more information because the job experience to use, so it was difficult to write." **(S5Int2)**

Data in Table 4.1 also show that for the students a good assignment is an academic paper that has to be well understood by the reader (category [a]). Students also said that a good assignment should demonstrate correct understanding of the assignment questions (category [e]). In this case, their understanding of assignment questions helped them to properly reply or discuss them in the text. Equally, students said that writing a good assignment should assist in their selection of information from different sources as well as in complying with proper assignment writing structure (category [b]) and (category [c]) respectively. These aspects were equally and highly ranked in both interviews. Students also believed that their reader could easily understand their ideas if they followed a good assignment structure and expressed their ideas clearly (categories [a] and [f]). The following statements support data in Table 4.1 concerning structure, clear understanding of the task questions, selection of the information and sources, students' job experience, the reader's engagement, and reading skills:

(10) "In terms of academic writing I think…eh… making a good assignment means to have a good structure eh…, to have a clear understanding of the task… eh question, in order to

know how we need to answer all of the things and in order to clarify which ones are the ideas that you want lecturer checks over giving the assignment knowledge." **(S2Int1)**

(11) "Specially, when you are going to write down you have to think in the questions of the assignment and look for the information that you have from the books or from you work experience. In the second assignment some questions were related to the work experience of the students." **(S5Int2)**

(12) "Ah, the assignment…ah…must be clear to the reader…ah…must be…ah…logical thinking, the construction of the paragraphs…ah follow the statements of the technical construction and, and enjoyable for the readers. Ah…to do it you need…you need to read a lot…a lot, but a lot…" **(S4Int1)**

Finally, students said that one of the basic conditions for writing a good assignment was related to the way they could demonstrate their understanding of the topic (category d). This aspect was highly emphasised in the first interview and was mentioned by all the students in the second interview. They also said that their reading skills helped them to write their texts properly. This skill was highly valued when students needed to choose appropriate information from sources in category [b]. They said that they use their reading skills not only to acquire or increase their knowledge about the assignment topic, but also to demonstrate they technical vocabulary and technical aspects of MGT5000 that they could use later in their academic papers.

(13) "…but based in the…in the reading I have a general knowledge how I will write the assignment. In which, eh…, which…what kind of terminology or structure I can write that assignment…"**(S1Int1)**

(14) "A good assignment requires to read too much. For me in the second assignment even I have worked, I had to think about the topic and the questions that I have to answer. I had to discuss about the assignment with my classmates to understand well the questions, to understand about the assignment because I don't have good background in English." **(S5 Int2)**

As mentioned before, statements were taken from an interview with the lecturer at the end of the semester. Thus, her answers represented her viewpoint on assignment 1 and assignment 2 as a whole. It is crucial, however, to point out that the lecturer's replies sometimes focussed more on one assignment than the other according to the question being asked. In other cases, she simply indicated that her information might be better understood by considering the differences in the nature of the two assignments.

When the lecturer was asked to express her view about what constituted a good assignment in her discipline, she nominated the following characteristics:

(a) Understanding of the question and comprehensiveness in answering the question.
(b) Appropriate identification of relevant quotes and sources to provide evidence of understanding the content.
(c) Critical selection of relevant content to answer the assignment question.
(d) Development of originality and analysis from reading sources to establish the link between theory and practice
(e) A writing approach which demonstrates good assignment structure.

As a complement to item 1 on the questionnaire, "What do you think makes a good assignment?", students were asked: "What do you need to know about academic writing, disciplinary thinking, and communication processes to be successful?" (Item 6 in the questionnaire). The students' replies to this question are summarised in these three statements: To write a good assignment students have to know:

1. how to correctly link purpose and content in their writing;
2. how to relate and develop academic skills, and
3. how to write accurately for Business.

Students pointed out the necessity to recognise reading and writing as related academic processes as well as the need to know more about English academic writing requirements in order to achieve their academic goals.

The question, "What do you need to know about academic writing, disciplinary thinking, and communication processes to be successful?" was not asked of the lecturer directly. However, in her responses to, "What do you think makes a good assignment?", she pointed out that students needed to know:

1. how to answer the assignment question properly using relevant quotes and sources;

2. how to evaluate the sources critically;

3. how to make the link between theory and practice from selected sources; and

4. how to apply academic skills properly to show their content understanding.

Statements from the students and their lecturer clearly indicated that a strong relationship between disciplinary knowledge and literacy skills was needed in order to meet academic writing demands. To establish the nature of this relationship (the main research question for this study), it was necessary to explore the process or processes, composing strategies and communicative needs students went through when they were writing their assignments.

4.2.2 Process or processes

Research sub-question 1 draws from results on questionnaire items 2 – 9 in this research and has two parts. Part 1 refers to the process or processes that the writers underwent, and part 2 refers to the composing strategies they used while writing their assignments. Table 4.2 summarises the process, processes or plan of activities that students reported undergoing to produce their assignments.

Table 4.2: Process or processes in assignment writing (n=7)

Process or processes in writing assignments	**Number of respondents Interview 1**	**Number of respondents Interview 2**	**Total**
(a) Understand the assignment question including multiple readings.	7	6	13
(b) Identify and select the best sources to support the writing of the assignment.	7	6	13
(c) Research the topic well.	6	6	12
(d) Plan the assignment	5	4	9

Students obviously placed great importance on their understanding of the assignment question [a] and on the selection of academic sources [b] as stages in their writing process. More particularly, students commented that multiple readings of the assignment questions, discussing and verifying with peers their understanding of the task question, and gaining full understanding of the lecturer's purposes were key activities to follow during their writing production. For example, S1, S5 and S6 in interview 1 said:

(15) "The first thing that I do always is to understand the question, so I read one, two, or three times. Ah, how many times I need to understand the question. Ah, if I have problems I will consult with my classmates, and if I'm sure that what I want or what is the eh…what

they want in … in that answer in that question, I start. The next process will be a research a whole. I mean a general research about the topic". **(S1Int 1)**

(16) "I read the questions and discuss them with some of my classmates. The lecturer also gave us more data and we ask her about the questions of the assignment." **(S5Int1)**

(17) "… So, first time I, I try to recognise the …eh…questions of the assignment, and try to think in key words related up with the questions of the assignment, and then…eh…I researched on the key words to find the recognition about that…the research topic…and then I started…ah the writing according to the structure principally in Business." **(S6Int1)**

Another aspect regarding Table 4.2 is that students also emphasised a number of times in the basic role of researching the assignment topic [c], as well as the identification and selection of the best information to support their writing [b]. Students emphasised the importance of these stages especially in the first interview. For example:

(18) "When you are going to write down you have to think in the questions, you have to have the questions in your head and look for information to answer the questions of the assignment." **(S5Int1)**

From data in Table 4.2, it was inferred from students' responses that there were aspects in the writing process with which some of them were unfamiliar with, or that required them to undergo a discovery process. These data also suggest that students might have acquired some understanding of the stages or processes that could be followed to produce more successful assignments. For example S3, S4 and S5 in interview 1 stated:

(19) "Mmm, I…I get, I got to know how to express my thinking in English well but still good… not good enough." **(S3Int1)**

(20) "Yeah, and, and, I need to ah…read a lot of books, and articles. I need to acquire knowledge and practice." **(S4Int1)**

(21) "Yeah, maybe I learnt how to write following a structure, the Harvard style. I did not have any experience. I start with introduction, after that you focus in your assignment; write the head, the subhead. I used that in my first assignment, then a conclusion. How to do a conclusion in your paper." **(S5Int1)**

In terms of process or processes that students might use to produce their assignments, the lecturer indicated that students made some comments on the online course discussion board through the course. These comments provided them with additional elements, considered to be supplementary ideas to be added to the written information already provided in the course introductory book, which contained the assignment criteria established for the course. Thus, students

presumably took account of those particular requirements as part of the process they applied in writing their assignment.

Discussion board comments were based on helping students to the assignment questions and how to write the assignments including conducting the critical analysis required for the essay. Some of the lecturer's statements that verified these issues are:

> **(22)** "I'd say specific criteria, general performance in relation to each grade level in relation to the first assignment and the second assignment. I provided that into the introductory booklet …" **(L3)**

> **(23)** "…processes and strategies are both in some comments on the discussion board. During this course they have some comments, they make in relation to helping them writing, write the assignments, in terms, in how to conduct …eh…critical analysis they have to, to write upon essay." **(L)**

For the lecturer, the stages in the process or processes that students would need in order to write successfully in the MGT 5000 course were: (1) Understand the question in relation to content issue; (2) Show the understanding of the question in the way of answering the question including the relevant quote and demonstrating evaluation of the sources; and (3) Make the link between the theory and practice. This process was supported by the daily teaching activity, as was pointed out by the lecturer:

> **(24)** "I'm giving them specific strategies as explaining them how to do that regarding some comments in the discussion board." **(L)**

> **(25)** "So, it's not just them producing or plagiarising the specific sources, but making sure that they can make the link between the theory and what they write. Adequate focus reading, it's important in this specific topic area as well. Definitely, the link between the theory and practice and I talk about that in class to them." **(L)**

> **(26)** "What I can try to, is trying to facilitate on the discussion board and so forth. And with students in class or on cam</> on campus students to try explaining to them how did you develop your arguments and, and give them some examples of that. But in the end it's going to be up to them to demonstrate well their understanding or not." **(L)**

4.2.3 Composing strategies

As indicated previously, the research sub-question 1 in this research has two parts, with Part 2 referring to composing strategies that writers used during their

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[3] "L" represents lecturer and indicates the information that was provided by the lecturer in the interview conducted with her for this study.

academic writing. This issue was addressed by Item 3 on the questionnaire, and students' responses are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Composing strategies in assignment writing (n=7)

Composing strategies	**Number of respondents Interview 1**	**Number of respondents Interview 2**	**Total**
(a) Need to understand the topic in order to read and write.	7	7	14
(b) Write in the way that reader understands.	7	7	14
(c) Analyse and select available information according to the task questions.	6	5	11
(d) Read widely in order to learn new vocabulary and key words.	5	5	10
(e) Create the assignment plan.	4	4	8
(f) Follow an assignment structure, link ideas in paragraphs and link paragraphs in the text.	3	5	8
(g) When writing use the computer tools to assist vocabulary (Thesaurus).	1	3	4
(h) Do further research if the information is not enough.	1	1	2

These responses provide interesting insights for this study since they indicated the composing strategies students applied while writing their assignments. They also show what strategies were common between assignments and which ones were considered according to the assignments contents, objectives and aims. Results show that understanding the topic in order to read and write (composing strategy [a]), as well as writing in the way the reader understands (composing strategy [b]), were the strongest strategies mentioned most often by all students in both interviews. Further, in composing strategy [c] where the students emphasised the importance of analysing and selecting the most suitable information to help answer the task questions. This composing strategy, [c], received a higher rank in the first interview than in the second. Another strategy equally mentioned in both interviews by the students was related to their reading skills. They said that one of their reading purposes was to learn new vocabulary and choose the key words they could use when they were writing their assignments (composing strategy [d]). Some examples to support this strategy are:

(27) "Yeah. At first I recognised the key words of the questions, which the examiner asked for writing them in the assignment. And then, I went for research to find out some publishing related to the key words. And then, I started writing my assignment in a properly way." **(S6Int1)**

(28) "…some students use less sources than another students and for, for example if I get lots of sources, references I think that I can find easy the answer to my assignment … because some authors eh…eh…put …ah…good ideas in their book…Ah…I take the, the ideas,

but yeah, I take the ide</> the authors' ideas, but I try to develop my knowledge, my …my own thinking, yeah."**(S4Int2)**

Students also mentioned as another composing strategy, the need to follow an assignment structure and link ideas and paragraphs appropriately (composing strategy [f]). They ranked this strategy higher in the second interview than in the first. Another strategy considered by some students was related to the importance of designing and following a plan of activities to write their assignments, composing strategy [e]. As expressed by S2 and S6:

(29) "Firstly, I, I use to read the assignment question, eh, and start to search about what, what exactly they are asking me. After that, I do a brainstorming, so which could be the possible answer of the assignment questions, eh select the main ideas and after that write a draft assignment to the assignment." **(S2Int1)**

(30) **"** Eh…making a good assignment is…good to have …eh… good knowledge of the topic, and…good writing skills and…eh…a plan of how to make…eh…eh…how to write… give good ideas related to the assignment." **(S6Int2)**

With reference to composing strategies, the lecturer signalled the importance of following comments posted on the online the discussion board by going through the feedback that she had provided after each assignment using an appropriate language and expressing correctly the ideas in order to write a good assignment. In addition, lecturer brought extra material to support her explanations regarding assignment contents and development. Students could use this material as reference for their assignment completion. She said:

(31) "…a certainly issue is that I follow upon the discussion board, things like for instance, not just only write descriptive assignments they really have also to look at critically analysing relevant issues in view of the literature and studying materials. Lot of students made unsubstantial comments and so forth and they needed to back clear off consistently." **(L)**

(32) "Well, it's really the kind of feedback that I gave them in relation to assignment 1 and assignment 2. For assignment 1 I made comments on two full pages of what kind of process that they have to go through in order to write a good assignment." **(L)**

(33) "I think, ah, I think in, what is important that understand also the English language or sometimes they need to understand the English language and need to be able to express themselves in English as well." **(L)**

In general, responses from the lecturer as well as those from the students suggested a link between students' content knowledge and their application of literacy skills that proved effective when the students were trying to construct their assignments.

In order to get a deeper understanding of the processes and composing strategies used by students, questions were asked about the difficulties they encountered, both in general and the composing process. The data for the general difficulties or worries about writing up their assignments, item 4 on the questionnaire, are given in Table 4.4 below.

4.2.4 Difficulties or worries for L2 students

Table 4.4 depicts results from item 4 on the questionnaire, which refers to the general difficulties and worries students faced while writing their assignments.

Table 4.4: Difficulties or worries in the writing process (N = 7)

Students' difficulties or worries in writing	**Number of respondents Interview 1**	**Number of respondents Interview 2**	**Total**
(a) Lack of or low proficiency in L2.	7	7	14
(b) Worrying about whether lecturer is going to understand their writing.	6	7	13
(c) Their writing answers the task question.	6	6	12
(d) Use of translation in writing assignment (L1 to L2).	6	5	11
(e) Lack of previous writing experience.	5	5	10
(f) Exceeding the assignment word limit.	4	4	8
(g) Having not enough knowledge related to the subject.	2	3	5
(h) Writing for a person who knows the subject area well.	2	2	4

Lack of or low proficiency in English as a second language, difficulty [a], seems to be the critical concern that students might have faced in their academic writing process and could well underpin other difficulties the students pointed out during the study. Student responses included some linguistic aspects that could reflect the students' perception about their low English proficiency. They included: lack of technical vocabulary, lack of English grammar knowledge, difficulty in organising ideas for an academic text keeping its structure, difficulty in writing ideas in a logical and clear way, and difficulty in writing the assignments keeping cohesion and coherence features in their assignment writing. Students' expressed the following opinions about their English proficiency:

> **(34)** "Yeah, and the other thing is the way I learnt when I was learning English, or when I was studying English in UNIPREP. That vocabulary kept in my…is in my mind right now. Now, I'm doing an MBA, it's totally a different topic, so I don't have enough vocabulary, another more, it's one of my worries ah …I have to read a lot to use properly vocabulary in a proper way the vocabulary and trying to introduce me to new terminology." **(S1Int 1)**

(35) "Yeah, in composition, ah, connect the sentences, ah…make ah…logical sentences, ah … use appropriate words, ah, I think that, and, and construct a logical paragraph." **(S4Int1)**

(36) "Yeah in writing. The skill of writing yeah is, is also difficult for me…The way to write, the thinking to write…The vocabulary to use…" **(S3Int2)**

(37) "Yes, how to put all the information together… As I answered you before, I continue having problems with the structure of the assignment…Mhm, and with grammar…Yes, sometimes, I don't know what is first, what I have to write to start the assignment. I have problems with the paragraphs…Because I don't know when to start other paragraph, how to …eh… link ideas according to the point of the assignment." **(S5Int2)**

The students' low proficiency in English was also mentioned by the lecturer during her interview. She pointed out that sometimes the students' lack of English language understanding could be the factor that prevented them from expressing themselves clearly. She also said that the second language of some overseas students could be a possible barrier to achieving a fluent communication. These sentiments expressed by the lecturer appear to be supported by following student comments, relating concerns regarding their reader's understanding of their texts (difficulty [b]).

(38) "Yeah, I worried about it. Yes. Actually, every time I have an assignment I…I…I'm really worried about lecturer, whether she or he can understand what I'm talking about." **(S3Int1)**

(39) "Because I know if I …If I…I write down, I can write many words, but if they are not clear for my reader, doesn't make sense! My assignment will be wrong." **(S2Int1)**

Such concerns about the students' low levels of English proficiency could also be related to another worry that the students raised principally in the first interview i.e. their concern about using translation from their first language to English when they were writing their assignments (difficulty [d]).

(40) "…I use to translate what I think from Spanish to English. So, in Spanish we have many ways to say the same thing. In English, most of the time is only one way and you have to use the shorter way and specific words. So, in Spanish you say in…I don't know, twenty words the same thing that in English is only five or six words, So, it's difficult when I try to translate, because when I translate my sentences is almost twenty words in one sentence, so when someone reads the essay says "take out this word". This word is not useful here, or if you say in this way, eh…, you'll say the same and it's only six words." **(S1Int1)**

(41) "Because in my language…the…the grammar and Mmm sent</> the grammar of the sentences could be expressed your thinking is different between English…So…Yeah, but sometimes…I worried…because…you know in, in Mandarin, if I want to express one thing, we have the idea …our…our word to write down something…But in English before you start the idea to write that in English is totally different, you know." **(S3Int1)**

(42) "Yes. I'm, I'm using all English words, but maybe using Spanish structure sometimes and because of that become not understandable what I'm saying." **(S2Int2)**

Students' worries about their low English proficiency and the use of translation from L1 to L2 led them to wonder whether the reader could understand their writing (difficulty [b]), and to reservations as to whether or not their writing had properly answered the assignment questions (difficulty [c]). Concern about answering the task questions adequately was ranked equally in responses on both assignments. The reader's understanding was a particularly concern when the students were writing their second assignment. This worry was top-ranked by the students in the second interview. As two of the students in interview 2 said:

(43) "Because I don't know how to start to answer the questions, I, I'm afraid how to write my opinions and that the lecturer can understand my ideas, my opinions. I am not sure that my opinions are the correct answer to the questions. So you have to ask to your classmates or to the lecturer in the office." **(S5Int2)**

(44) "Yes, the structure,…yes…after I have understood the assignment question the most difficult for me is to know how to write, how to start …to start writing my ideas. Sometimes, I…I don't know how to write my ideas in paragraphs, using a good assignment structure. One structure that my lecturer can understand what I mean." **(S7Int2)**

Students also explained that because of the translation strategy some of them adopted in writing their assignments, they exceeded the assignment word limit (difficulty [f]). This worry was ranked equally in both interviews, and is exemplified in the following statements:

(45) "Because the assignment has a limit of words, this is necessary, and this is a problem for me. Normally, that I have problems like this, if it's 2000 words I have 3500." **(S1Int1)**

(46) "The difficulty that I have in writing the assignment is writing over the word limit, to strict number of words because I use to write over the word limit. And…so…first the mistake what I did is…I…whatever information that I got I put it into my assignment. At first, I didn't worry about the word limit, and then, later on, I found that I was running over the word limit, so reducing the word limit and also to produce…eh…quality for…eh…the assignment…eh…that's the opposite." **(S6Int1)**

(47) "Sometimes, after I wrote my assignment I saw that I wrote many words, more than the words that I, I…needed. So, I corrected and reduced the words according to the word assignment limit. But, to cut words was also too difficult of doing." **(S7Int2)**

A lesser difficulty noted by students expressed was related to "having not enough knowledge about the topic to write their written tasks" (difficulty [g]). This difficulty was mentioned by only two students in the first interview, and three in the second. The last and lowest-ranked difficulty mentioned by the students, was

"writing for a person who knows the subject area well" (difficulty [h]). Consequently, it appears that the students focussed more on their worries in their language proficiency and in making their writing easy for their reader to, than on worrying about their reader as an expert in the area they were writing about.

4.2.5 Composition difficulties or worries in L2 academic writing

Answers to item 5 on the questionnaire (i.e. composition difficulties or worries) can be thought as further answers to item 4 (writing difficulties or worries). Thus, Table 4.5 gives the data for composing difficulties or worries the students had while writing their assignments.

Table 4.5: Composing difficulties in the writing process (N = 7)

Students' composing difficulties or worries in writing	Number of respondents Interview 1	Number of respondents Interview 2	Total
(a) Lack of or low proficiency in L2.	7	7	14
(b) How to match assignment structure with its content.	6	7	13
(c) Use of translation in writing assignment (L1 to L2).	6	7	13
(d) Lack of English grammar knowledge.	6	6	12
(e) Lack of previous academic writing experience.	5	4	9
(f) How to analyse, discuss or criticise an issue in the assignment.	6	2	8
(g) Not using vocabulary properly.	2	5	7
(h) Relating own viewpoint and job experience with theory to answer the assignment task.	0	6	6

As in Table 4.4, Table 4.5 shows that students' lack of or low level English proficiency was the most relevant composing difficulty for them in their writing (composing difficulty [a]). This difficulty was top-ranked in both interviews. Table 4.5 also shows, in descending order of importance, the other main composing difficulties students had to overcome throughout their writing process: Translating information from L1 to L2 to produce the assignment (composing difficulty [e]); writing down following a text structure to develop the assignment content (composing difficulty [h]); and lack of English grammar knowledge (composing difficulty [d]). Regarding these aspects, three students in interview 2 said:

(48) "Yes, Ah…English is difficult for me, so I'm worried about whether or not I misunderstand the topic." **(S3Int2)**

(49) "Structure…to write according to the assignment structure is not easy for me. I still have difficulties when…when I try to organise my ideas, but is because the structure. I know …I know that I have to practise more about that." **(S6Int2)**

(50) "Yes, and the grammar, because I have to learn more English. Sometimes I don't know how to put my ideas in good English." **(S5Int2)**

The mentioned difficulties might be linked to other composing difficulties students identified such as their lack of a previous academic writing experience (composing difficulty [e]) and their lack of knowledge in how to properly analyse, discuss or criticise an issue in their assignments (composing difficulty [f]). This last composing worry was emphasised in the first interview. Of these difficulties, the students said they had writing problems when they needed to express their viewpoint using academic references properly, when they wanted to start writing the assignment or when they had to link sentences and paragraphs correctly. Students offered the following explanations:

(51) "Because …eh…I don't know. But for me is not easy…eh…eh… comment to ideas and construct the paragraph is not easy. Ah…maybe I'm not, I'm not familiar with writing, with the English writing. Ah…I think that in Spanish for me it's difficult too." **(S4Int2)**

(52) "Sometimes when I…I write I have to discuss and be critical at the same time. You know…in business is…is in that way. But, sometimes I found I wrote a dis </>ah… an assignment, I have written down the discussion style, but I have not written a critical discussion assignment and…if I didn't, I have to read and write again because I have to be critical…" **(S6Int1)**

Other difficulties indicated by the students in Table 4.5 were related to how to use technical vocabulary accurately in the assignments (composing difficulty [g]), and plus how to relate their viewpoint and job experience to theory in order to answer the assignment questions (composing difficulty [h]). As some students expressed:

(53) "Yeah in writing. The skill of writing yeah is, is also difficult for me. The way to write, the thinking to write, the vocabulary to use…I know vocabulary, but it's not enough." **(S7Int2)**

(54) "Ah. I remember the assignment two, the part B lots of changes. Yeah, Mmm…but I'm not….I think…I didn't, I didn't write very well…Eh, maybe for my experience, I have…I have not that kind of experience, so I couldn't emerge." **(S3Int2)**

(55) "Yes, and how to start. Also, if you don't have any background to write, and you don't have sources to check what you want to say that's take time, so to write the assignment it's very hard. For the second assignment I didn't have more experience, more information because the job experience to use, so it was difficult to write." **(S5Int2)**

Results shown in Table 4.5 might suggest that the students' composing difficulties were mostly related to the purpose, content and text structure of the written task. The lecturer's comments mirrored some of the concerns expressed by the students. She remarked, for instance, that student' limited the understanding, knowledge and use of the English language was a significant barrier when they wanted to express themselves to the extent that sometimes she could not understand what they were saying. These are some of her statements:

(56) "Probably, structure of the sentence sometimes, and the way they express themselves. You read and literally cannot understand what they are trying to say." **(L)**

(57) "…you will read an assignment and sometimes there is an entire paragraph that your literally cannot understand what they're saying. So, that is a particular. Particular issue I think ah, sometimes when you know the students from not an English speaking background in the way that they express themselves in an assignment." **(L)**

The lecturer pointed out other difficulties faced by L2 students in their academic writing: (1) Inability to develop arguments and demonstrate their understanding of assignment content; and (2) inability to analyse and understand how theory and practice interact with each other. As further challenges encountered by students, she also cited lack of previous writing experience in the field, difficulty in identifying relevant literature to develop their ideas and write down their assignments, and lack of English language knowledge. Accordingly, some of the lecturer's statements are:

(58) "I have been teaching this subject for a very long time so I know that they are always worried about assignments whether they are from a non-English speaking background or not. I think also another factors of some of them because they don't necessarily come from, they may not be students with a previous degree either." **(L)**

(59) "That's right, even just practical, just their practical background and some of them have had majored for more than five or ten years and some of them come to do the MBA and they don't really know and it's really hard to have to present their ideas on paper. They have in their heads but they even don't know how to put them on paper. So, that's…are those things that I do within class and I think OPACS's role is obviously important here because she [sic] uses specially examples and is giving them some strategies to make their work rich." **(L)**

The next section presents students' responses to items 8 and 9 on the questionnaire, which asked students whether students were thinking of their reader (i.e. their lecturer) when writing their assignments.

4.2.6 Students' concerns about their reader in L2 academic writing

Table 4.6 summarises the students' answers to items 8 and 9 on the questionnaire regarding their considerations about their reader when writing their texts.

Table 4.6: Students' writing concerns about their reader (N = 7)

Students' writing concerns about the reader	Number of respondents Interview 1	Number of respondents Interview 2	Total
(a) Think about what the lecturer would understand.	5	7	12
(b) How to show my understanding through the text.	4	7	11
(c) Recognise reader as an expert.	3	2	5

Results of Table 4.6 show that students highlighted their writing process as a communication tool where two important concerns were highly considered especially in the second interview. One of those concerns was the need to write clearly to facilitate their lecturer's understanding of the assignment (students' concern [a]), and the other was the importance of demonstrating their content understanding through both written assignments (students' concern [b]). Regarding these considerations S1 elaborated:

> **(60)** "Mmn, first of all, I wanted that he understands or she understands, it's the first thing… Yes, I'm thinking in them because…they will read the assignment, and it does not matter if I understand the assignment, if they cannot, is nothing. So, like thinking in the customer, my customer is my lecturer. So, I want that, I'm always thinking in the person that is going to read my assignment." **(S1Int1)**

Student comments also highlighted the importance of: using vocabulary similar to that in the written references or text books in their writing: being aware of the content information to be developed in the assignments; avoiding writing L2 as L1; and looking for the lecturer's understanding. They were also aware that they needed to express their viewpoint clearly to demonstrate their understanding of the assignment topic. On these issues, they said:

> **(61)** "Yes, yes! That, the lecturer knows about the theme a lot eh…ah…I need to, to demonstrate to him or her that my knowledge is good too, yeah." **(S4Int1)**

> **(62)** "Yes, yes… I always was thinking about…about how to say my ideas in a clear way you know…that…that my lecturer could understand my ideas. And, and that she…she could see my knowledge about the assignment, about…about the topic of the assignment you know…" **(S7Int2)**

(63) "Yeah, I was thinking how to express my opinion in the way that she understands my ideas. I…I didn't know if my opinions expressed what she wanted in the assignment, especially when I was writing my opinions…I was not sure…" **(S5Int2)**

Table 4.6 also illustrates that there were some studentswho acknowledged their reader as an expert (students' concern [c]). This concern meant that students paid special attention to the process of writing and content development in their assignments. This statement was expressed in both interviews, but it was not highly ranked in either of them. Conversely, some students pointed out that there were not many writing changes because they did not think on the reader when they were writing their assignments. The students explained their approaches thus:

(64) "Compose, compose, the ideas according to the question, is not easy, ah…Because, because, mmm I think the reader has a broad knowledge and a simple writing is not enough for the reader." **(S4Int1)**

(65) "Not, Not that much, I used the contents and the vocabulary that we use in the book." **(S5Int1)**

(66) "Not, really. I, I was thinking about the topic, the content." **(S3 Int2)**

Comments from students were similar to the lecturer's regarding what students have to have in mind when they were writing their assignments. The question in mind was the most important factor for the lecturer. This means, that students must first have a clear understanding of the question in order to present the content and their arguments in the assignment. Elaborating on this point, the lecturer said:

(67) "I hope they don't have me in mind. I hope they have the question in mind." **(L)**

(68) "…it's about their understanding of the question and it's not black and white. It's about how they understand the question and present the content. You might even get like for instance A part for assignment 1. You have, you might have one person reasoning in one way and another student reasoning in a totally different way which could be both correct." **(L)**

(69) "Because I don't want to make a case for the one thing and another student make, the case for the other side of the coin and they could be both right. It's really how they present their arguments. So, I hope they rather write with me in mind, but they write with the marking criteria in mind that they have provided with them with" **(L)**

When asked if she considered that the students kept her in mind as their academic reader, the lecturer replied:

(70) "…that's true, yeah. It's an academic assignment, so it would be assessed from an academic point of view, yeah." **(L)**

This statement is consistent with the students' perceptions regarding the active roles that the lecturer has in interactions with them. Their lecturer is their marker, but also their academic reader.

The next set of results is related to research sub-question 2 of this study, learning through academic writing. Thus, data indicate learning aspects that the students and their lecturer considered were present during the students' writing production.

4.3 Learning through academic writing

The students were asked in item 11 on the questionnaire about those aspects they improved as a result of a learning process while writing their assignments. Students' answers show their perceptions of the importance of literacy skills and their application for successful professional writing. Data in Table 4.7 show the kind of learning that students reported during their writing process, in particular, how reading and writing processes contribute to their academic knowledge and skills development.

Table 4.7 : Learning aspects during assignment writing (N = 7)

Learning aspects during writing process	Number of respondents Interview 1	Number of respondents Interview 2	Total
(a) Know more about writing academically through the writing experience itself.	6	7	13
(b) Use reading process to improve writing process.	5	6	11
(c) Improve academic vocabulary and expressions.	3	5	8
(d) Improve research experience.	3	0	3
(e) Recognise and work better with some computer Tools.	1	1	2

In both interviews, students gave a high rating to writing and reading skills as key factors for performing their tasks (learning aspect [b]). However, they gave a higher rating to the writing process as an aid to learning. They said that the actual writing practice helped them to improve their knowledge and academic writing skills (learning aspect [a]). They also said that through the writing practice they could expand their academic vocabulary and expressions (learning aspect [c]).

Two additional learning aspects were mentioned in Table 4.7 refer to the improvement students made in their research experience (learning aspect [d]), and their improved use of some computer tools such as thesaurus use and grammar checking when they were writing their assignments (learning aspect [e]). This last learning aspect [e] was given low rating in both interviews, while learning aspect [d] was chosen by the students only in the first interview. Some students' thoughts regarding learning aspects during assignment writing are:

(71) "I read before and right now I'm reporting what I read and putting in my words, so I'm… I'm learning back and I think maybe I introduce the vocabulary to write the expressions." **(S1Int1)**

(72) "Actually, I learnt…ah…what to put and what not to put. Or how to reduce the…too of… more information that I want in one sentence." **(S5Int1)**

(73) "I learnt about the structure, the assignment structure. I…I need to practice more, but now … I know more about structure. To write my ideas now according to the references … and to keep an assignment structure is...is easier for me now." **(S6Int2)**

(74) "What I learnt? Maybe English eh…style for writing down assignment… Mmm, other thing that I have learnt…be concrete basically. We use to be maybe got around ah, ah, in, in the idea or give a lot of background…Before start...Here it's just start straight away with the idea." **(S2Int2)**

In addition to the statements mentioned in Table 4.7 regarding the students' learning through their writing process, they also referred to their own developing content knowledge during the course. Applying theory to practice that was also mentioned by them in both interviews. Similarly, the lecturer commented on the the students' academic progress and improvement in their writing skills during the assignment-writing process. Some of the lecturer's perceptions about students' progress follow:

(75) "Well, obviously I would first have wanted them to familiarise themselves with the content in order to answer the questions in the assignment. So, they needed to read through a lot of material and understand the material in terms with the questions. Ah, so, it's about reading and understanding the content and then applying that to the assignment. So, the content is important but then it is not just reset up the content in a prescriptive way, but it is the linking a series of aspects of this course with the practical aspects of this course" **(L)**

(76) "So, it's about to me, about understanding the content, it's about critical analysis, it's about the way I set up the assignment. I asked them to critically discuss every time. That's what I was trying to do to make them think through issues, what come up with building arguments, but at the same time, demonstrate why they're putting special arguments forward it and obviously then come up with specific recommendations." **(L)**

Based on the students' perceptions about their writing skill performance as well as the goals of their assignments, the students reflected on their strengths and weaknesses in their academic writing. These results are shown in Table 4.8 and Table 4.9 respectively

4.3.1 Strengths of L2 students

Table 4.8 shows results from item 12 on the questionnaire in the students' interviews, where students appraised their own strengths in academic writing.

Table 4.8: Students' strengths in academic writing (N = 7)

Students' strengths	**Number of respondents Interview 1**	**Number of respondents Interview 2**	**Total**
(a) I know how to do assignment.	4	4	8
(b) I have previous academic writing training.	4	3	7
(c) I apply good reading strategies.	3	1	4
(d) I know how to do research.	1	1	2
(e) I have a previous Business background.	1	1	2

Table 4.8 represents the main students' perceptions about their strengths in academic writing. In both interviews, students gave equal and primary importance to their knowledge about how to write an assignment (students' strength [a]). The second strength students identified was having had a previous training in academic writing (students' strength [b]). In nominating those strengths, students were also indicating their knowledge of maintaining assignment structure, linking their ideas adequately and, using references appropriately. They also applied previous academic writing skills and content knowledge to write successfully this time.

In the first interview, three students mentioned that one of their strengths was to apply good reading strategies (students' strength [c]), but this statement was just mentioned by only one student in the second interview. Two remaining categories that received equally low priority in both interviews were about the students' knowledge of how to do research (students' strength [d]), and any knowledge gained from a previous Business background (students' strength [e]). The

following comments give further insight into their perceptions about their knowledge and skills:

(77) "That I have …ah… background in business, so I can develop easily sentences or structures in business, this is one of my strengths. Ah… that I did UNIPREP that made me a little bit more experienced with academic style writing." **(S1Int1)**

(78) "The knowledge, I'm already talking, I think in Business, I can say is a strength of mine." **(S2Int2)**

(79) " Mmm… the structure… the assignment structure. I don't know if I have mentioned the structure many times. The structure in my assignments was the main problem. But, ah… now… now, I have a really clear knowledge how to write." **(S7Int 2)**

Regarding the students' strengths, the lecturer pointed out the positive contribution some aspects that overseas students usually bring to the class through their writing. This occurs when aspects such the students' different cultures and different contextual backgrounds, inform theoretical perspectives, and are incorporated as examples, providing valuable input into their assignments. In particular, the lecturer observed:

(80) "I think, it's specifically in students from non-English speaking backgrounds, they do bring their own culture aspects to their writing sometimes, which is really a good point and it's really refreshing when they do that. They would come from different contexts and they're sometimes able to bring that to the writing in terms of using examples and so forth." **(L)**

(81) "Oh, I think that they do bring their cultural aspects sometimes within to the assignment without thinking, without encouraging that it's really a good thing. So, in that side that it seems it works in their favour." **(L)**

4.3.2 Weaknesses of L2 students

Table 4.9 represents students' responses to item 13 on the questionnaire regarding their perceptions about their weaknesses in academic writing.

Table 4.9: Students' weaknesses in academic writing (N = 7)

Students' weaknesses	**Number of respondents Interview 1**	**Number of respondents Interview 2**	**Total**
(a) Lack of writing experience in Business.	6	6	12
(b) Lack of English knowledge.	3	6	9
(c) I do not follow the assignment structure and requirements appropriately.	4	3	7
(d) Lack of L1 writing experience affects L2 production	3	3	6
(e). Lack of writing experience from previous major.	2	1	3

In both interviews students' main concern was their lack of writing experience in Business (students' weakness [a]). Students also explained that one of their weaknesses was their lack of English knowledge (students' weakness [b]). This reported weakness involved their lack of or limited knowledge of English grammar, academic vocabulary, assignment structure and logical linking features, all of which are crucial for good quality academic writing. This issue was nominated by only three respondents in the first interview but its number doubled in the second interview. It might suggest that students were more conscious of their English proficiency and academic writing quality following a second assignment in the same course when they had to employ a wider range of academic skills.

Student also reported difficulty in trying to follow the assignment structure and fulfil its requirements appropriately (students' weakness [c]). This aspect drew four responses in the first interview compared with only three in the second interview. Students' lack of L1 writing experience (students' weakness [d]) was equally mentioned in both interviews by the students who considered that their lack of L1 writing experience could affect their L2 production. The last weakness indicated in Table 4.9 refers to the students' lack of writing experience because of their previous major (students' weakness [e]). According to the interviews, previous academic writing experience was valued as a key skill which might assist with the students' current writing tasks. The following comments offer further insight into their responses:

(82) "No really, but I think is my English, my English is not good enough, so I cannot, I cannot, I have not enough English to write down a good assignment." **(S3Int1)**

(83) "Yeah, …could be that because…English is not my first language, I cannot express at all, all my knowledge. It's still difficult for me…" **(S6Int1)**

(84) "Weaknesses, ah…for me is not easy write because my previous experience." **(S4Int1)**

(85) "Mmm, sometimes vocabulary, because I wanted to say a lot of things, but just came out few words, so I need to improve this part." **(S2Int2)**

(86) "My English, and that I have a limited number of words, I need to know more vocabulary, and I need to know what information could be accepted or not in the assignment" (**S5Int2)**

In line with the students' perceptions, the lecturer said that the students' reported weaknesses were consistent with feedback she had given to them on their assignments. She focussed particularly on students finding difficulty conducting critical analysis, in developing their arguments, using correct grammar, lexical and syntactical rules, and even in applying format and writing style conventions. The lecturer emphasised that students found it difficult to link theory to practice also in building and presenting their arguments in their assignments. She offered further explanation in the following quotation:

> **(87)** "Okay, the weaknesses. Weaknesses, I think that it's related directly with the feedback that I gave to the assignment. I can provide you with …ah…there always, this main theme seems in relation to the critical analysis building the arguments but it's also about sentence structure, spelling, typographical errors, silly things like page numbers even, use of a format, the use of references, and things like that, so…" **(L)**

In sum, these results imply that successful academic writing requires a clear awareness by students of those literacy skills that a postgraduate student require in order to achieve their academic goals. Furthermore, raising this awareness might not only facilitate students' development of their L2 skills, but also help them to communicate their knowledge in their daily academic performance. Below is a description of the second data set collected for this study, analyses of the written texts.

4.4 Deployment of linguistic features in academic writing

As indicated in the first section of this chapter, the results of this part of the study relate to sub-questions 3 and 4, which were:

> *3. How do NNPS perceive and engage with their disciplines through deployment of interpersonal features of their texts?*
>
> *4. What linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features are recognised in NNPS' writing?*

In order to derive data that might answer these questions, this study used a concordance program on two electronic corpora created for each student from their written assignments. The concordance program helped to identify both the social and the functional orientation the students deployed in their discourse. Specifically, these findings might indicate the postgraduate students' ability to use

discipline specific discursive, rhetorical and linguistic conventions to serve their purposes as second language writers for their particular discourse community, in this case, the lecturer.

The analysis of the electronic Corpus using *MonoConc Pro* (MP 2.2) provided the second data set collected for this study. Data were selected in order to explore the notion of writer's identity in academic texts. Thus, the data could reveal the most visible expressions of the students' presence in their texts, as well as the expressions the students used to engage their reader in their written discourse. In so doing, this study focussed on the use of discourse markers that students employed to call their reader's attention and to present their viewpoint via their discourse. Here the discourse markers were studied not only because of their propositional meaning but also because of their discourse functions (Risselada & Spooren, 1998). Table 4.10 depicts the discourse markers (pronouns, logical connectors and modal verbs) selected for this study.

Table 4.10: Discourse markers selected for text analysis

Pronouns	Logical Connectors	Modal Verbs
I, me, my, you, your, yours, we, our, us, they, their, them	***Exemplification*:** For instance, for example, like, such as, as, as illustration. ***Comparison***: Like, as, similar ***Contrast*:** But, however, or, whereas, although, though, meanwhile. ***Cause / consequence***: Because of, due to, since, so, thus, therefore, hence, as a result	Will, would, may, might, can, could, shall, should,

The analysis of these discourse features will also be used to explain the textual and interpersonal functions that students might consider when using language to acknowledge construct and negotiate their texts. Therefore, these data will serve to identify how students, as writers, engaged and interacted with their reader and

how they could argue, discuss, criticise, explain and demonstrate their academic knowledge through the deployment of linguistic features and discourse organisation. The same analysis was done to each corpora and a correlation between the obtained results was carried out considering the text purposes and contents.

As well as showing the frequency of the three main groups of discourse markers selected for this study, this part of the chapter will provide a number of utterances taken from the students' productions, to show how the metadiscourse actually works in the academic writing. The utterances were selected to show how the students might have used the language to: (1) organise their texts, employing an array of cohesive and interpersonal features according to particular content purposes, the assignments objectives; (2) create a social interaction with their reader, who could connect, interpret and understand their texts in a way preferred by the students as writers considering a particular academic community; and (3) project themselves into their discourse, signalling their attitude towards both the content and their lecturer, who was the audience for their assignments.

Below is the presentation of the discursive markers selected for this study, their occurrences in the students' texts and examples of their use in the assignments. The data presented in this part of the study will be discussed in the next Chapter in terms of the students' communicative intention, assignment content, assignment objectives and assignment audience.

4.4.1 Pronouns

This section will show how the students as academic writers used the personal pronouns as part of the discourse markers in their texts. The analysis of pronouns is important in this study because of their discourse function; they are reference markers that indicate the writer's presence and the reader's engagement in the text. They are linked with the writer's identity, the writer's authority, writer's and reader's territory, and the writer's interest in creating and achieving successful interaction with their readers (Fortanet, 2004; Harwood, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland,

2001b, 2002b, 2002c; Kamio, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007, 2008; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Taboada, 2006; Tang & John, 1999). In so doing, Table 4.11 displays the frequency of pronouns in both assignments, from a corpus of 30,848 words for the first assignment and 29,433 words for the second assignment. They are listed from highest to lowest order according to their total occurrences in each assignment.

Table 4.11: Discourse markers 1 - Pronouns

	Corpus 1 No of words: 30,848		**Corpus 2 No of words: 29,433**	
Pronouns	**Total occurrences**	**Percentage**	**Total occurrences**	**Percentage**
their	210	0.6808	146	0.2422
they	183	0.5932	118	0.1957
them	104	0.3371	78	0.1294
us	13	0.0421	0	0.0033
our	12	0.0389	4	0.0066
your	12	0.0389	2	0.0033
I	11	0.0648	6	0.0216
my	11	0.0324	1	0.0034
we	9	0.0292	4	0.0066
you	9	0.0292	3	0.0050
me	1	0.0034	0	0.0000
mine	0	0.0000	0	0.0000
yours	0	0.0000	0	0.0000

As Table 4.11 indicates, this study selected mainly the first and second person pronouns and possessive adjectives in singular and plural from the corpora data (*I, my, me, mine, we, our, us, you, your, you)*. The third person pronouns were checked only in their plural form (*they, their, them)*. The choice of the plural form for the third person pronouns was made considering the discourse analysis that will be done in this study to quote the writer's and reader's presence into the text. The third person pronouns in singular were not analysed given that in most of the assignments the students used pronouns and adjectives such as *he, his, him, she, hers, her, it* and *its* to refer to any author they might have cited, to any author' citation, to any scientific reference, or to other kind of information that the students might have developed. *"It"* was also used in the assignments in order to build proper grammar constructions in impersonal expressions. Some examples where third person pronouns in singular form were used are:

(88) Samples of third person pronouns, singular, in use:

(a) "Finally, Drucker (2002) considers it is actually more important…**He** states: these workers are not labour, they are capital." **(L67A1)**[4]

(b) "The designer (A) is also good in multimedia so **he** also has the skill and efficiency in designing the website." **(L203A1)**

(c) "… and designating someone to act on the worker's behalf while **he** or **she** is on vacation can create…" **(L332A1)**

(d) "So, **it** is the responsibility of Dr. V. L. Dutta to behave in a positive manner in the company." **(L959A2)**

(e) "The leader has the right to punish any member if **he** or **she** does not fulfil job related obligations." **(L777A2)**

As noted above, the discourse function of the selected pronouns was an important consideration in this study, more so than their grammatical function, or the correct grammatical deployment that students have made of them in their texts.

The distribution of the selected pronouns in Table 4.11 shows how many times each pronoun appeared, and how many times it was signalled as a discourse marker. The percentages correspond to the number of occurrences of the pronouns in comparison to the number of words of each Corpus per assignment. Results in Table 4.11 show that personal pronouns were used slightly differently in each assignment. The pronouns occurrences were higher in Corpus 1 (assignment) than in Corpus 2 (assignment 2). In terms of actual numbers, a number of personal pronouns per student's assignment will not be provided in this study because the students' assignments were grouped for building up each Corpus assignment. Thus, it is not possible to identify a particular number of instances of pronouns used by each student separately.

The words "mine" and "yours" were not used in either of the two assignment corpora. "Their", "they" and "them" were the pronouns most used, with a higher number of occurrences in both Corpus 1 and Corpus 2 compared with the first and second person pronouns in singular and plural. Results also indicate how the pronouns' occurrences changed in each Corpus. Incidences of the pronoun "their",

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[4] **L** in this part of the Chapter refers to the line number in the Corpus from where the given information was taken. **A** means assignment and **1** represents that the data belong to the electronic Corpus that was built up from assignment 1 (Corpus 1). Thus, **A2** represents the information from the electronic Corpus from assignment 2 (Corpus 2).

for example, reduced from 210 occurrences in Corpus 1 to 146 in Corpus 2, representing a reduction in percentage from 0.68% to 0.24%. It was followed by "they" and "them" which were also used frequently by the students but less so in the second assignment. Here it is crucial to point out that the results just show the global frequency of the selected pronouns for the study, but the concordance program could not make a distinction between their uses as subject, possessive or object. It is clear from the data that the use of the pronouns "they", "their" and "them" individually and collectively surpass the number of times the other pronouns were used.

In order to identify the writer-reader involvement and audience construction in the texts, it is important to understand the function of the pronouns students used in their assignments. Consequently, the pronouns' roles were investigated by first selecting from Corpus 1 and Corpus 2, a number of sentences or sentence fragments that could represent the pronouns' functions. Then, the samples were analysed in terms of the visibility of the writer (Harwood, 2005a). Later in this chapter are some examples containing generic and non-specific uses of "*they*", "*their*" and "*them*" which are instances of where the use of these pronouns can discursively and conceptually be related to *"I", "we", "our" or "us"*. That is, the use of *"they", "their"* and *"them"* might indicate that when students used them, they wanted to include themselves in the discourse they were presenting. This is important when bearing in mind the main purpose of this study; that is to identify two broad metadiscourse categories (Ifantidou, 2005), which might be related to either intra-textual or inter-textual roles of specific reference markers or personal pronouns when were used by the student-writers in their texts.

On one hand, the intra-textual category might refer to the use of the personal marker or pronoun to identify the author himself/herself. Its interpretation depends on who is speaking. This author reference is usually made to other parts of the same text (e.g., "*I have chosen…Ltd in India", "My experience in this area…", "As I said before…"*). On the other hand, the inter-textual category could refer to the use of the personal markers or references to identify other

authors, or the author himself/herself in other texts (e.g., "*However, I feel that this type of decision making…", "…the recommendations that I suggest to improve the organisation…", "… with all these views I personally feel that employees are also…*").

The identification of the intra-textual or inter-textual role of pronouns might also explain the generic and non-specific uses of English personal pronouns students adopted when referring to their territory as writers, or to their reader's territory (Kamio, 2001). Analyses of data under the Kamio's (2001) territory concept in a writing process could identify the writer's or reader's territory through propositional utterances, whose aims are to negotiate content knowledge between writer and reader. The identification of the territory would thus indicate the general perceived space or domain that writers or readers have when they are engaged in a communicative transaction through a written text. In summary then, the identification of each metadiscourse category (intra-textual/inter-textual) in the results of this study might reveal a variety of lexical items used by the students to indicate their presence, attitude or viewpoint in their assignments (Ifantidou, 2005).

Next are examples where the pronouns "*they", "their" and "them*" were used generically, that is, indefinitely and non-specifically, although the degrees of genericness may vary among examples. Examples might indicate a negotiation of meaning between writer and reader where the key element is the reference of the personal pronoun. Therefore, the use of pronouns in academic writing could indicate both aspects, i.e. their reference and discourse functions. Additional examples of the pronouns used by students in their assignments are provided in Appendix F.

(89) *'They'* might mean *'I'* or *'we'* when they refer to employees.

(a) "…when *employees* feel uncomfortable at the workplace, **they** will move out to another company…" **(L45A1)**
(b) **"**When the *employee* receives a desired promotion from their employer then their job satisfaction increases and **they** get motivated towards high productivity." **(L170A1)**
(c) **"**…to reinforce those values, *employees* have to trust their leader. **They** got trust through the ethical actions of their leaders." **(L24A2)**

(d) "By virtue of this behaviour *employees* become aware of aspects **they** can change and improve." **(L294A2)**

In example 89 (above), the word '*They'* is used generically in all instances; that means, indefinitely and non-specifically. These examples suggest that when students wanted to apply their knowledge of discipline-related theoretical concepts to their assignments they were studying, they created generic statements about employees in any organisation. In 89(a) "*they"* is extremely indefinite and non-specific, referring to any employee who might leave their workplace if they felt uncomfortable at their jobs. In 89[b], 89[c], and 89[d], the same pronoun is used with the same indefinite characteristic. Therefore, the indefiniteness and non-specificity suggest that when students used *"they"* to refer to employees, they could be also referring to themselves as employees. In consequence, they presented their point of view about job and personal decisions they could make considering different organisational circumstances. In this case, *"they"* could logically refer to *"I"* if the students viewed themselves as employees, or in another case, if students identified their reader as an employee, "*they"* could also mean *"we"* in the given examples.

(90) ***"They"*** **means "*I*" or "*we*" when they refer to managers.**

(a) "Managers must develop appropriate communication to understand and interact with multicultural organisations. Doing it, **they** learn more about a diverse group's personal values as well as how the individuals like to be treated." **(L61A1)**
(b) "…, managers most of the time should take decisions about these practices, but **they** will need and have financial support to develop them and not stop after a short time." **(L382A1)**
(c) "…*managers* have to explore and decide whether **they** want to make specific changes in its operations and, if so, commit resources to planning the changes." **(L216A2)**
(d) "Most managers should think that **they** can select good leaders on the basis of personal experience but there are also some parameters that could lead them to recognise different kind of leaders." **(L302A2)**

(91) ***"They" means "I"*** **or "*we*" when used to refer to leaders.**

(a) "Leaders really need to create an ethically healthy climate for their followers, where **they** can do their work productively and confront a minimal degree of ambiguity." **(L958A2)**
(b) "All these are the responsibilities of the leader and thus **they** play a key role in the success of organisation change." **(L953A2)**

As in [89], results for [90] and [91] also showed that the pronoun "*they*" was presented generically; in these examples "*they*" is indefinite and non-specific, referring to managers in [90] and to leaders in [91]. In both cases, examples

might suggest the students' position, attitude or decision if they were playing any of the two administrative roles in an organisation. In [90], for example, students could be presenting their viewpoints as managers, which would mean that 'they' meant "*I*" if they were presenting their personal view, or "*we*"' if they decided to include their reader in the context. "They" could also mean "*I*" or "*we*" in [91] if the students were presenting their ideas from a leader's perspective, i.e., presenting their opinions in adopting the role of a leader in an organisation, or identifying themselves and their reader as leaders in any organisation.

(92) "*They*" means "*I*" or "*we*" when referring to people.

> **(a)** "…When *people* think about motivation, **they** relate it with a group of factors which produce them, the feeling for remaining in the work place..." **(L20A1)**
> **(b)** "…*People* can get into the companies, based in attracted salaries, but by the time if **they** can not identify their personal goals with company's goals, dissatisfaction come out…" **(L26A1)**
> **(c)** "…Whatever the size, or type of organisation *people* need to talk to each other; **they** need to exchange views and ideas, issue and receive instructions, discuss problems…" **(L773. A1)**
> **(d)** "*People* are unlikely to follow someone whom **they** perceive as dishonest to who is likely to take advantage of them." **(L953A2)**
> **(e)** "*People* who invested in the current system resist change. **They** fear the cost of status, money, authority or other benefits that **they** value." **(L1003A2)**

In [92] "*they*" is also identified as an indefinite and non-specific pronoun when students used it to refer to people. Examples in [92] suggest that "they" might mean "I" or "we" when students present themselves as a part of the whole concept of human race – "people" in these statements. So, the generic and non-specific uses of "*they*" probably helped students to indicate their judgments or criteria in front of certain ethical, social and job considerations when they were applying the content theories in their assignments. In this case, "they" could be interpreted as "I", meaning the writer's opinion, or "we" if students were involved and projected their reader's viewpoint in their statements.

In line with results in [89], [90], [91] and [92], statements in [93] and [94] indicate that *"their"* and "*them*" may connote *"our"* and "*us*" respectively, if students were projecting themselves and their reader as employees or managers. In these cases, it is clear from the meaning of the sentences that students considered that "*their*" and "*them*" could refer to themselves and their reader, when they are part

of a more or less delimited group of people where they could be employees or managers. Projecting "*their*" and *"them"* as "*our*" or "*us*" in [93] and [94] might also indicate the writer's territory in the statements whose principal reference could be "I"; it might also indicate how the writer explicit involved the reader a common territory, in a shared context.

(93) "*Their"* means "*our*" if the writers are projecting themselves as employees or managers.

(a) "The feedback is a very good motivator for the *employees* as it gives them an idea of **their** progress in **their** performance." **(L163A1)**
(b) "The short term financial benefits will be good for the employees but the employees are more motivated when their performance is appreciated and recognised by their colleagues or managers." **(L130A1)**
(c) "Furthermore, to reinforce those values, *employees* have to trust their leader." **(L24A2)**
(d) "*Employees* involved in the change though that **their** position in the company was threatened, and they could lose it easily; they were afraid about the way to manage the new system…" **(L348A2)**
(e) "The first element is when *managers* with leadership use **their** formal and personal powers, to encourage subordinates towards the companies' goals." **(L48A2)**

(94) "*Them*" means "*us*" if the writers are projecting themselves as employees or managers.

(a) "Once managers can identify the specific stage of *employees* and provide **them** satisfaction of those needs, they will be able to remain **them** motivated." **(L22A1)**
(b) "The flexible working hours actually increases Individuals' commitment towards the organisation and also encourages **them** to develop their positive attitude." **(L157A1)**
(c) "The feedback is a very good motivator for the *employees* as it gives **them** an idea of their progress in their performance." **(L163A1)**

To sum up, the results indicate that the intended reference of the pronouns "*they*", "*their*" and "*them*" pronouns might not always be clear if it is not acknowledged that they constitute a system of codes. This system is based on the notion of the writer's and reader's territories, the negotiation of the content knowledge between them and the discourse function of these pronouns to achieve a proper meaning in the instances where they are used.

Other significant results from Table 4.11 are related to the "*I*", "*my*" and "*me*" pronouns. The "*I*" and *"my"* pronouns were used the same number of times in Corpus 1, but occurred less frequently in Corpus 2. Use of '*I*' went from 11 occurrences in Corpus 1 to 6 in Corpus 2, and '*my*' also went from 11 occurrences in Corpus 1 to 1 in Corpus 2. The pronoun "m*e*" was seldom used in either of the

two assignments. Students just used the word "*me*" once in Corpus 1, and not at all in corpus 2. Assuming that "*I*", "*my*" and "*me*" usually represent the writer in the text, the low frequency of these pronouns in both corpora (mainly in corpus 2) might indicate that the students in this study preferred to develop their texts without involving themselves explicitly.

One reason that might explain the low use of these pronouns in the students' assignments could be their previous knowledge regarding academic writing rules. In student interviews, some students said that the first person pronouns in singular should be avoided in academic writing. Elaborating on this aspect of academic writing, students also said it was better to seek other kinds of expressions which would allow them to express their ideas without nominating themselves in their texts. Despite the fact that students mentioned their awareness regarding the use of these pronouns in their texts, results show some cases where students still used them.

The students' statements in [95], [96] and [97] show that inclusions of "*I*", "*my*" and *"me"* pronouns in their writing could help the students to: (1) organise the text and guide the reader through the argument 95[a], 96[a], 96[c], 97[a] and 97[b]; (2) state personal opinions and knowledge assertions 95[b], 95[c], 95[d], 95[e], and 96[b]; and (3) acknowledge organisations and individuals who contributed to their analysis and theoretical applications in some way 95[a] and 95[d] (Harwood, 2005a).

(95) "*I*" pronoun occurrences.

(a) "In order to discuss these dynamics **I** have chosen a group of Engineers in KCP…" **(L502A1)**

(b) "Certainly, **I** don't agree with the statement as it states that employees are not the source of high profits." **(L445A1)**

(c) "…These are some of the conclusions that **I** make about my groups decision making. However, **I** feel that this type of decision making…" **(L514A1)**

(d) "This is nothing but imposing reward power over the followers. **I** don't feel Dutta imposes Coercive Power over his employees, unless…" **(L962A2)**

(e) "These are the recommendations that **I** suggest to improve the organisational change structure." **(L1023A2)**

(96) "*My*" pronoun occurrences.

(a) "…Particularly, I left a good job in **my** country, **my** family and position to get a worth knowledge in order to satisfy **my** growth need but having to…" **(L75A1)**

(b) "These are some of the conclusions that I make about **my** groups decision making. However, I feel that this type of decision making…" **(L514A1)**
(c) "…to certain number of conflicts and unresolved problems. **My** final point to highlight for this essay is the third-party…" **(L669A2)**

(97) "*Me*" pronoun occurrences.
(a) "…Let **me** take the inverse sense of the phrase…" **(L61A1)**
(b) "…Let **me** take the inverse sense of the phrase. People-first policies lead to high profits…" **(L63A2)**

In general, results show significant underuse of "*I*", "*my*" and "*me*" in both corpora thus reducing impressions of identity and connotation of authority that could be projected by a writer using these powerful rhetorical forms (Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2001b, 2002b).

Incidences of the first person plural from this Corpus *"we",* "*our*" and "*us*" were also counted, since they might refer to the writer and the reader of the assignments students produced; these pronouns have implications for both participants in the written discourse event. The occurrences of "*we*" declined from 9 times in Corpus 1 to 4 times in Corpus 2. Results might suggest that students chose to use "*we*" to present their arguments in a generic way. In such cases, "*w*e" could mean "*I*" and could be part of the writer's territory. Alternatively, students attempting to involve their reader in their claim used *"we"* meaning "you" and "me" (reader and writer respectively), where the pronoun positions has the writer in the centre of its core meaning 98[a]; all the non-specific people referred to by "*we*" must fall into the writer's territory of reference 98[b].

(98) "*We*" means '*I*' or 'writer and reader'.
(a) "Thus, in summary **we** can see that in term [sic] of financial rewards, the money can be satisfied for individuals who desire physiological and safety needs." **(L334A1)**
(b) "However, conflict process can be divided into various stages. At first **we** can come through the causes of conflicts which can be due to the lack of effective communication among members or groups…" **(L1010A2)**

In Corpus 1, the pronoun '*us*' occurred 13 times but there were no occurrences in Corpus 2. This pronoun might have been used by the students to project their identity in 99[a] and 99[b]. Data suggest that the role of authority was weaker in corpus 2 than in corpus 1 (Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2001b, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999). According to the results for assignment 2, students reduced their presence or avoided presenting or signalling their ideas and conceptions compared with greater 'visibility' in the first assignment. A reason of the low frequency of the

first person pronouns in the data could be because of the students' wish not to represent themselves as opinion-holder and originator in their academic writing. (Tang & John, 1999).

(99) "*Us*" means '*I*' when the writers are projecting themselves.

(a) "Let **us** start our discussion with software companies. These organisations achieve high profits by…" **(L447A1)**

(b) "This is a routine process. Now let **us** conclude about this type of decision making." **(L512A1)**

These results suggest that academic writing requires a clear awareness by students of their use of pronouns. It was found that in a few cases students did address their reader using the first person pronoun in singular or plural in their assignments. It seems that few of them understood the fact that the first person pronoun in academic writing is not a homogeneous entity, and that there are multiple roles or identities that may be fronted by the first person pronoun (Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2001b, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999). This study considered all various forms of the first person pronoun and found that their various roles were expressed by "*I*", "*my*", "*me*", "*mine*", "*we*", "*our*", "*us*", and "*ours*".

Results also suggest that students claimed authority, identity and territory using *"they"*, "*their*" and "*them*", when they tried to exhibit some form of ownership of the content of their writing, when they tried to argue or express their viewpoint and when they were discussing or applying a particular theoretical concept in real organisational situations in their texts (Harwood, 2005b; Hyland, 2002b). This conclusion can be supported by the frequent occurrence of these pronouns in the students' assignments. It could be said that students found it easier to express a range of roles or identities using the third person pronoun in plural *("they"*, "*their*", and "*them*") than using the first pronoun person ("*I*", "*my*", "*me*", "*mine*", "*we*", "*our*", *"us",* and "*ours*"). Below is the description of the second group of discourse markers collected for this study, logical connectors.

4.4.2 Logical connectors

Other discourse markers that were identified for the text analysis are related to the text organisation, the logical connectors or connective adjuncts. These discourse

markers (See Table 4.12) have a range of roles. They may indicate rhetorical relations such as the writer's purpose and the reader's text construction; coherence relations such as exemplification, comparison, contrast, cause, and consequence; or discourse relations such as writer and reader engagement, writer's purpose, and content development in the texts (Hyland, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Taboada, 2006).

These relationships occur because the discourse markers involve associations between constituent units of the text and aspects of the communicative situation, involving the writer and the reader in the writing process, along with their attitudes, beliefs and intentions (Risselada & Spooren, 1998). Identifying these connections in the research data, could help to clarify the relationship between the students' intended communication goals, and the response they elicit from the lecturer as reader (Taboada, 2006).

The interpretation of particular coherence relationships is usually not (or at least not completely) determined by linguistic properties, so the analysis of logical connectors could shed further light on the coherence relationships and their intended representations in-text. As part of that process, it was crucial to analyse the content and the structure in the surrounding context, as well as the relevant aspects of the communicative situation and knowledge of the extra-linguistic aspects that made up the texts. This was needed in order to understand that when the students deployed particular rhetorical features, their intention was to discuss, argue, describe, explain, inform, demonstrate, illustrate, suggest or express their reasoning about any particular content and knowledge of that content for their discipline.

Table 4.12 indicates the frequency of the logical connectors used by the students in their assignments (See Methodology Chapter 3, section 3.3.2 for logical connector selection). The logical connectors are presented according to their discourse function i.e., the occurrences of conjunctions and adverbial clauses in the Corpus of each assignment were counted separately for each logical connector

category. The percentage rate for each connector category is presented for each corpus and is related to the number of words per assignment. As in the previous section, Corpus 1 and Corpus 2 represent data from the first and second assignments in that order. Percentages are presented in four decimal places because of the figures obtained for some connectors in the study.

Table 4.12: Discourse markers 2- Logical connectors

	Corpus 1 No of words: 30,848		**Corpus 2 No of words: 29,433**	
Logical connectors	**Total occurrences**	**Percentage**	**Total occurrences**	**Percentage**
Exemplification				
for instance	3	0.0097	2	0.0068
for example	18	0.0584	12	0.0408
like	25	0.0810	20	0.0680
such as	90	0.2918	49	0.1665
as	39	0.1264	26	0.0815
as illustration	1	0.0032	0	0.0000
Comparison				
like	25	0.0810	19	0.0646
as	30	0.0843	26	0.0815
as (adjective) as	31	0.1005	13	0.0442
similar to	9	0.0292	1	0.0034
Contrast				
but	65	0.2107	60	0.2039
however	32	0.1037	34	0.1155
or	134	0.4344	105	0.3567
whereas	7	0.0227	12	0.0408
although	6	0.0195	3	0.0102
though	6	0.0195	5	0.0170
Cause / Consequence				
because	45	0.1459	45	0.1529
due to	14	0.0454	17	0.0578
as	22	0.0713	14	0.0747
since	8	0.0259	8	0.0272
so	39	0.1264	37	0.1257
thus	31	0.1005	28	0.0951
therefore	19	0.0616	15	0.0510
hence	9	0.0292	6	0.0204
as a result	31	0.1005	18	0.0612

Below is the presentation of logic connectors that have been chosen for this study, each connector category will be considered individually. Within each connector category, it will be presented samples of statements or part of statements that have been taken from both corpus of the study. The samples are presented as evidence of the way logical connectors were used by students.

4.4.2.1 Exemplification

Results show that exemplification clauses e.g. "*for instance*", "*for example*", "*like*", "*such as*", "*as*" and "*as illustration*" were discourse elements that students used in their content clauses to introduce further information; as a complement in clause structure, these inclusions could help the reader to understand the information students were trying to develop in their assignments. Thus, these connectors potentially played an important role in the text cohesion. In general, Table 4.12 indicates that students used more exemplification connectors in their first assignment than in the second assignment. The term, "*such as*" was the connector students used most often in both assignments; 90 occurrences were recorded in Corpus 1 compared with 49 in Corpus 2. It was followed in frequency by "*for example*" and "*like*", which had similar number of occurrences in both assignments. Low usage was recorded for the clauses "*for instance"* and "*as illustration*" in both assignments; "*for instance"* occurred 3 times in Corpus 1 and 2 occurrences in Corpus 2, "*as illustration*" was once in Corpus 1 to none in Corpus 2.

Below there are samples taken from both corpora, which indicate that students might use these connectors to exemplify a representative member like in 100[a], 100[b], 102[a], 102[b] and 105[a]; or to introduce a specific example which comes in a separate sentence from the preceding general statement like in 101(a); or to make clear a particular statement which comes as a complement of the previous or next content clause like in 101[b], 103[a], 103[b], 104[a] and 104[b].

(100) Exemplification connector: "for instance".

(a) "For this reason, high profits in a company support an investment on people. **For instance,** Pfeffer and Veiga (1999.p.47) show us…" **(L382A1)**

(b) "…and the organisation must consider how to adapt this situation for keeping competitive. **For instance**, palm oil prices in south East Asia are a half of prices in Colombia." **(L296A2)**

(101) Exemplification connector: "for example".

(a) "As for the goal setting theory, that emphasise goal accomplishment which depends on individual goals. **For example** some people will set up a goal to purchase house or car and so on." **(L316A1)**

(b) "To do this, tasks were assigned to each team member, **for example**, reducing the defect rate, enhancing product performance and product innovation among others." **(L76A2)**

(102) Exemplification connector: "like".

(a) "There are a lot of leadership qualities **like** honesty, sympathy, empathy, identity etc." **(L943A1)**

(b) "…characteristics **like** authoritarianism or dominance of a group member or leader can reduce the morale and the productivity of the group." **(L200A2)**

(103) Exemplification connector: "such as".

(a) "When employees believe that efforts will lead to a good financial reward **such as** bonus, a salary increasing, the rewards will satisfy the employees' thoughts and personal goals as well as enhance the performance." **(L316A1)**

(b) "According to the Trait theory leaders should have personal qualities and characteristics **such as** knowledge about market segment, industry, customers to name a few." **(L9A2)**

(104) Exemplification connector: "as".

(a) "…many aspects of work-related behaviour are affected to an appreciate degree by factors **as** lighting, temperature, air quality or noise." **(L113A1)**

(b) "This sector in Colombia and also South America is controlled by a few main investors and the good relationships with them, **as** the main tactic, produce the stability, and credibility of the business deal." **(L11A2)**

(105) Exemplification connector: "as illustration".

(a) "Role conflict arise when a person deal with opposite roles; **as illustration**, OPT member responsible for a mill process that should judge his own employees under the role of quality management system auditory." **(L116A1)**

4.4.2.2 Comparison

The terms *"like"*, "*as*", and "*similar"* were other discourse markers identified in the students' assignments. These markers were used by students to signal comparison; for instance, those in [106], [107] and [108] express comparison of equality (Dixon, 2005; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Expressions such as: *"more",* "*more than"*, "*better than*", and "*less*" (not indicated in Table 4.12) had 100, 5, 27 and 13 occurrences in the first assignment correspondingly, and 160, 4, 8 and 16 occurrences in the second assignment. The results showed that students sometimes used a second clause, whose syntactic function of complement was to express a comparison. This comparative complement was found in a variety of

positions relative to the head of the comparative phrase, although the most usual position for the comparative complement in the study was at the end of the clause containing the comparative phrase, as in 106[a], 107[b] and 108[b].

(106) Comparison connector: "like".

(a) "Sometimes the implementation of decisions or a process of negotiation **like** the last story, involves the concept of power." **(L247A2)**
(b) "So the Department members know and like each other. They are together **like** a family and behave **like** friends." **(L968A2)**

(107) Comparison connector: "as".

(a) "Successfully organisations through the world have been developing an important number of strategies to improve employee productivity, human motivation and increase their profits **as** much **as** possible." **(L374A1)**
(b) "At the beginning of the change company did not have the same infrastructure and distribution channels **as** Carvajal S.A., some goods were arriving late to customers; sales personnel experienced process conflict in regard to priorities on tasks." **(L52A2)**

(108) Comparison connector: "as (adjective) as".

(a) "Feedback can be achieved through formalized meetings with manager, **as well as** surveys with purpose of developing a strategy to improve the organisation." **(L91A1)**
(b) "…key locations around the world, which can make effective real time shipments, **as well as** reducing the costs of shipments from each local centre." **(L200A2)**.

(109) Comparison connector: "similar to".

(a) "However, these are **similar to** leadership behaviours." **(L961A1)**
(b) "The bases of power are described as influence targets evaluation of subjective probability that the influence agent will behave in a certain way. However these are **similar to** leadership behaviours." **(L961A2)**

Typical comparisons in the students' texts appeared to show greater efforts to state a further clarification, argumentation or explanation after a previous utterance, like a point-making device where a reader might follow and understand the texts by the identification of the comparison markers suggested by the students through a comparative clause like in 106[a], 106[b], 108[a] and 109[b]. Data indicate that students used more comparative constructions in the first assignment than in the second assignment, with "*as…as*", "*as*", and "*like"* being the most frequent comparison markers. They declined from 31, 30 and 25 occurrences (respectively) in Corpus 1, to 13, 26 and 19 in Corpus 2. Use of the term, "s*imilar to*" occurred 9 times in Corpus 1 but only once Corpus 2.

In general, the data showed that students used comparative constructions as a rhetorical strategy to examine the similarity between two participants in terms of some property or a parameter; or to establish the comparison between things, states or events (Dixon, 2005; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

4.4.2.3 Contrast

Other discourse markers examined in this study of discursive and rhetorical functions were "*but*", "*however*", "*or"*, "*whereas"*, "*although*", and "*though"*. Such markers encode adversative relationships among events and create textual cohesion (Wang & Tsai, 2007). Students used these markers to present: (1) antithesis, indicating a preference for one action or belief over another similar one as in 110[a], 111[b], 112[a], 114[b] and 115[a]; (2) concession, supporting a particular belief or action in the presence of apparently opposing information as in 110[b], 111[a], 114[a] and 115[b]; and (3) neutral contrast, intended to help the reader to understand particular differences between the two points presented as indicated in 112[a], 112[b], 113[a] and 113[b] (Wang & Tsai, 2007).

The three contrastive relationships identified in the students' assignments, could indicate that students used the contrastive markers to perform different discourse functions. The markers could help them to induce a positive view for one point, to set aside an objection, or simply to draw attention to differences. Thus, when students maintained these kinds of contrasting relationships in their texts, they were presenting two propositions or utterances that involved an implicit contrast, plus an explicit contrast or a contrast associated with the previous discourse (Wang & Tsai, 2007).

(110) Contrast connector: "but".

(a) "There were not real punishments for employees **but** those who did not get the expected results in terms of performance, were removed from the company." **(L18A2)**
(b) "Email communication was not the most effective way that the organisation could use during the change process, **but** it was the faster one." **(L377A2)**

(111) Contrast connector: "however".

(a) "… the rewards could be financial or non financial. **However,** the theory mainly focusses on developing performance through non financial rewards…" **(L402A1)**
(b) "Generally, leadership can be exercised in many settings, **however**, the concern here is the leadership carried out by a chairman in organisational settings." **(L64A2)**

(112) Contrast connector: "or".

(a) "Structural change in itself does not produce success **or** failure; it is the management of change that creates it." **(L54A2)**
(b) "In other words, it is the personality and the behaviour of people which make them a leader **or** not." **(L302A2)**

(113) Contrast connector: "whereas".

(a) "The need for affiliation seeks friendship, cooperation and mutual understanding **whereas** the need for achievement means accomplish challenging but moderate goals." **(L79A1)**

(b) "The first one emphasises the human relations aspect of the work **whereas** the second one stresses production and the technical aspects of the job…" **(L233A2)**

(114) Contrast connector: "although".

(a) "Money may not be an effective motivator in your culture **although** it may have some effect in short time."**(L479A1)**

(b) "…it tries to make balance between number of men and women. **Although**, the MOF has been taken to choices the employee who has qualifications…" **(L500A2)**

(115) Contrast connector: "though".

(a) "**Though** both the financial and non financial rewards can motivate an employee, the non financial rewards are considered to be the best way to motivate the employee." **(L130A1)**

(b) "…is able to inject and put a lot of energy to his followers in order to achieve group goals **though** an extra effort." **(L310A2).**

Compared with results for analysis of previous markers, students used contrastive relations similarly in both assignments. That is, there were not significant variations in the uses of contrastive discourse for assignment 1 and assignment 2. The word "o*r*" was the most frequently used contrast connector in both assignments — 134 occurrences in Corpus 1 (0.43%) and 105 (0.35%) in Corpus 2. Next frequency of usage was *"but",* with 65 occurrences in Corpus 1 and 60 in Corpus 2. The third contrastive marker was "*however"*, which showed little variation between assignments: 32 in Corpus 1 and 34 in Corpus 2. The next marker to be analysed in this category was *"whereas*", which grew from 7 occurrences in Corpus 1 to 12 in Corpus 2. Finally, the last two markers were "although" and "*though*", which declined from 6 occurrences for each in Corpus 1 to 3 and 5 occurrences in Corpus 2 respectively.

In sum, results show that when students used "*but*", "*however*", "*or*", "*whereas*", "*although*", and "*though*", their intention was to highlight a contrast in the utterances they were producing. Because of this function, they could introduce a change of information content, frequently modifying previous discourse. Data also showed that such contrast relationships between two utterances or propositions were transparent enough to be found in the semantic content of prepositions, while others were buried within writers' and readers' content knowledge, or were implicit in writers' expectations about each other and each other's conceptual thinking (Wang & Tsai, 2007).

4.4.2.4 Cause

This section considers the discourse markers illustrated in [116], [117] and [118] to express causal relations. Markers such as "*because*", "*due to*", "as" and "*since*" in the students' texts illustrate connections between cause and result. They might have been used by the students either to indicate purpose, reason, or result, where purpose and reason are taken as sub-types of a more general category, 'cause'. Examples [116], [117], [118] and [119] illustrate connections between cause and result from the students' assignments. In all of these cases, the second clause begins with an adjunct related anaphorically to the first clause, and in this construction the adjunct belongs to the cause (reason) category.

(116) Cause connector: "because of".

(a) "Consequently, differences between successful and unsuccessful group may be not simply **because of** the work design or group process and so on, but may be due to the factors of the group development and external conditions." **(L337A1)**

(b) "Employees were also in stressed condition **because of** long hours; forced and unpaid overtime which is the regular feature of Wipro culture." **(L917A2)**

(117) Cause connector: "Due to".

(a) "…the differences between successful and unsuccessful group may be not simply because of the work design or group process and so on, but may be **due to** the factors of group development and external conditions." **(L337A1)**

(b) "…we can come through the causes of conflicts which can be **due to** lack of effective communication among members or groups…." **(L1010A2)**

(118) Cause connector: "as".

(a) "Negative inequities i.e. overworked and underpaid actually demotivate an employee, and then the employee exerts lesser effort in their job **as** they are less paid. This will decrease the productivity of an employee." **(L151A1)**

(b) "This also involved the key members of the IT Department **as** they need to understand the workflow process to program for the e-RMA, e-Hub systems." **(L202A2)**

(119) Cause connector: "since".

(a) "Group leadership can be changed or may be rotated among the four members **since** it is a very small group." **(L253A1)**

(b) "The impact that Mr. Salcedo has on the organisation may be realized from the organisation culture perspective **since** it enhance strategies for the company performance." **(L255A2)**

Results show "*because*" with highest number of occurrences, 45 occurrences in each of the two assignments. It was followed by "*as*", which had 22 occurrences in Corpus 1 and 14 occurrences in Corpus 2;*"due to"* occurred 14 times in Corpus 1 and 17 times in Corpus 2; "si*nce*" was the last cause marker in this category, occurring 8 times in each assignment.

4.4.2.5 Consequence

Data show "*so*", *"thus", "therefore",* "*hence*" and "*as a result*" as adjuncts of result, which were characteristically expressed in the students' assignment by a prepositional phrase (PP) with a head and a content clause as a complement as in examples 119[a], 120[a], 121[b], 123[b], 124[a] and 124[b] (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). That is, the resultant meaning found in the data was indicated lexically by the head noun with the complement of the propositional phrase. Examples [120], [121], [122], [123] and [124] illustrate that students used consequence or result markers in their writing, when they wanted to indicate causal relationships between actions and events in context.

(120) Consequence connector: "so"

(a) "…the designer (A) is also dominant in attitude and extrovert in nature **so** there is a regular conflict between designer (A) and the team leader." **(L184A1)**

(b) "Wipro Spectramind provides BPO service to the western countries like USA **so** there is a cultural requirement for the employees to have a linguistic training to acquire the American accent." **(L917A2)**

(121) Consequence connector: "thus"

(a) "Designer (A) has a goal conflict and does not show any respect to each other decisions. **Thus**, the team is also suffering from proper decision making." **(L184A1)**

(b) "**Thus** a model of change will depend on the situation of the organisation and it may take elements of different scales of change." **(L283A2)**

(122) Consequence connector: "therefore"

(a) "Some members complain the inequity between the roles of allocations, the leader **therefore** redesign the roles, which make members' satisfactions." **(L370A1)**

(b) "…his position provides power to award or punish through forma authority; **therefore** Mr. Salcedo tend to perform better in favourable situations taking advantage of his position." **(L231A2)**

(123) Consequence connector: "hence"

(a) "The OPT behaviour shows positive but also negative effects on productivity and cohesiveness **hence** strict selection trials and valuable training plans are required to overcome such difficulties." **(L112A1)**

(b) "… he might have also gathered huge range of knowledge over the company projects. **Hence** he also attains informational power over the department engineers." **(L962A2)**

(124) Consequence connector: "as a result"

(a) "According to the expectancy theory training employees for their jobs increases their level of self-confidence which enhances their performance **as a result** employee will be more motivated to put more effort to achieve better performance." **(L154A1)**

(b) "In this case, the leader is one of the founders and he has been managing the leadership of the company from the beginning. **As a result**, most of the norms, organisational values, routines and rituals and stories and myths of the organisation have been created and shaped by the leader." **(L327A2)**

Students used similar consequence markers in both assignments: that is, the same markers were used a similar number of times in both assignments, in marked

contrast to the incidence of other discourse markers analysed in this study. More previously explained students used most of the markers more frequently in their first assignment than in the second. Analysis showed that "*so*" was in the top list of the result markers in the students' work. It had 39 occurrences in Corpus 1 and 37 in Corpus 2. Next on the list of markers was "*thus*", which appeared 31 times in Corpus 1 and 28 times in Corpus 2. Like *"thus"*, "*as a result"* occurred 31 times in assignment 1, but then decreased to only 18 times in assignment 2. There were 19 reported occurrences of "*therefore*" in Corpus 1 and 15 in Corpus 2. Only single-digit figures were recorded for the remaining consequence markers, *"hence*" and "since": *"hence"* declined from 9 occurrences in Corpus 1 to 6 in Corpus 2, while *'since'* occurred 8 times in each assignment.

Analysis therefore indicate that the coherence relationships presented in this part of the analysis text can be classified into two major classes: either semantic versus pragmatic relationships, or internal versus external relationships (Taboada, 2006). It can be said that when students created exemplification, comparative, contrastive, and cause-consequence relationships, they were attempting to have a particular effect on their reader. The intended effect might have been to persuade the reader with arguments applying rhetorical elements within the students' written texts. Consequently, the recorded discourse markers might have helped students to demonstrate and support their knowledge for their intended audience. Below is the description of the third group of discourse markers collected for this study, which refers to modal verbs.

4.4.3 Modal verbs

The third group of discourse markers selected for this study is related to hedges (See Chapter 3). Discourse features such as "*will*", *"would*", "*may*", "*might*", "*can*", "*could*", "*shall*", "*should*", *and "must"* were selected to denote the students' reluctance to indicate their presence or students' direct evaluation about particular information in their productions. Analysis of these markers showed how the students expressed utterances associated with hypothesis or predictive contexts where their reader's interpretation could associate the students'

hypothetical utterances to the real job situations. That is, hedges indicated the degree of commitment, certainty and collegial difference the students as writers wished to convey to their reader. Table 4.13 shows the hedges chosen for this study, and their incidence in the two assignments.

Table 4.13: Discourse Markers 3 – Modal Verbs

	Corpus 1 No of words: 30,848		**Corpus 2 No of words: 29,433**	
Modal Verbs	**Total Occurrences**	**Percentage**	**Total Occurrences**	**Percentage**
will	149	0.4830	57	0.1937
would	4	0.0130	5	0.0170
may	46	0.1491	28	0.0951
might	2	0.0065	6	0.0204
can	222	0.7197	176	0.5980
could	16	0.0519	11	0.0374
shall	0	0.0000	0	0.0000
should	45	0.1459	32	0.1087
must	38	0.1232	36	0.1223

In the text analysis, modal expressions showed the students' attitudes towards the factuality or actualisation of the content by the rest of the clause demonstrated below in the examples 127[b], 128[a], 128[b], 129[b], 131[a], 131[b], 132[a] and 132[b]. The students used modal verbs which involved different kinds of modality, to express necessity, as shown in 127[a], 132[a] and 132[b]; examples 129[a], 129[b], 128[a] and 128[b] give instances of modal verbs signifying possibility. Necessity and the related concept of possibility are core concepts in modality, according to Huddleston and Pullum (2002). Data analysis suggested that the strength of the modality expressed in a clause might indicate a distinction between formal, semantic and pragmatic aspects of conditionals. Thus, students might use modal verbs to express an instruction in a direct or indirect way. It was direct in 132[a] and 132[b], and would be considered indirect in 131[a] and 131[b].

Results also showed that modality helped students to express dynamic properties and dispositions of persons in terms of ability. This was the case in [129] and

[130]. Examples in [125] might denote that "*will*" as a modal verb, helped students to organise their content and guide their reader through the text.

(125) Modal verb: "will"

(a) "Finally, this essay **will** discuss about the use of non financial rewards such as training, flexible work hours, good employee relations, feedback and recognition at the workplace to motivate people with the introduction of the two additional motivation programs." **(L392A1)**

(b) "This essay **will** provide an illustration and analysis of a leader's behaviour by applying 'transformational' and 'trait' theory of leadership." **(L64A2)**

(126) Modal verb: "would"

(a) "…will be a high motivation but another employees' behaviour with different interest, it **would** not effect. Perhaps the manager's ignorance regarding to the expectancy of the employees…" **(L77A1)**

(b) "He saw that if Chi Mie could not provide global service they **would** lose their competitive ability around the world." **(L200A2)**

(127) Modal verb: "may"

(a) "Enriching jobs **may** enhance employees' motivation, satisfaction, performance, and retention." **(L95A1)**

(b) "There are that could be cited about leadership. Among others, Fiedler contingency model **may** be applied to leadership style of Mr …" **(L229A2)**

(128) Modal verb: "might"

(a) "However, if the group does not identify the heterogeneity among members, they **might** have a norm that conflicts directly with some members' personality." **(L53A1)**

(b) "In view of encouraging young talents he **might** impose some Reward power over the group members." **(L962A2)**

(129) Modal verb: "can"

(a) "People **can** get into the companies, based in attractive salaries, but by the time if they **can** not identify their personal goals with the companies' goals, dissatisfaction comes out. **(L26A1)**

(b) "However, the process **can** be managed in different ways, for example, developing a sense of history; creating a sense of …" **(L58A2)**

(130) Modal verb: "could"

(a) "Managers are looking for new ways to understand how employees **could** become happy and productive at the same time, while the organisation is getting good financial results…" **(L390A1)**

(b) "Palmas Bucarelia **could** design a continuous and systematic learning to enhance the performance of employees." **(L296A2)**.

(131) Modal verb: "should"

(a) "Company with high profits **should** start new projects to continue growing..." **(L382A1)**

(b) "Most of the time the consultations **should** be addressed to solve managerial." **(L310A2)**

(132) Modal verb: "must"

(a) "The group **mus**t mainly have a complete idea on the technology that KCP pursues." **(L505A1)**

(b) "Mr Salcedo recognizes that the company **must** change in response to market demand."**(L273A2)**

From the data in Table 4.13, "*can*" was the most frequently occurring modal verb noted 222 times in Corpus 1 and 176 in Corpus 2. It was followed by "will", which declined from 149 occurrences in Corpus 1 to 57 in Corpus 2. There was a similar tendency of frequency in both assignments for the verbs *"should"*, "*must*" and "*may*", which recorded 45, 38 and 46 respectively in Corpus 1 compared with 32, 36 and 28 occurrences in Corpus 2. The next marker in this category was "*could*", which appeared 16 times in the first assignment and 11 in the second. Interestingly, *"would"* and *"might"* increased in frequency in assignment 2; *"would"* occurred 4 times in assignment 1 and 5 times in assignment 2, while *"might"* occurred twice in the first assignment, and 6 times in the second. There was no record of "shall" appearing in either corpus.

The results gave a general picture of variation in conditional use in the students' assignments. Any conditionals uses were directly related to the students' intentions in making generic statements, also in arguing and in achieving politeness in their texts. Notably, the functional aspects of the conditionals might reflect a relevant writer and reader relationship, where the reader acknowledges the writer's conviction in his or her argument, in this case, the students' perspectives.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter presents the data gathered from qualitative and quantitative instruments designed for this research. Thus, preceding sections present detailed data obtained from interviews and corpora analysis applied in this study. Interviews were made to volunteer students and the course leader of MGT 5000 course of the MBA program at USQ; and the corpora analysis was done to two electronic corpora made up of the students writing productions.

Endeavours were made to enhance the reliability and validity of the qualitative interviews from the first stage of the research design to the final stage of data analysis. Efforts were also made to obtain the most reliable data from the quantitative corpora analysis process. However, partiality might still occur, because the researcher had to interpret the perspectives and thoughts of the

interviewees and relate them to her personal knowledge, understanding and experience. In addition, qualitative data were analysed accoring to multiple references of existing theories, so data interpretation was linked to theoretical preferences by the researcher (Cohen, et al., 2000; Mertler & Charles, 2005). The same partiality could be present in the corpora analysis, where rhetorical; discourse and pragmatic analysis were done to obtain the results of this study.

Though external factors such as culture and previous academic qualifications were recognised but not analysed in the data collected, the proposed results indicate that the obtained data are certainly valid for their envisaged constructs.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of discourse knowledge and writing skills in relation to academic writing in the Business Faculty in the MBA Program. Evidence of academic knowledge and academic writing skills are presented. In so doing, the views of seven L2 postgraduate Business students and their lecturer about the qualities of a good assignment was considered in relation to students' experiences, difficulties, worries, weaknesses, strengthens and learning as students were writing their assignments. Their collective perceptions clarified the relationship between disciplinary knowledge about their course, Management and Organisational Behaviour, and essential academic writing skills.

It was expected that exploring the link between disciplinary knowledge and academic writing would show that specific knowledge about disciplinary thought and communication processes was needed to succeed in specific courses. Communication processes in a discipline require different academic literacies, including writing using specific communicative conventions, and explicit discipline-specific terminology. Finding a link between disciplinary knowledge and academic skills is in line with the findings of other authors of disciplinary literacy and students' text production in a second language (Hyland, 1998, 2001a, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Leki, 2003; Lillis, 1997; Lillis & Tuner, 2001; Zeus, 2004; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b).

Since Leki and Carson's work in 1997 no studies of L2 writers have directly examined this articulation. Significant constituents of the study provide the gap between L2 postgraduate writers themselves and the writing skills, writing processes, writing strategies, and writing demands they have to use and develop in order to engage successfully in their academic community. Valuable insights into

the articulation between writing practices of students and writing demands of a disciplinary course are presented in the proposed *"Model for the L2 postgraduate writing process: a metadiscourse perspective''* in this study (Fig. 2.8). This model was employed to propose a second model in this study that could be considered in the L2 teaching-learning arena: *"A model: writing process of an L2 disciplinary text"* (Fig.5.2). This model involves learning and teaching principles that might be taken into consideration when constructing a disciplinary text in an L2 postgraduate context.

5.2. Processes and composing strategies used in L2 academic writing

The characteristics of a good assignment provided a useful focus for writing well within an academic discipline, Management and Organisational Behaviour (MGT5000) in this case. Analyses of the students' and lecturer's perceptions about characteristics of a good assignment writing indentified different aspects of the process or processes and academic strategies students experienced while writing their tasks. The first item in the questionnaire, "What makes a good assignment?" facilitated the interviewees' engagement with the research topic and research objectives. It also helped to establish an appropriate academic background and focus for exploration and discussion of the remaining items in the questionnaire.

5.2.1 Analysing assignments

There were eight main categories students referred as key elements in a good assignment. Among all of them, students especially highlighted the importance of writing an assignment that could be easily understood by the reader. Through their writing tasks students needed to show their understanding and acquired knowledge about theoretical concepts and applications. In addition, the students' previous knowledge was an important issue that helped some of them to accomplish their tasks (quotations (38) (60), and (62)). Categories related to these quotations in Table 4.1 were ranked lower in the first interview than in the second

interview due to the assignment objectives and contents, as well as the students' writing needs. Results ranking suggests that not only did students take responsibility for building up their content knowledge and understanding regarding the discipline, but they also explored how to successfully create writing that would be understood by their reader.

Students' found it easier to write the first assignment than the second, in part because of their own writing needs, as well as the difference in assignment content and objectives. Neither previous knowledge nor job experience was a crucial factor in the first assignment but they both were critical for the second assignment. It was therefore more difficult for the students to write the second assignment than the first one. In the first assignment, they had to apply theoretical perspectives from reading sources to a particular case study provided in their study material. In the second assignment, however, students not only required content knowledge to complete the task, but previous job experience to relate theory to practice in a real situation task (Quotations (3), (5), (8), (9), and (55)).

Students' responses indicate that one of the main challenges they faced while developing their tasks was in writing about a job experience they did not have. Students who did not have job experience to relate to the course content needed to go through extra activities or procedures to acquire the information needed to accomplish their tasks (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; M. Williams & Burden, 1997). Thus, the second assignment challenged students to incorporate their writing, not only their new and previous subject knowledge, but also knowledge from the workplace integrated with theoretical knowledge. Most of them identified the challenges of trying to balance simultaneously their writing skills and assignment demands, their language proficiency and academic knowledge, as the greatest difficult in completing their assignments (quotations (39) (46), (51), (54), and (55)).

Findings suggest that the second writing task was a particular challenge for some students, in terms of cognitive operations, knowledge of the world and language

skills. The student interviewees therefore faced different difficulties in achieving their academic tasks, depending on their individual background, knowledge, and abilities. Task requirements meant that students had to recognisethe input (information regarding the assignment question and any further reading to complete the assignment); make sense of the input to organise and structure their ideas; organise and process the information; transfer and generalise contents; and overcome any communicative difficulties and linguistic complexity to produce their assignments. Results indicate that students who lacked job experience found it difficult to complete the "real situation" task or "authentic learning" task set by the lecturer. The lack of job-related knowledge to help them apply MGT5000 theories in real situations could have affected both the students' writing and in consequence, the reader's comprehension. Specific analysis of this aspect of these students' assignments was not considered because that aspect was not the focus of this study. However, further studies could be done to investigate the students' writings about a real situation task in a business environment, taking account of their specific background and contexts.

Findings also show that reading skills are significant in the writing process and in creating a good assignment. They support the belief that reading qualifies students' writing by exposing the reader to target language writing, a finding rarely mentioned in the literature (Hirvela, 2004). Students not only applied reading strategies to explore assignment content, but also they said that while reading they could recognise and identify rhetorical and organisational patterns that characterised their academic field. Through the learning process, students adopted general academic conventions and specific discipline conventions (quotations (13), (71), and (73)). These findings support previous observations (Lillis, 1997, 2001; Zamel et al., 1998; Zhu, 2004b) that indicate students acquire and learn dominant conventions in higher education by applying their reading skills. The dominant conventions learnt through reading are applied later by students in their written academic texts. As in the literature cited, this study found that reading skills enabled students to explore, recognise and apply academic conventions and linguistic features is their writing.

Therefore, this study found that in addition to the significant link or co-dependence established between content knowledge and students' academic writing skill, there is also a clear association between students' needs and difficulties with the techniques associated with communicating that disciplinary knowledge, and applying the rhetorical language skills when writing an assignment (quotations (3), (10), (34), and (44)). The students' and lecturer's perceptions as to the attributes of a good assignment encapsulated the relationship between the importance of the academic writing as a disciplinary skill and the nature of writing, which was also discussed by Zhu (2004). While Zhu's findings refer to the faculty views on academic writing and writing instruction, this study provides analysis about practices and experiences of disciplinary knowledge and communication processes involved in producing academic texts in a particular business subject (MGT5000 in this case) from students and course lecturer views.

Students also highlighted the importance of presenting the writer's viewpoint clearly. They focussed on writing clearly, when expressing their point of view, analysing and discussing the contents to answer the assignment questions. (See quotations (18), (62), and (63)). In both interviews, students focussed on two main concerns. One was related to how important it was to write in a way that their reader could understand fully their arguments and analyses. The other concern was based on how important it was to present their analyses according to the assignment questions, as a means of showing understanding and comprehension of the tasks. (See quotations (10), (15), (17), and (18)).

Good selection of information sources and following the structure for writing were also mentioned by the teacher as key factors for good assignment writing in an academic discipline. The lecturer said, for instance, that a good assignment response should include appropriate identification of relevant quotes and sources as evidence of content understanding, combined with a good assignment structure. A synthesis of the students' and the lecturer's responses shows that the core qualities of a good assignments are based on: (1) good research, with

appropriately cited quotes and sources; (2) evidence of understanding key content, and (3) to clarity in addressing the assignment questions. These issues were mentioned in both interviews with the students, but emphasised a little more in the second interview. A comparison between the students' and the lecturer's responses showed that it was critical not only to understand the assignment questions but also to recognise the way in which students should answer those questions.

Results suggest that students attempted to satisfy their reader's expectations, taking account of the reader's essential role as audience for the writers' texts and intending meaning of those texts. They were aware that they had to demonstrate specific knowledge of a particular topic, and of the shared subject knowledge that existed between them and their reader. That students were writing for a known reader (their reader), suggests that the development of the students' texts and their structure were influenced by perceived audience expectations (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). In order to show what they had learnt and understood of the topic, and in a way their reader could properly understand what they were writing about, the students believed it was crucial to give evidence of their subject-related learning process, plus their critical thinking in applying theory in a particular business situation.

To sum up, the writing demands experienced by the students in this study were: (1) managing the complexity of the context in which they were embedded; (2) overcoming the difficulty of attempting to organise the L2 literacy subject to meet their literacy needs as L2 writers; and (3) continuing to develop their L2 performance and competence while they were writing. These core demands were the main categories proposed by both the students and the lecturer as requirements to be fulfilled in writing a good assignment (quotations (29), (30), (31), and (58)). In addition, the lecturer commented that a good assignment should show originality and sound analysis of reading sources to link theory and practice (quotations (59), (68), (75), and (76)).

Results indicate that there is a link between discipline knowledge and writing skills in a postgraduate production. In acknowledging this link, the study found that postgraduate students have to develop, improve and apply content knowledge and language knowledge (among other kinds of knowledge), in order to meet the academic demands that their discipline community requires. As explained before in this study, disciplinary knowledge and content knowledge refer to the previous and new knowledge students were required to have about different theoretical principles regarding the Management and Organisational Behaviour (MGT5000) class.

Regarding writing demands of a good assignment, students commented about their needs as L2 postgraduate writers. When commenting on the disciplinary thinking, the lecturer placed particular emphasis on the critical and analytical thinking skills that students needed to understand and demonstrate the link between theory and practice from different academic sources. It seems that some of the subject goals were achieved when students submitted their assignments to the lecturer. The lecturer's acknowledgment of the students' topic understanding suggests that the students applied their academic strategies and language skills successfully in their professional area. Consequently, by applying their academic writing process they were able to produce a text where they could provide clear evidence of growth and development as well as evidence of their reflective learning. The reflective learning gave the students the opportunity to set out their strengths (and weaknesses) as L2 users, as well as to demonstrating how much knowledge they had gained from the discipline learning process while constructing their assignments (Nunan, 2004).

Other responses from the lecturer and students regarding the knowledge that students needed about discipline-specific communication showed that students had to adopt different academic strategies to manage their challenges in academic text construction. They needed to recognise the relationship between academic reading and academic writing as processes in order to overcome different task activities. Students said that their academic skills helped them to acquire subject

knowledge, select specific information, understand the discipline topic, and answer the task questions, being careful to substantiate their viewpoint by citing appropriate references from the literature. They reported that all these activities increased their knowledge and skill in assignment writing (quotations (15), (20), (28), and (34)). The lecturer summarised this knowledge as that capacity that students needed to answer the assignment question properly, using relevant quotes and sources (quotations (23), (25), and (75)).

The students also expressed their concerns about their competence in English as a second language, particularly whether or not they were using English appropriately in their assignment writing. It appears that this made students hesitant about the assignment task requirements, and uncertain that their arguments, analyses and criticisms were written properly (quotations (43), (44), (49), (50), (52), and (53)). The results clearly indicate that students were able to identify not only what they needed to do in the target tasks, but also what they needed to do in order to learn more about the writing requirements for their academic field.

Thus, the students' reading skills provided certain elements to students that they used to accomplish their tasks. Elements included content information, disciplinary language, and academic expressions from written sources. These helped students to manage task difficulties in content knowledge given their L2 competence and L2 academic writing requirements.

5.2.2 Process or processes in L2 disciplinary writing

At this point, the discussion focusses on the process or processes (meaning plan of activities) the students went through to produce their assignments. To answer this research sub-question, students were asked what process or processes they applied, and what composing strategies they used in their writing tasks. The students explained that understanding the assignment question was a crucial stage in the process of producing their texts, sometimes requiring multiple readings of the assignment questions in order to understand them. Some of them also needed

to discuss their understanding of the questions with other students and/or with the teacher. The discussion with peers or with the teacher was either done in person (in and/or out of class) or participating actively on the electronic discussion board (quotations (10), (14), (15), (16), and (43).

Findings indicate that one of the requirements presented to the students both verbally and in writing by the teacher, was that they should check the electronic discussion board regularly. In general, the students and their lecturer confirmed that verbal and electronic discussions gave further information on assignments; they not only provided a record of the students' comments and enquires; but also captured the lecturer's replies regarding assignment objectives and guidelines on how to conduct a critical analysis on which to base their assignment (quotations (23), (24), (25), and (26)).

According to the research outcomes, students had two objectives in mind when they monitored the electronic discussion board before writing their assignments. The first objective was to obtain a full understanding of the lecture's requirements through the questions. According to the students, the lecturer's purposes were reflected in the assignment questions. Consequently, understanding the lecturer's purpose through the assignment questions could lead them to identify the purpose or purposes of their written tasks. The students' second aim was to be completely sure they had fully understood the instructions and questions for their assignment. This second aim was based on the students' hesitation about their L2 competence and the possible misunderstanding of the task questions, their meaning and goals. Indeed, feedback from both the lecturer and the students highlighted the importance of understanding the assignment questions before beginning to write the assignment (quotations (10), (14), (18), (29), and (68)).

The research showed that students needed to understand the purpose of their assessment task, as well as the task components both before and while completing the actual task. These results are similar to those found by Yasuda (2004) concerning students' need to have a full understanding of the various aspects of

the tasks they were asked to complete. Students in the USQ research were asked to understand, relate and apply theoretical contents in the MGT5000 arena according to their academic and professional expertise. While Yasuda (2004) pointed out how students struggled to differentiate "*discuss*" from "*consider*" as verbs of instruction in her study, students in this study had to follow more complex instructions such as: "*critically discuss", "discuss and explain your position",* "*argue*", and "*analyse*". Those skills were applied in a particular situation using relevant contents from literature according to the scenario or business situations they had to discuss in their assignments. Students then claimed they were not completely sure how to argue and discuss, or analyse and critically argue or discuss and criticise at the same time (quotations (43), (52), and (63)). At the end of the process, they came to realize that the differentiation of the instructions was crucial to fulfilling the communicative and rhetorical purposes of their academic tasks.

Results suggest that a lack of competence in writing was not only related to the lack of composing competence but also of the lack of linguistic competence students had to develop their tasks. Similar results have been mentioned by Rowe Kraples (1990) citing other authors. Students' lack of linguistic competence revealed why they found difficult to write proficiently and to use their second language appropriately when they needed to argue, analyse, criticise or critically discuss according to the assignments instructions.

Once they were able to understand the assignment questions, students' next steps were to identify and select the best sources to support their assignment writing (Table 4.2, category [b])). This category was ranked as high as category (a) in the same table (7 times and 6 times respectively in each interview). Students said that the appropriate selection of sources could provide them with valuable content to include in their texts. This process demanded that they research the topic widely not only to obtain enough information from different sources including study materials, but also to select the relevant literature to develop a critical analysis for discussion according to the assignment goals (quotations (6), (11), (15), (17), and

(18)). Results thus indicated that research involved a complex activity that enriched the students' knowledge about interpretative skills as a means to learning, analysing and criticising theoretical concepts and applications to real business contexts.

In the first assignment the students had to assume a critical position in response to three different business situations and to incorporate two relevant motivation theories. In the second assignment they had to adopt a critical position from a leadership perspective, in a context of organisational change, for a case study and two scenarios. Thus, the content of both assignments meant that students had to draw upon extensive readings to support their arguments, discussions and analysis. The research on content made up the third category in Table 4.2, category [c]: Research the topic well. Students had to research the assignment topic in order to extend their content knowledge and apply it later in their written assignments. This skill was equally recognised and valued in both assignments.

Designing a plan for the assignment was the fourth category that was highly valued by the students. The four students who had previously taken English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses indicated the importance of a design plan as part of their writing process. Although students had a clear idea of what to do in terms of the writing process, they had to face challenges when they needed to know how to write specifically for the Business discipline. These challenges were even higher for those students whose academic skills were inadequate, or who were not sure how to express their thinking in English, their second language, when they wanted to write clearly and coherently for their reader. Problems also arose when they needed to know how to maintain cohesion and coherence in their writing when expressing their arguments for example quotations (29), (30), (35), (37), (50), (51), and (77).

For students with previous knowledge in L2 writing, planning the task was another demand they had to meet. Results suggest that writing was easier for those students who followed some planning steps, transferring their writing experience

learnt previously in an EAP course to the new one. Students emphasised and valued the skills taught in the EAP course. This response contrast with findings by Hansen (2000), who found that her only participant placed more value on the skills she learnt on her own and in her content courses, than those learnt in a generic EAP course.

Students followed a series of steps in the writing process to reinforce and construct knowledge not only in terms of content but also in terms of how to write in their disciplinary field. In addition, results show that the processes students followed while writing their assignments helped them to improve their second language skills, for example English (quotations (6), (17), (29), and (34)). Findings also showed that in addition to the difficulty in designing a plan of activities to write the assignments, some students found it very difficult to express their critical viewpoint or to argue through a particular scenario. They indicated that it was hard for them to present their ideas and criticisms in a clear way and in appropriate academic and linguistic terms. Thus, the difficulties students faced become on challenges they had to undergo during their writing tasks.

Students placed significant value on the role of peers and the teacher, specifically, in the cooperative learning environment created through verbal and written discussions both in and out of class. Results showed that these discussions highly supported the writing process and facilitated individual students' writing in the discipline (quotations (14), (15), (16), (23), (26), and (32)). The value placed on these discussions indicates that interactive social-cognitive processes are fundamental to the production of academic texts. Ample interaction, as well as social and contextual factors, assists cognitive processes.

The constructive influence of peer–teacher discussions in the writing process to achieve disciplinary literacy in an L2 is a positive result obtained in this study, and one that has not been widely explored or highly recognised before in the literature (Hansen, 2000). In Hansen's study, there was no permanent communication between the student-writer and the EAP instructor. This led to a

low performance by the student. Hansen (2000) suggests that the instructor's apparent lack of awareness of student' difficulties to complete prevented the instructor from suggesting other options more suited to the student's needs and interests.

The next section focuses on the composing strategies students used when they were producing their assignments.

5.2.3 Composing strategies in L2 disciplinary writing

Interview data on composing strategies showed that content understanding and academic writing were the most relevant aspects students had to consider while writing their academic documents (See Table 4.3). These results are in line with the results obtained about the processes students operationalised to write their texts.

Students said that it was crucial to have a good understanding of the topic in their assignments (Table 4.3 category [a]: Need to understand the topic in order to read and write). Their understanding of the topic led them to read and write better about the topic itself. Students said it was more difficult to read and write about what they did not know than to do the task when they had previous knowledge about the topic they needed to deal with. They pointed out the importance of having a previous knowledge about the topic they had to study, analyse and discuss in order to succeed with their tasks. They pointed out that their previous content knowledge definitely had made easier for them to undertake the reading and writing processes through their academic practice (quotations (3), (4), (5), (8), (9), (30), (34), (77), (78), and (84)).

Students also reported that they analysed and selected the most appropriate information from available sources by applying appropriate reading skills, (category [c] in Table 4.3). These strategies allowed them to demonstrate their content knowledge according to the proposed task questions. They applied their reading skills to acquire academic and technical vocabulary as well as key terms from the literature, to use later in their written papers (category [d] in Table 4.3).

Students thus strengthened their strategic competence through these strategies, and by modelling their disciplinary writing on examples from specialised people in their discipline, i.e. observed in their literature reviews (Bachman, 1990, 2000). The strategy reading with a particular purpose was equally ranked in both interviews. Its high rank, in both interviews, indicated how students built up their writing skill when they applied cognitive strategies, which led them to store, transform and use purposely the previous and new knowledge for their task completion (Matlin, 2002) (quotations (1), (6), (7), (13), (14), (28), and (71)).

Reading purposely to write is a cognitive strategy that is evident in this study, and one that was also found in a study by Riazi (1997). Students progressed by using reading activities like note taking, writing down the task outlines, identifying and choosing appropriate discipline formats and assessing their own progress at different stages of their progress. Interestingly, both Riazi's (1997) study and this one, highlight the importance of employing reading skills as an academic strategy to acquiring knowledge of the discipline content and to identify the rhetorical aspects of their discipline. One difference between the studies is that students in this study also mentioned that their reading skill helped them to identify the most appropriate and useful ways of approaching their potential readers when they had to write about a particular topic in their field (quotations (12), (27), and (60)). This aspect was not mentioned in the Riazi's study.

Realisation by students in this study that previous academic writing training was helpful highlighted the importance of having a designed plan and a particular assignment structure to advance their writing process (Categories [e] and [f] in Table 4.3). Those students who opted to make a plan prior to beginning writing were ones who had previously taken a UNIPREP course at the university (USQ). The UNIPREP course was taken immediately before students started their postgraduate program, including the Business course on which this research is based. By designing a plan for the structure and content of their assignment including links within and between paragraphs, students demonstrated the

linguistic and rhetorical skills they had learnt in EAP courses and their transferability to a range of academic contexts.

In this study, for instance, the transfer of academic skills occurred during the students' completion of their written assignments for their business course. Data clearly indicated that students who had previously taken EAP courses, applied their previous knowledge of academic literacies to solve the academic tasks they were required to perform (quotations (10), (29), (34), and (77)). The study clarifies researchers' concerns as to whether or not students transfer skills learnt in EAP contexts, to their subsequent academic contexts (Hansen, 2000; Riazi, 1997; Swales, 1990). Findings of this study add to knowledge on second language with further research required on this issue of preparation all levels of L2 writers' education.

Bachman (1990) also verified that students applied communication strategies purposely when completing their writing tasks, mindful that it was crucial to communicate their meaning effectively. In this study, students were required to apply their best linguistic knowledge to succeed in doing their tasks. The students' concerns about how to link their ideas and paragraphs correctly were also an evidence of the communication strategies students used in order to achieve their writing tasks (Celce-Murcia & Elite, 2000; Ellis, 1994; Usó-Juan, et al., 2006). These concerns were highly ranked in the second assignment where students had to focus more on adopting a theoretical viewpoint ahead of drawing upon their professional and work experience (quotations (3), (6), (9), and (54)).

With reference to the students' linguistic competence and the associated composing strategies they adopted (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Ellis, 1994; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006b, 2006c), three students out of seven in the second assignment and one out seven in the first assignment indicated that they used the computer as a tool to check and qualify their writing. That is, students said that the computer assisted them when they needed to check or verify vocabulary, correct spelling of the words to be used in

their texts or to correct their sentence constructions. Students thought that applying this strategy could help them to express their thoughts more accurately. Also they thought that this strategy could help them to construct discourse in appropriate and accurate ways as L2 users. A further study regarding the computer use may be addressed to recognise if the students identified or perceived any limitations on the functions of the computer to assist with composition and appropriate word choice. Finally, only one student in both interviews said that to start again and do further research if the information was not enough to produce a successful assignment was a strategy that she had implemented in order to write down the academic tasks.

Students sought to understand how other academic writers expressed their content understanding, how they shaped their arguments to inform and/or persuade their reader, and how they used particular rhetorical devices to express their arguments through their writing. They made assumptions about their reader's processing abilities, contextual resources, and intertextual experiences to produce their written texts. In this study, one of the main strategies students applied was to first ensure they understood the assignment questions, and then to directly address those questions, thus enabling them to meet the reader's expectations. Students thus valued the disciplinary knowledge and community-specific rhetorical devices that should be included in their discussions and final papers to create the potential negotiation of disciplinary meanings between them as writers and their reader. Quotations (10), (27), (38), (39), (44), (60), (62), (63), and (64) are evidence of the students' awareness of their audience in their papers. The text-based interaction between writer and reader involved complex writing and performance demands that had to be satisfied by the reader in order for meaningful exchanges to occur, one of the main focus issues for the students.

Disciplinary interactions and metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing have been studied principally by Hyland (1998, 1999c, 2001a, 2001b, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d, 2002e, 2002f, 2003, 2004b, 2005b), Hyland & Tse (2004a) and Tardy (2005). These studies found that postgraduate students used rhetorical devices which

allowed them to be accepted into or recognised in their disciplinary community. This study also presented academic strategies that students used to become writers in their particular discipline, which is business. These strategies may be viewed as a complement to those identified by Hyland and support Hyland's claim regarding teaching practices, where teachers have to be aware of how the academic and disciplinary conventions challenge students, and how students, as novice writers, struggle for understanding while they trying to master the rhetorical and discursive conventions in their disciplines. Findings in this study demonstrated that not only having the content knowledge but writing properly in the discipline gives students the opportunity of gaining control over their writing and enabling them to meet the challenges of participating actively as members of their discipline community.

L2 writing challenges that students in this study faced in writing their assignments were reduced by the lecturer's assistance and support. Results showed that there were teaching practices that helped students with their written tasks. These practices included: (a) a clear presentation of the assignment criteria for each assignments (quotation (22)); (b) a sequence of comments and information on the discussion board about how to write the assignments (quotations (23), (24), (26), (31), and (76)); (c) lecturer's recommendations about specific sources where a link between theory and practice was presented (quotations (25) and (26); (d) written feedback (quotation (32)); and (e) explanations about how the task questions could be answered considering the array of possibilities for applying content knowledge in practice, depending on different internal and external business circumstances (quotations (68), (69), (75), and (76)). The lecturer's ongoing guidance to students through the course was reflected in the academic strategies they applied in their writing process, as well as in the ranking students gave to each category of composing strategies.

Both the lecturer and the students indicated that the composing strategies students applied were related to: how to apply literacy skills successfully, how to acquire and extend content knowledge in their discipline, how to produce texts to be well

understood by their reader, and how to express their thoughts academically, following a correct assignment structure. In addition, the lecturer highlighted the importance of students' participation in discussions throughout the course, as well as their adherence to assignment recommendations and incorporation of key points explained through course material and classes. The students and the lecturer concurred that by following the recommendations on how to write a good assignment, as well as by analysing written feedback provided by the lecturer after the first assignment students had useful, potential strategies to apply to their second assignment writing task.

In conclusion, like previous studies on academic writing (Berkenkotter, et al., 1991; Connor & Mayberry, 1996; Hyland, 1999c, 2002a, 2003, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Leki, 2003; Lillis, 1997, 2001; Riazi, 1997; Tardy, 2005; Yasuda, 2004; Zamel, 1998b; Zamel, et al., 1998; Zhu, 2004a, 2004b), this study identified constructive changes in the L2 postgraduate writers' academic literacy tasks over time (quotations (73), (74), and (79)). This notion of developmental change was also identified by Tardy (2005), who observed that at graduate level, writers not only go through a complex process of knowledge-transforming in their discipline, but also they gradually develop a rhetorical understanding of disciplinary texts. This thesis research indicates that the writing processes and academic strategies followed by students were crucial when students wanted to develop a better understanding of academic writing within their disciplinary settings.

At high levels of education, students' literacy goes beyond being simply a skill of reading and writing on a particular topic. In this study, for instance, students said that they needed to know how to learn about their new academic knowledge, how to interact with it, and how to construct knowledge of their disciplinary communities and content. Thus, they had to recognise, learn and develop academic strategies that at this level of literacy could enable them to become active members of their field. It was not only the rhetorical understanding mentioned by Tardy (2005), but also the writing process or processes and academic strategies students followed that allowed them to express their content

knowledge as well as to engage their readers in a rhetorical act of persuasion about their work's value, meaning, and credibility.

The preceding explanation of the process and strategies applied by L2 postgraduate students in their writing offers new insights to add to the literature regarding L2 writers' acquisition of communicative competence. More specifically, this research study adds further insight into L2 postgraduate writers' acquisition of writing skills, as well as their acquisition of communicative competence which underlies writing activity.

The study also adds to second language acquisition (SLA) theory, in relation to L2 models of teaching and learning writing. On this issue, Carson (2001) states that SLA theory should develop a perspective of acquisition on models of teaching and learning that has not been adequately incorporated in the literature. The study adds to theory on acquisition of communicative competence and provides explanatory theory that accounts for the ways in which L2 writers, readers, texts and contexts interact, the ways in which these factors may be defined and expressed, and also ways in which they differ.

To address Carson's (2001) concerns about lack of research in L2 writing, this study proposes a model for the L2 postgraduate writing process from a metadiscourse perspective (Chapter 2) and a model of an academic writing process for producing an L2 disciplinary text (Fig. 5.2). The former model is derived from the literature review for this research, and the second model has evolved from the analyses of data from this study. Both models indicate how a disciplinary text could reflect the interaction between writer and reader, as well as how the link between disciplinary knowledge and academic skills interact in a written composition. The proposed models define the context, linguistic, motivational and cognitive factors that are part of an academic writing production and may be applied in further SLA theory regarding L2 models of teaching and learning writing.

The next section discusses students' difficulties, worries, needs and writing concerns in relation to the composing strategies they employed for their assignment writing (See Tables 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6.)

5.2.3.1 Difficulties or worries for L2 students in a writing process

For this discussion, and in line with behaviourist perspectives, the term "difficulty", is considered to comprise two elements, "difference" and "difficulty", identified as "difference = difficulty" (Ellis, 1994). Discussion about difficulties for L2 students refers to those elements of the second language that were different from the students' native language and, in consequence, more difficult for them to work with (Ellis, 1994). Discussion about writing difficulties shows that writing as a skill involves demanding tasks that call upon various abilities as well as upon more general metacognitive abilities for any language user. Writing is then presented as a challenging and difficult skill for both native and non-native speakers (Kroll, 1990; Schoonen et al., 2003).

The concept "*need*" is presented as the complex term that covers many aspects. It involves what learners know, do not know, or want to know, which can be studied and analysed in different ways (Hyland, 2003). This study has defined the learner's needs in terms of target needs and learning needs. The former refer to "what the learner needs to do in the target situation," and the latter refer to "what the learner needs to do in order to learn". Target needs were then categorised as necessities, lacks and wants (Frodesen, 1995, p. 335). (See Chapter 2.)

Being aware of the difference between difficulties and needs in the writing process is important at this point of the discussion because both terms will be used together but each will refer to particular meanings. One will be used to refer to the difficulties students faced while writing and the other will be used to refer to the needs, lacks and wants students experienced during the writing process. Students needed to know about forms of communication and the linguistic features associated with these forms in the target situation. Their needs also showed the gap between what the students already knew and what they needed to know in

order to produce a final paper. Finally, the students' needs arose when their thoughts about their writing tasks have been different from the teacher's assessment, so the students' writing did not fulfil the teacher's expectations (Frodesen, 1995).

There were two main areas of difficulty for the L2 students: L2 proficiency and L2 competence, plus other areas related to the complexity of the academic tasks students had to perform. The main difficulty related to lack of or low L2 proficiency. This concern was mentioned by all students in both interviews, as evidenced in their interview reflections about their L2 proficiency (quotations (14), (34), (35)(37), (40)(44), (51), (82), and (86). Along with the students' recognition of the task context, they recognised that their L2 use was crucial for achieving their communicative and academic goals. Students focussed on the need for L2 competence to negotiate meaning through writing for their reader. Indeed, previous research on academic writing has also shown students' L2 competence enabled the interaction between the writer and reader in an academic context (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Riazi, 1997; Thompson, 2001).

Responses from the USQ students suggested that the students' awareness of their lack of L2 proficiency led them to express their next worry, which was to consider their reader's potential understanding of the texts they were producing. Students identified their low L2 competence as a linguistic barrier, which led them to be misunderstood by their reader. They mentioned that success or failure of the intended interaction and negotiation of meaning with their reader relied on the way they expressed themselves through their written productions (quotations (38), (39), (44), (60), (62), and (63)).

Perceptions of difficulties experienced by L2 postgraduate writers were also studied by Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006). Students' reflections about their L2 proficiency, and lecturer concerns about how to understand the students' writing because of their lack of L2 proficiency are common to both Bitchener and Basturkmen's (2006)study and to this one. In both studies, readers and students

mentioned the topic of inadequate proficiency in L2 as the main probable block to them writing well. Students as writers found difficulty in keeping both their own writing and their reader's needs in mind. They needed to write texts that had to be well understood by their reader. The lecturer found that at times students' written ideas lacked substance and there was a lack of clear articulation to show how ideas were linked. In addition, thoughts were sometimes not clearly expressed and statements were not fully developed. Consequently, the lecturer, as reader, sometimes found it difficult to understand the students' writing.

Students also mentioned that during the writing process they sometimes found themselves translating their thoughts from L1 to L2 (quotations (40)-(42)). They also reflected that when this happened, their L2 competence helped them to recognise, correct and rewrite the ideas they wanted to express. That is, students' awareness of the differences between L1 and L2 writing requirements helped them to develop and practise their L2 writing in their tasks. This means that the students relied heavily on their L2 competence and L2 performance, their L2 communicative competence to achieve their academic tasks and to fulfil the complexity of the tasks successfully.

Results indicated that in some cases, when students had a previous academic background in business, they retrieved information more easily on topics relevant to the assignment content. They translated the information while composing their assignments, but the translation process did not benefit their writing. Rather, they found their translation activity resulted in texts that were confusing and difficult to understand, that exceeded the assignment word limit, and were not well written in English. Analyses revealed that students' L2 communicative competence was the main means for students to correct their writing when they were became aware of the possible language and communicative mistakes they were making.

During the interview process, the lecturer echoed the students' perceptions about their levels of L2 competences (quotations (33), (56), (57), and (59)). She indicated that the students' low L2 proficiency could have been the reason that

made them unable to communicate clearly. It was easier for the lecturer to address the problems or difficulties that students faced in relation to discipline content, specific genre or assignment development. To do so, the lecturer said that she presented additional sources and material along with content teaching that could help students decide what to include in their assignments. The lecturer affirmed that it was more difficult for her to resolve students' difficulties associated with their linguistic proficiency, than those related to the specific genre. Students' difficulties with expressing and linking ideas properly may be as much as a cognitive issue as a linguistic one. Indeed, the lecturer stated that worries or difficulties of this kind could arise whether students were from a non-English speaking background or not (quotations (58) and (59)). In front of the students' difficulties regarding their L2 competence, the lecturer stated that she focussed her role as reader on the discipline content of the assignments rather than on the L2 students' performance.

Students' also mentioned their concern about being able to answer the assignment questions correctly, because of the limits of their L2 performance. This worry was a key concern in both interviews. Concern arose because students could not fully comprehend the assignment questions because of their low confidence in their L2 competence (quotations (14)(16)). Academic strategies such as peer and/or teacher discussions assisted students to clarify the task questions they had to answer.

These results are consistent with theoretical principles postulated by Carson (2001), related to processes and understanding of second language acquisition (SLA). Carson (2001) recognised that social and cognitive factors played a major role in second language acquisition, mediated by learner attitudes. Findings indicate that students' attitudes and motivation were essential for them to function effectively in their second language and to acknowledge the particular role that their second language played in accomplishing their tasks, and ultimately, in developing their L2 skills to succeed at their assignment writing. Lack of understanding of the tasks requirements, hesitation in the use of rhetorical forms,

and concern about possible L2 misuse had a significant influence on the students' writing performance.

Along with the difficulty students had in answering the assignment questions properly, there were two other worries, highlighted in both interviews. Students pointed out their lack of previous writing experience in an L2 academic context; and their worry at exceeding the assignment word limit. Some students explained that they had no previous experience of having to use the correct language for the assignments, as well as having to apply the appropriate discipline formats and conventions to suit particular content, audience and purpose. These issues, led students to write their texts considering at the same time aspects such as: (a) their L1 influence in their final papers, (b) proper selection and development of the content information to answer correctly the assignment questions, (c) the L2 proper use considering word limit in their production, and (d) their reader's comprehension of their texts.

Students who had insufficient knowledge of the subject had more difficulties with writing tasks than those who knew the subject area well. In this study where writer and reader shared the same academic field, the students' main concerns lay with understanding the purpose of the writing and having adequate content knowledge of to complete their assignments. Audience, though, recognised as a specialist did not affect the students' production. These findings add to those presented by Hansen's (2000), who recorded the struggles a writer faced when choosing to avoid using discourse conventions that her reader might not understand by focusing on grammatical and rhetorical devices with which the reader was familiar with. This study is similar to Hansen's in that it identifies the conflicts novice writers face with audience, purposes and content knowledge when they are acquiring academic literacy. However, this study also found that writers' conflicts are reduced if both writer and reader belong to the same discipline community.

In general, it appears that the students' difficulties or worries were based on the task complexity they had to overcome to fulfil the task aims. At the same time, students' performances and learning were basically influenced by the task complexity (Robinson, 2001). In this study, task complexity in L2 writing meant that students had to acquire and apply multiple skills to demonstrate their mastery over contextualised content knowledge. Consequently, the main difficulties and worries arose when students needed to demonstrate appropriate use of discipline formats and conventions in their writing. That is, they had to keep a specific rhetorical presentation to develop their thoughts and ideas as well as demonstrating mastery in their second language (Kroll, 1990).

In summary, postgraduate students experienced difficulties when they approached their academic assignments without a clear notion of academic writing constructors; that is, what to write about and how to do it (Hyland, 2002c; Leki, 2003; Lillis, 1997). Their academic writing thus became a learning activity that helped them to express their knowledge in a discourse of the discipline properly and gradually (Hyland, 2003; Lillis, 1997). Difficulties were demonstrated that affected coherent writing in the discipline.

5.2.3.2 Composing difficulties in the L2 writing process

Students' main composition difficulties were related to their L2 communicative competence and to the purpose, content and text structure of the written tasks (quotations (10), (14), (19), (34), (61), and (63)). Findings suggest students' concerns about their lack of or low proficiency in L2 brought other issues that made it difficult for them to write. These were issues relating to reading skills, expressing opinions, previous writing knowledge, writing to facilitate the reader's comprehension of the text, translating from L1 to L2, writing following an assignment structure, exceeding the number of words required in the text, recognising the reader as a member of a disciplinary community, and some more (quotations (19), (34), (38), (42), (44), (46), (50), and (64)).

Students said that they experienced difficulty in matching the assignment structure with its content (quotations (37), (49), and (51)), and in expressing themselves clearly through their writing. As a result, students sometimes opted to translate their thoughts from L1 to L2 (quotations (40) and (41)). Other difficulties were associated with: lack of previous academic writing experience (quotations (55) and (84)); lack of expertise in analysing, discussing or criticising an issue in the assignment (quotation (52)); as well as not knowing how to integrate their own viewpoint and job experience with theory to answer the assignment task (category [h] in Table 4.5; quotations (3), (5), (9), and (55)).

Results indicate that both the students and their lecturer both identified similar issues. The lecturer highlighted the fact that students were sometimes unable to develop arguments and adequately demonstrate their understanding of the assignment topic. She also pointed out that students experienced difficulty with analysis and integration of theory and practice. In general, the lecturer observed that the students' lack of previous writing experience in the field led them to experience difficulties in identifying relevant literature to support their thoughts, and in composing their assignments. She noted that the students' lack of English language knowledge was one of the main causes of their difficulties in producing their texts (quotations [31], [33], [56], [57], and [87]).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings confirm empirically what theory states related to language deficiency. If a language user has not been trained sufficiently the needed language skills are not available to apply to a particular task (Moerk, 2000b). In this case, the perceived deficiency is principally task-related and not language user-related. The students' language deficiency in this study may be consequently interpreted as a cognitive deficiency, where their L2 skills certainly could have affected the comprehension of the assignment questions as well as their L2 writing production. Students' perceptions presented through this chapter regarding their L2 competence are evidence of this statement. As a consequence, lack of fluent language skills made it more difficult for the students to productively express certain complex trains of thought, to focus on

language form as well as content, to learn, understand and work with large sets of information and resources from their disciplinary field.

According to the results, language skills should be seen as crucial tools, well mastered or not, that fit a specific task. For this study, the incorporation of discipline input, the students' L2 competence, and the task relevance of acquired skills had to coincide so that students could achieve their intended task results. In this context, language is considered to be a tool for comprehension and is acquired with degrees of fluency and competent academic processing. This finding has been overlooked in literature regarding L2 postgraduate writers acquiring disciplinary literacy (Hansen, 2000).

From a metadiscoursal perspective the students' language competence made it difficult for them to engage their audience. Given that students as writers have to use functional, rhetorical and discursive elements to express their arguments, represent themselves and engage their reader through the texts (Hyland, 1998, 1999a, 2001a, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a), students, in this academic context, found it difficult to use appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic resources to build up the text they were producing. It can be said that beyond competent use of the students' second language, the writing process allowed students to discover and understand rhetorical, discursive and functional features, which are directly involved in and linked with social aspects of their discipline community.

A close association between the students' written assignments existed between content and the context in which they occurred. Students sought not only to present themselves as writers in a discipline but also to engage their reader through arguments and negotiation of meanings, according to academic models they had identified through their course materials. In general, analysis showed that when students tried to put all these factors together into the writing process their worries and difficulties arose. In turn, these were solved through the same writing process by applying academic processes and study strategies that could help them to fulfil their academic aims and achieve a final written production. In the end,

students overcame apprehension about their L2 communicative competence when they worked out how to focus more on proper discipline content and its accurate development, and to reduce their fears associated with producing a text in English. Their priority was to demonstrate to their reader that they had understood the course content, its theories and further professional applications, rather than in showing their L2 proficiency to a reader whose principal aim was to determine their understanding of content in their discipline (quotations (10), (12), (28), (39), (60), and (64)).

Research findings also showed the positive result of the teacher's assistance to the students to assist with their disciplinary writing practices. Thus, results showed that the students' need to understand the whole process of working on a piece of discipline writing was in part satisfied by the lecturer's guidance during the writing process. The lecturer opted to assist the students to successfully accomplish their tasks by giving adequate time on the written task, presenting further material and sources along with content teaching to the students, and promoting oral and written discussion about the assignment tasks (quotations (7), (16), (25), (26), (31), (32), (75), and (76)).

From a pedagogical view, the students' performance at the level of L2 competence and rhetorical usage was not prioritised by the lecturer for three reasons: (1) the course size, the class was big; (2) the teaching and assessment demands (both the lecturer and the students had a heavy work load throughout the semester.); and (3) the different student profiles. The lecturer had to be aware of and assist students with different discipline and cultural backgrounds, different academic experiences, different first languages, plus the associated diversity in writing and learning background and experience. She focussed her feedback mainly on the content of the course rather than on aspects related to second language usage. However the lecturer did assist students by giving them general feedback on L2 usage with their assignments in order for students to consider it in their next written assignment.

These results shed light on the active role of the teacher in helping students to explore and learn more about academic and discipline-specific writing. This type of teaching role has been identified by Hyland (2004b). However, more studies are needed about the roles of teachers within specific disciplines, and their teaching-learning assistance to L2 postgraduate novice-writers acquiring literacy expertise in their discipline.

5.2.3.3 Students' writing considerations about their reader

With reference to the difficulties or worries and composing difficulties students experienced while writing their assignments, there were also some concerns regarding the reader of their assignments. There were two main aspects students' prioritised when they considering their reader.

One concern was related to the reader's understanding of their texts, while the other was related to how they could demonstrate to their reader their understanding on the topic they were learning and discussing through their texts. These two categories received the highest ranking in the second assignment. It is important to note that in their interview responses, both the students and their lecturer emphasised the importance of students demonstrating a good understanding of the theoretical knowledge gained during their course when they wrote their assignments. Therefore, one of the main objectives students had to fulfil in their assignments was to demonstrate their content knowledge, and to apply it in a particular professional scenario. The students' concerns, motivated them to explore the most suitable strategies to express their ideas and thoughts in a way their reader might understand what they were trying to express, discuss, analyse, argue or state (quotations (38), (44), (60), (62), and (63)).

In addition to the concerns expressed above, students were also struggling to find the most appropriate language and content for their assignments. Their concerns surfaced when they were aware of their reader as an academic and professional expert as well as an evaluator of their writing productions (quotations (61), (64), and (70)). Though recognising the reader as an expert, this was not a major

consideration for students. It is necessary, however, to point out that students gave more significance to the content and how to present their content knowledge in their papers than how to use language properly in their writing tasks.

These findings confirm those presented by other researchers (Hansen, 2000; Leki, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki & Carson, 1994; Riazi, 1997) regarding how students write differently according to their audience. Results suggest that in the writing tasks students placed emphasis on content by considering their reader as an expert, as a member of discipline-specific audience. In other studies, researchers have found that in a writing department or ESL department students typically emphasised linguistic and rhetorical forms rather than content ((Hansen, 2000; Leki & Carson, 1997). This implies that, as in previous studies, students in this study focussed on content.

To accomplish their writing goals for their academic reader, students focussed on: (a) the content they had to work with for the tasks, (b) the differences between writing in L1 and L2; and (c) writing in a way their reader could clearly understand what they were writing about. According to the students' interview findings, when students thought about the influence of the reader in their papers, they had to make changes. They checked aspects such as technical vocabulary usage and content relevance in their texts related to study sources: they also paid attention to possible interference of their first language in their L2 writing and their L2 accuracy in writing (quotations (11), (13), (17), (30), (40), (44), and (64)). All of these aspects were crucial for the students in their aim to be well understood by their reader.

Some students also opted for a previous review of their texts by an L2 user before submitting their tasks to their final reader. The confidence about the assignment accomplishment of those students who applied this strategy demonstrated higher levels of confidence in their assignment writing compared with those who did not have their assignments reviewed before submitting them to their lecturer. It is worthwhile noting that the students, who opted to have their assignments proof-

read before submitting them, were those who had undertaken the UNIPREP course before starting their postgraduate program. As previously stated on the subject of transferability of linguistic and rhetorical skills in academic contexts, the students' previous academic training may have afforded them higher literacy skills enabling them to perform academic writing tasks more easily and successfully.

In summary, students highlighted the role of writing as an important communication tool for business both in the real world academic context. Consequently, they considered that applying content information to real situations and expressing their viewpoints clearly way were two critical aspects that could influence their academic writing when they thought about their intended reader.

To conclude, results obtained about academic processes, academic strategies and the L2 writing difficulties that students needed to overcome clearly showed a relationship between the discipline-specific knowledge they required and the L2 skills they had to apply in an academic context to successfully achieve their academic tasks. This relationship is integral to the main research question of this study. Thus, it may be said that the processes and strategies students opt to apply in their academic context are led by their previous and new content knowledge as well as by the language and the ability of negotiating meaning in their academic writing. Results also suggest that the processes and strategies students applied in their writing were also related to the difficulties or worries they faced in a particular written task in their discipline area. Findings indicate that these aspects are relevant and related to the L2 academic writing process.

The following section addresses discussion of data related to the students learning process while they wrote their assignments (See Table 4.7, Table 4.8 and Table 4.9).

5.3 Enhancing learning

As stated before in this chapter, data from the students' and teacher's interviews are linked and grouped and address the second research sub-question of this study. It is:

2. *What do the participants in the study think they learn while writing their assignment texts?*

The most significant results indicated that students felt that they learnt and knew more about academic writing as they went through the writing experience itself (category [a] in Table 4.7). That is, writing the assignments allowed students to learn more about how to write in their academic discipline. This perception was highly ranked in the first interview and was mentioned by all the students in the second interview. It may be said that instead of the difficulties students faced while writing their assignments, they found their tasks to be a challenging process that could allow them to learn and know more not only about their discipline content but about correct L2 academic writing. Thus, the challenge of their writing tasks may have motivated them to acquire more academic knowledge, and knowledge in writing by applying skills that could help them to achieve their academic goals and performance outcomes.

These results provide positive evidence of what researchers have found about task difficulties and students' learning when they aim for successful task completion. Researchers have found that tasks of appropriate difficulty are likely to be more motivating for learners as they feel that they are being asked to respond to reasonable challenges (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Skehan, 1998; M. Williams & Burden, 1997a, 1997b). The difficulty of a task goal may depend on whether the goal represents a learning or performance outcome, which is related to what knowledge and skills learners seek to acquire (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). Though not measured, these study findings indicate that there is evidence of learning as a result of writing (quotations (71), (72), (73), and (74)). Similar

results were obtained by Riazi (1997) when exploring how L2 post-graduate students acquired domain-specific literacy in their academic discipline.

As well as acquiring domain-specific knowledge, there is evidence of other types of learning associated with the writing process. Students indicated that they had gained knowledge of their discipline community (discourse conventions, audience, and relevant content in their field) as well as knowledge of discipline content and genres. Regarding academic skills, students said that their reading process led to them improving their writing process as well. Results also indicate that students felt that by applying their academic skills, they had improved or developed more their L2 language knowledge and their research skills. As discussed previously in this chapter, results clearly indicate that the reading-writing relationships in academic settings are engaged in composing activities where the use of sources provides a significant opportunity for students to accomplish their academic tasks successfully.

Results demonstrate two of the core principles stated by Hirvela (2004) in models of reading-writing pedagogy. One principle is reflected in how students indicated that both reading and writings skills were acts of composing and of meaning making. The second principle is in evidence when students stated that both their reading and writing skills supported each other when they needed to perform their reading-writing tasks. That is, they used reading to create an acquisition-rich environment for writing development and used writing to provide a way in to reading and reading development. Students thus indicated that their academic skills allowed them to achieve more content knowledge and L2 knowledge throughout their academic tasks, and these were reflected in their completed written assignments.

Students also considered the lecturer’s comments and feedback, mainly from the content of their assignments, to be a strong support in improving their L2 writing. One student however explained that feedback did not include his own possible misunderstandings. This study found that the teacher’s feedback was critically

important in helping to improve the students' writing performance as well as to facilitate learning in their disciplinary writing. Further research however, is required to explore the importance of the teachers' role in giving the students feedback about their writing, in terms of how students learn writing while accomplishing their written tasks.
There are different attributes that writers bring to the writing in the learning process. The attributes include contextual factors, linguistic features, motivational factors, and cognitive factors. These are consolidated in a model for the L2 postgraduate writing process from a metadiscourse perspective. Writers' motivation affect learning in important ways when they are brought into their writing practice their individual characteristics, personalities, attributions and perceptions of themselves. Both students and lecturer drew upon the students' existing academic skills, their previous content knowledge and their L2 competence as major strengths or weaknesses affecting their academic writing process. Results indicated that the students' strengths and weaknesses were precisely the attributes that led guided them in their writing development. That is, the students' strengths or weaknesses led them to apply skills and strategies and undergo specific processes in order to make sense of their disciplinary writing.

For half of the student-participants, it was useful to have previous knowledge about assignment planning and writing. This knowledge was developed through previous training in academic environments, which proved to be valuable experience when they wanted to complete their Business course assignment. A smaller number of participants indicated that their strengths were based either on their knowledge of how to gather appropriate reference material, that is "exploring academic sources", or on previous knowledge they had on the subject content, or even in the knowledge they had of the discipline discourse.

With regard to individual students' characteristics, the lecturer indicated that students brought cultural aspects to their writing practice which enriched their assignment writing. Applying content knowledge in different contexts and cultures made the students' academic writing more interesting and valuable to the

lecturer, but the students did not seem to be aware of the significant elements that they were including in their texts (quotations (80) and (81))

Most of the students pointed out that their main weakness was lack of writing experience in Business (quotations (84) and (86)). Aspects related to the students' low competence and performance in their second language were mentioned by students and the teacher as the main weaknesses that might have affected their writing (quotations (58), (59), (82), (83), (85), and (87)). These identified weaknesses led students to face difficulties when they wanted to better achieve a clear understanding of theoretical concepts, to develop their ideas and to apply theoretical concepts to real discipline contexts. According to the lecturer one of the main students' weaknesses was related to the low level of critical analysis students presented in their texts when they tried to develop their arguments.

In brief, results in this research suggest that diverse prior educational practices as well as new learning, cultural and linguistic aspects of language influenced the adaptive abilities of the students in response to the new educational practices. Next discoursed features of writing are considered.

5.4 Students' use of discourse features in academic writing

A textual analysis of two electronic corpora of students' productions was completed to answer these sub-questions:

3. *How do NNPS perceive and engage with their disciplines through deployment of interpersonal features of their texts?*
4. *What linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features are recognised in the NNPS' writing?*

Text analysis identified social and functional discourse orientations in students' writing. It also indicated students' ability to deploy discipline specific discursive, rhetorical and linguistic conventions for their particular discourse community, in this case one lecturer.

Discourse markers were studied for propositional meaning and discourse function (Risselada & Spooren, 1998). Analysis of discourse markers showed the most visible expressions of student voice presence in the texts as well as expressions they used to engage their reader. Analysis of data also showed how students aimed to gain the reader's attention and how they projected their attitude into their discourse. Students deployed cohesive and interpersonal features: (a) to organise their texts according to the particular discourse and content; (b) to create a social interaction with their reader; and (c) to project themselves into their discourse. Findings showed that cohesive and interpersonal features indicated students' attitudes towards both content and their reader. Analyses of the discursive markers selected for this study suggest that students found it relevant to use linguistic features appropriately in order to express themselves clearly and to link ideas and paragraphs correctly when developing the content of their assignments.

The textual and interpersonal functions together with linguistic and rhetorical features indicated that students' used the discursive markers intentionally. Such use consolidated the metadiscourse aspect of their academic writing (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990; Hyland, 1998, 1999b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). Findings related to pronouns, connective adjuncts and modal verbs selected for this study clarified the students' communicative intention and attitude towards both content and audience (Table 4.10). Discussion of these grammar categories based on data from previous chapter is presented below.

5.4.1 Presence and identity in academic writing

Pronoun markers are linked to writer identity, writer authority, and to writer territory, and the writer's interest in creating and achieving successful interaction with their reader (Fortanet, 2004; Harwood, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland, 2001b, 2002b, 2002c; Kamio, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007, 2008; Risselada & Spooren, 1998; Taboada, 2006; Tang & John, 1999).

Results from this study linked writers' territory, presence, attitude, identity, and authority, in line with findings presented by other authors (Fortanet, 2004; Harwood, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland, 1998, 2001a, 2002b, 2004b, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Ifantidou, 2005; Kamio, 2001; Kuo, 1999; Tang & John, 1999). The difference between this and other studies is that the analysis focussed on the first year postgraduate L2 students' written texts in business, while other authors have worked with a range of analyses in different texts in different disciplines (i.e. journal articles, research articles, PhD theses, Master dissertations) that revealed student presence in their writing.

Previous studies were considered as a reference for this study. They include: the use of "we" in university lecturers (Fortanet, 2004), research articles in four academic disciplines (Hyland, 1998), published research articles from eight disciplines (Hyland, 2001a, 2005b), the use of personal pronouns in undergraduate theses (Hyland, 2002b), doctoral and master dissertations by Hong Kong students (Hyland, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a), linguistic metadiscourse in academic texts (Ifantidou, 2005), generic and non-specific uses of personal pronouns *"we", "you"* and "*they"* in a contrastive study of English and Japanese (Kamio, 2001), inclusive and exclusive pronouns in academic writing, scientific journal articles from different disciplines (Harwood, 2005a; Kuo, 1999), study of self-promotional "*I"* and *"we"* in academic writing – scientific journals across four disciplines (Harwood, 2005b), personal pronouns in journal articles – writers and readers relationships (Kuo, 1999), and the "*I"* in writer identity in first-year undergraduate students' essays (Tang & John, 1999).

Based on the literature, in this study, analyses of personal markers identified writer-reader interactions through the texts. Significance and recognition was given by both writer and reader to their identity, their authority and their territory in texts, which led to built up the writer-reader interaction in students' writing. This interaction, thus, led to the engagement required for reader and allowed to negotiate meanings and understandings between writer and reader. Figure 5.1

represents the complex relationships between both writer and reader in their respective roles.

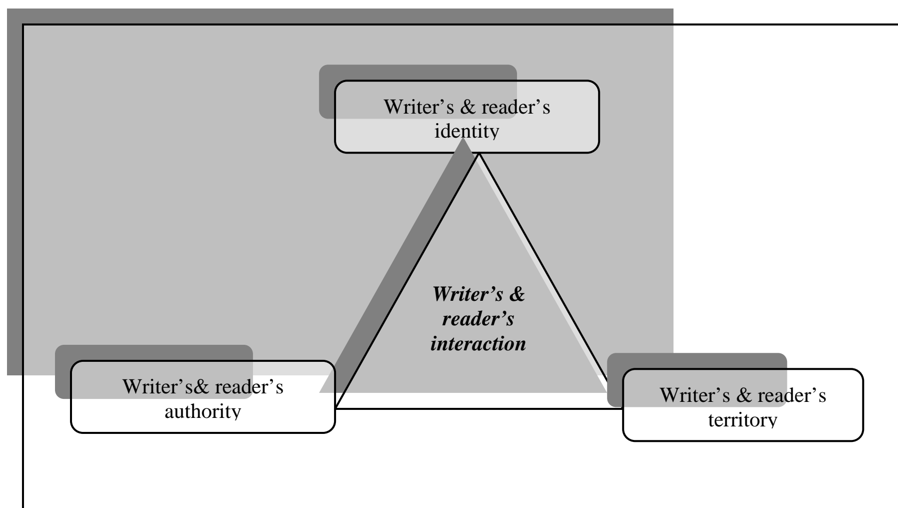

Figure 5.1 Personal markers creating a writer and reader interaction and engagement.

Text analysis identified that students used pronouns in inclusive or exclusive ways. Sometimes they referred to themselves independently at other ties, to themselves and the reader together, to themselves and other persons associated with them, or solely to the reader. Use of pronouns then was evidence of the functional and discursive aspects of the language in the students' productions (Halliday, 2002a; Hyland, 2003). Referents as person markers allowed students: (a) to show their presence in their texts (quotations (95), (96) and (99)); (b) to indicate their intention in the context (quotations (95), (96), and (99)); (c) to involve their reader in the content of the text acknowledging her as a member of a discipline community (quotations (98)); and (d) to address the reader as lecturer appropriately creating an effective and persuasive discourse (quotations (98)) (Fortanet, 2004; Hyland, 1999a, 2001a, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999).

The data analysis allowed identification of the intra-textual or inter-textual role of pronouns in the students' writing. They adopted generic and non-specific uses of personal pronouns when referring to their territory as writers' or to their reader's

territory (Kamio, 2001). Adapting Kamio's (2001) territory concept in an academic writing process, students used personal markers intentionally in their propositional utterances when their purpose was to negotiate content knowledge with their reader. Writer and reader territory involved the general perceived space or domain that students as writers or lecturer as reader had when they were engaged in a communicative transaction through the written texts.

Third-person plural pronouns were used more frequently than other types of personal pronouns (Table 4.11). The high occurrence of these pronouns and the low occurrence of first-person singular and first-person plural pronouns indicated the students' preference for expressing their presence and identity as academic writers. Stating their voice and identity while avoiding first person pronouns such as *"I", "me", "my", "we", "our", or "us"* in their texts is explained by the concept students had of writing an academic text in appropriate academic style. The interviews revealed that one of the main difficulties when writing in academic style was avoiding the use of personal pronouns that could directly identify them in the text. Students also said that this worry was even stronger when they tried to state their opinions, arguments and discussion on a particular topic. In the task questions, especially in the first assignment, students were asked explicitly to argue, express in a critical way, and discuss business situations.

The difficulty of identity in academic writing has been studied previously (Hyland, 2002c; Tang & John, 1999). Hyland's found that creating such identity is usually difficult for L2 writers. He found that such difficulty was based on previous teaching experiences students have about academic style, which have required them to write academic texts in an impersonal way. Students said in the interviews that one of the reasons for avoiding the use of first-person pronouns was that they had been taught that use of such pronouns was inappropriate in academic writing because it brought their own opinion into their texts, making them less objective. Students therefore faced a dilemma in relation to the words they had to choose from: first, answering the assignment questions successfully demanded writing in a critical way and discussing specific discipline scenarios;

secondly, they needed to present their thoughts in ways that made most sense to their reader, at the same time stating voice, identity and authority without using first person pronouns like "*I"* and *"we"*.

Aligning with Hyland (2002c) and Tang (1999), this study highlights the importance of the assistance and orientation that students expect to receive from their teachers and tutors. Different academic practices and demands in the disciplines as well as the different ways of expressing knowledge based on a variety of subject-specific literacies are needed. Students in the Business field, such as those involved in this study, have to learn that members of their discipline communicate in a particular style that allows them to express their argument and opinions in a discipline-specific way. Students have to learn to be more confident using personal pronouns like *"I", "me", "my", "we", "our", and "us"* as a form of reference. In addition, students should be taught that the use of these pronouns helps them to present their arguments and thoughts creating identity, voice and authority in their written productions.

In this study the occurrences of *"I", "my", "me", "we", "our" and "us",* though infrequent in both assignments, were higher in the first assignment than in the second. These results could reflect the position students opted for considering the main objectives of the assignments. In their first assignment, students had to argue and critically state their opinions about certain case studies associated with theories they were studying; in the second assignment they were asked to apply theoretical principles to particular situations they had experienced in a previous job. The role of authority and student's presence were weak in the second assignment though students had to write about their own experience in the assignment (Harwood, 2005b; Hyland, 2001b, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999). Results suggest that the low frequency of the first person pronouns in the data might be related to the role of opinion-holder and originator that students could take in their texts, added to the discipline knowledge they were required to have in order to provide analysis of a job situation as requested in their tasks (Tang & John, 1999).

In contrast to the low frequency of first-person pronouns there was a high frequency of third-person plural pronouns. Analyses showed that the highest number of occurrences of "*they*", "*their*" and "*them*" was found in reported direct speech with the same referent, a larger of group people where the writer could be included. The use of generic and non-specific uses of these pronouns is understood as a characteristic of impersonal writing, where students presented their view points without marking their presence explicitly. The impersonality of the writing is thought to be a strategy students applied to protect themselves, by distancing themselves from their thoughts and findings and avoiding the first-person singular and plural pronouns (Harwood, 2005a). Use of these pronouns in the students' texts could also be understood as the strategy students applied to create a credible academic identity and a voice with which to state their arguments, discussions and opinions (Hyland, 2002c).

Analyses further suggest that students found it easier to express themselves through a range of roles or identities when they used "*they*", "*their*" and "*them*" (Halliday, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999). These referents were used by students to refer sometimes to themselves sometimes, to themselves together with the reader, or to themselves and other persons associated with them. Thus, generic and non-specific uses of "*they*", "*their*", and "*them*" are samples where the use of pronouns may discursively and conceptually be related to "*I*", "*we*", "*our*", or "*us*". In the context of an instrumental approach to language, the textual function of the pronouns served ideational and the interpersonal functions in the students' texts (Halliday, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999).

On the one hand, the ideational function of the language helped students to represent in language their experiences of the real business world. This included experiences students had as employers, as managers, as leaders, as employees and in some other roles to which they could refer while applying the theoretical concepts to answer their tasks. Students used: (a) "*they*" to refer to employees (quotations (89)), to managers (quotations (90)), to leaders (quotations (91)), and

to people involved in business activities (quotations (92)); (b) "*their*" to project themselves as employees or managers stressing the ownership of their words (quotations (93)); and (c) *"them"* to project themselves as employees and/or managers (quotations (94)). It can be said that the ideational function of the third-person plural pronouns let students construct different identities through which they could project their cognitions, perceptions, reactions and linguistic acts of understanding.

On the other hand, the interpersonal function allowed students to use "*they"*, "*their"* and *"them"* as the means of their own intrusion into the texts. With it, students could not only express comments, attitudes, and appraisals about particular topics to answer their tasks, but also they could engage their reader and create a relationship with her in the texts they were building up. This function allowed students to report, persuade, question and inform according to the content purpose (Halliday, 2002b).

In other words, the ideational and interpersonal functions, brought into and maintained solely through language, served to state the set of communication roles students played as both writers and reader. In addition, these functions enhanced the social relations between writers and reader, in terms of identity, visibility and authority as writer in their texts (Halliday, 2002b; Harwood, 2005a; Hyland, 2002b, 2002c, 2005a; Kamio, 2001; Tang & John, 1999).

In summary, identification of each metadiscourse category (intra-textual and inter-textual) in the results of this study revealed a variety of lexical items and language functions that students applied through their assignments to indicate their territory, presence, attitude, and authority. Analyses of the data indicated that the use of personal pronouns in the students' productions let them present and signal their ideas and conceptions in an effort to claim territory, presence, attitude, and authority. Through textual elements of language students revealed some form of ownership of the content showing that they perceived themselves as organiser of

the text and the subject who had the right and ability to originate, present and develop new ideas and academic contributions in their disciplinary field.

5.4.2 Writer's attitude through academic writing

Discourse markers or logical connectors were also analysed under a metadiscourse perspective and presented according to their discourse function. Analysis indicated use of such markers not only for text organisation, but also for rhetorical relations, such as the writer's purpose and reader's text construction. Findings verified that the use of discourse markers in written texts is linked to the writers' interest in creating and achieving a successful interaction with their reader. The students' intentions, communicative goals and reader's effect were identified through analysis of these markers (Renkema, 2004; Taboada, 2006). In other words, discourse markers indicated the attitude of students toward their texts. When students used rhetorical markers not only were they organising the propositional content of their written utterances in their texts, but also they were seeking an effective interpretation of their texts by their reader.

By analysing the use of discursive features and their functional, discursive and rhetorical aspects in L2 postgraduate writings, this study has contributed to the rhetorical knowledge arena in advanced academic literacy, a topic that has often been given marginal attention in EAP writing classrooms. Tardy (2005) found that rhetorical knowledge may be developed and learnt over time through the writers' literacy practices. At graduate level, these practices allow students to acquire reading and writing skills in the target language, and to learn ways of thinking about, interacting with, and making knowledge with disciplinary communities.

The study verified findings by Tardy (2005) regarding students' writing practices and their rhetorical knowledge upon entering their discipline community. During interviews, the students explained that their selection of vocabulary included discourse markers that they had learnt through reading and then applied in their written assignments. They therefore recognised expressions, disciplinary

statements and vocabulary they perceived as useful to support their thoughts. This suggests that reading skills and students' analysis of discipline content were part of the composing strategies students applied to write their academic discourse in an appropriate manner. Use of these composing strategies not only gave students the opportunity to improve their linguistic ability, but also offered them the possibility of increasing and building up the rhetorical knowledge in their discipline.

Rhetorical knowledge in the discipline was another difficulty students faced in writing their assignments. Specific academic discourses as well as particular rhetorical knowledge in business were aspects of language they had to consider in order to fulfil the academic writing demands of their texts. As L2 writers in their discipline, their language competence involved the acquisition, learning and practice of rhetorical knowledge. Discourse markers provided useful functional, discursive and rhetorical meanings, which helped them to express and construct texts according to the task and academic demands posed by audience, content and purpose.

Data suggested that students used discourse markers such as "*for instance", "for example", "like", "such as", "as", and "as illustration"* to contribute explicit content in their texts. Those markers were more commonly used in the first assignment than in the second. Their use might correspond to the kind of content students had to develop in their texts. In the first assignment students were asked to analyse business scenarios based upon specific theoretical content. Results showed that exemplification markers were used to set theoretical concepts through particular and real job situations. To clarify, students used exemplification markers when they wanted to apply theoretical concepts to particular cases which occurred in some companies. Most of the companies that students referred to were related to companies where they had worked or they knew about their business performance (quotation (100)).

It could be also argued that exemplification markers allowed students to convey their understanding about theoretical concepts to their reader. The examples students provided in their texts not only served to expand ideas, but to demonstrate their understanding of theoretical contents to their reader (quotations (101), (102), (103), and (104)). In a pragmatic view, the exemplification markers could be analysed as separate discourse units, whose communication of speech-acts gave students the opportunity to provide evidence for their claims. Their use then may be seen as a purposeful and communicative activity that helped students to support, emphasise, argue and explain their ideas in meaningful contexts (Ifantidou, 2005).

Exemplification also allowed students to demonstrate their discipline knowledge to the reader by relating shared knowledge in business situations. Findings suggest that students used examples in their texts as a communicative strategy, and as evidence of shared knowledge both writers and reader had about the assignment content. In this study, the use of exemplification markers as metadiscourse features indicated an interpersonal relation between writer and reader, where took account of the reader's knowledge, textual experiences and text construction (Hyland, 2003).

Markers of comparison were also evident. Comparison markers were used in both assignments, but more often in the first assignment than in the second. Though only a relatively a low percentage, the most frequent comparison markers used by students were "*as*" and "*as…as*" (See Table 4.12). Students used comparative markers in their texts not only to establish cohesive relations, but also to construct texts that would be well understood by their reader (Halliday, 2002a).

Students appear to use these markers to make their texts more consistent, accurate and explicit. Since it is impossible to compare one situation with another unless both have been described in the same way, students used comparatives when they needed to relate a theoretical concept to a real job situation (quotations (106), and (109)); to match a theoretical concept with social elements or social concepts that

were part of the writer-reader shared knowledge (quotations (106)), and to state a common pattern or characteristic of two clauses used to express and develop the students' thoughts (quotations (107) and (108)). Shared knowledge between reader and writer played a crucial role in text construction and in text understanding when comparisons of different situations or issues comprised part of the text. Comparative markers similar to exemplification markers allowed students to support their arguments. Results implied that when students made comparisons between business situations or when they compared theoretical statements, they relied on the reader's ability to identify the expressed comparisons as certain forms of valid and effective argument (Hyland, 2001a).

Markers of contrast are the next group of discourse markers analysed in this study. Findings indicated that they signified antithesis (quotations [110a], [111b], [112a], [114b] and [115a]); concession, (quotations [110b], [111a], [114a] and [115b]); and neutral contrast (quotations (112) and (113)). They were presented in the students' texts as the means of expressing opposition of two concepts, two protocols or two methodologies (Fraser, 1999; Magnet & Carnet, 2006; Wang & Tsai, 2007).

The high number of occurrences of the neutral contrasts *"or"* suggests that students used this connector to cause the reader to have a better understanding of particular differences between two statements. In addition, findings implied that students found it easier to use *"or"* to contrast their ideas than to use *"although", "though" or "whereas",* which were other connectors of contrast selected in this study. *"Although", "though" or "whereas"* had the lowest occurrences in both assignments. Students might opt to avoid the use of these connectors due to the complex construction required to express them. They have meanings and functions that are somewhat more sophisticated than cause clauses because of the concept of concession in written text and text cohesion (Hinkel, 2002). While *"although"* and *"though"* require the construction of a full content clause as a complement or a complement that may be reduced to a participial and verbless clause; *"whereas"* belongs to a group of prepositions governing non-expandable

content clauses. It expresses contrast, but hardly passes on the suggestion that the superordinate clause might be expected to be false (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). In addition, the main function of concession clauses (*though, although, whereas*) in discourse is to present ideational content, which provides evidence of the writer's credibility (Hinkel, 2002).

Data showed that contrast relations between two utterances or propositions were transparent enough to be found in the semantic content of prepositions, but others were buried within writer's and reader's content knowledge, or implicit in writer's expectations about each other and each other's conceptual thinking (Wang & Tsai, 2007). Accordingly, results indicate that the use of markers such as: *"whereas", "although" and "though"* in the students' productions were pragmatically motivated. Students assumed that the context in which the markers appeared, plus the amount of background knowledge possessed by the reader were essential for the texts to be well understood and interpreted (quotations (113), (114), (115)). In a metadiscourse approach, these discursive markers allowed students to play an active role as disciplinary members; to present their conceptual arguments to their reader based on their discipline knowledge; and to express their willingness to share responses when they made claims to support of their principal thesis.

The number of occurrences of *"or", "but', and "however"* (Table 4.12) indicated that students of this study preferred to use transparent and explicit contrastive markers to express their objections or to draw their reader's attention to differences in their texts (quotations (110), (111), and (112)). Findings showed that students expressed a contrastive relationship clearly when they juxtaposed two utterances in the texts, making it easy for their reader to understand not only the connection between the two sentences but also the content relationship between the proposed statements (Knott & Sanders, 1998). It may be argued that when students used the concessive forms they were seeking to maintain and enhance the ideational orientation of their texts. Through this approach, students acknowledged their reader' response to their discourse, the reader's engagement, and also looked for the reader's understanding as audience.

Results verify previous studies (Hyland, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Mauranen, 1993) regarding the use of contrastive markers as metadiscourse elements. The present practical results, however, also offer new findings in an area that has not been widely explored before about the L2 postgraduate academic writing (Hyland & Tse, 2004a; Mauranen, 1993).

Discourse markers that express causal relations are the next markers to be analysed. The *"cause"* category involves adjuncts of purpose, reason or result, purpose and reason (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Results show that students used more *"because of"* and *"as"* than *"due to" and "since"* to express cause in their assignments. Results verify what the literature presents regarding *"because"* as a cause marker. It has been identified as the most central and versatile of the reason prepositions, which can occur in subject or predicative complement functions as well as an adjunct (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). In this study, it was as a cause marker that *"because"* was most frequently used.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002) pointed out that from a grammatical perspective, adjuncts of cause are much more important than those of result, in terms of frequency and the variety of constructions available for expressing them. In agreement with these authors, results showed that students mainly stated their arguments with cause clauses, supported by corresponding consequence clauses in both assignments. Doing so, students pointed out the level of argument about what was true in the real world as the cause in a business situation related to the subsequent result.

Given that a cause marker indicates a consequence, it could be argued that students used these markers to state semantic and pragmatic relationships. Semantic relationships link utterances based on their propositional contents, the semantic facts of the two utterances (quotations (116), (117), and (119)). Pragmatic relations link utterances based on their illocutions, the logic level

and/or the speech act in the utterances (quotations (116), (118), and (119)) (Fraser, 1999; Renkema, 2004).

Results suggest that students stated semantic and pragmatic relations to develop their thoughts when they employed cause clauses and their corresponding consequence clauses as a rhetorical strategy. The consequence markers students used were *"so"* with the highest number of occurrences in both assignments, followed by *"thus"* and *"as a result"*. *"Therefore"* was slightly more used than *"hence"* which had the lowest number of occurrences in the students' productions. Results show that students used similar kinds of cause and consequence markers in both assignments, with a similar number of occurrences in the written assignments.

It could be argued that students found it useful to use cause markers and consequence markers to indicate the cause-consequence relation between an utterance and the previous one they had used to express their ideas. The functional, discursive and rhetorical meanings of these markers allowed students: (a) to construct coherence relating adjacent statements or logic units in their discourse (quotations (120)); (b) to postulate a continuation of the previous discourse (quotation (121)); (c) to state knowledge-based causal relations as warranty for their reader's understanding and engagement (quotation (121)); (d) to explain theoretical concepts in the content domain of the 'real-world' causality of a business event (quotations (120), (121), (122), (123), (124)); and (e) to create textual cohesion, where interpersonal meanings and reader's acknowledgment could help to develop the students' academic arguments through their texts (quotations (124)).

As with other markers, functional, discursive and rhetorical functions of the cause and consequence markers helped students not only to relate statements logically, but also to construct texts whose purpose and contents considered the reader's interpretation, understanding and engagement.

5.4.3 Tentativity in academic writing

Discourse markers related to hedges were also analysed in this study. Results indicated that *"can"* was the modal students used the most. It was followed by *"will"* with a higher use in the first assignment. *"May", "should"* and *"must"* had a lower use and similar tendency of frequency in both assignments. These markers were followed to a lesser extend by *"could", "would",* and *"might"*. *"Shall"* use was nil in both assignments.

The use of modality in the students' papers indicated their commitment to the text content, their acknowledgement of the reader as a participant in the text and the students' awareness of the academic community's rules concerning rhetorical aspects of writing. Results, therefore, indicate the relation of these markers to the writers' attitude when students wanted to express facts, state their views about a particular business situation or indicate their attitude about a particular business scenario. Analyses of these markers showed how reluctant students were to indicate their individual presence when they were assessing professional situations in their writing. In this manner, students expressed statements associated with hypothesis or predictive contexts where their reader's interpretation could relate the students' hypothetical statements to real job situations and theoretical judgements (Ferguson, 2001; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Hyland, 1998, 1999b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a).

Because modals express different meanings, they also express different functional, discursive and rhetorical functions in a discourse. There is in fact substantial overlap between the modals (Dixon, 2005). Because of this, results suggest that students sometimes found it difficult to understand and decide what modal verb to use for expressing factual and physical circumstances in certain business situations. *"Can"*, for instance, refers to inherent ability, but if it is used subjectively, it expresses possibility. Quotations (129), as a sample of the data, suggest that students preferred to use this modal with a connotation of possibility, where any statement they were referring to could have been reasonable or

acceptable to their reader. Using this modal, students stated that their business or theoretical assessments or comments about a particular topic were circumstantially possible and could be accepted by their reader as part of the discipline community.

Results showed that students used *"may", "might", "could"*, and *"would"* to state their critical opinions. The epistemic use of these modals allowed students to present their assertions in a persuasive manner, where proper concern and deference to the views of reader were made part of their claims (quotations (127), (128), (130), and (126)). *"May"*, *"might"* and *"could"* were more often used objectively to express students' assessments related to academic knowledge in practical job situations (quotations (127)(130)).

Occurrences of "*must"* and *"should"* in results indicated that students used these modals to state their views regarding actions that needed to be taken in a business organisation according to a particular situation (quotations (131) and (132)). By using these modals, students wanted to express their way of thinking regarding future changes in a company or a business organisation. The proposed changes were presented according to specific causes students had identified previously. That is, by using these modals, students indicated what they considered "right" or "more convenient" to happen in an organisation, based on specific facts they had already presented. Therefore, the suggested advice students proffered through their texts reflected their knowledge domains and significance of contributions that could be easily recognised and interpreted by the reader as a member of their discipline. Shared knowledge between student-writers and reader was basic to establish an understanding with the reader, to gain personal credibility and to create a convincing discourse behind the exposed arguments.

Differently used from other modals, *"will"* was preferred either to refer to organisational matters or to insert further information into the text (quotations (125)). This modal helped students to guide their reader to follow the text. Pragmatically, it may be argued that students used "*will"* objectively when they

wanted to introduce new information, when they wanted to follow the content from what just been said, or when they wanted to conclude their texts.

In general, as in previous studies (Hyland, 1999b, 2005b) the use of modals indicated the degree of commitment, certainty and collegial deference students as writers wished to transmit through their texts. It also showed the position students adopted with their audience when they tried to persuade, convince, evaluate, justify or claim regarding a singular business matter. The use of these discursive markers was equal to those presented above. They indicated the students' projection in an academic context when they sought to negotiate discipline meanings and claimed an active role between writer-reader interactions when they were constructing their texts.

According to the study results, it could be argued that the frequency of use of connectors is linked with the difficulty students found in using them in their texts, with less frequently used connectors proving more difficult. Frequency will reflect the rhetorical knowledge and rhetorical function students recognised in the metadiscourse categories. These findings corroborate and go further than those presented by Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995). The importance of the findings lies in future teaching and learning in terms of writing processes. It is crucial that teachers help students to realise and be aware that what they write reflects themselves as writers. Students' writing, especially at postgraduate level, should not simply be demand to fulfil particular academic requirements in the curriculum. It should be a process that reflects a social context, writer's beliefs and attitudes, and communicative goals expressed through the correct use of discourse markers. More research is required to determine whether or not the results are similar for other L2 novice writers at postgraduate level in the same field (Business) or in other academic areas.

The use of discourse markers in the students' productions also suggest that there is a set of conceptual relations that students as writers, and lecturers as readers use when processing text. Under a cognitive approach, these kinds of relations have

shown the cognitive significance of coherence relations, where cognitive mechanisms operate in writers and readers when they process texts. Results suggest that the conceptual relations in the students' texts refer to the cognitive mechanisms or logic schemas student-writers used to link their thoughts within the texts as well as the cognitive mechanisms and logic schemas their readers used, to interpret their texts. With these results, this study confirms what has been proposed by Knott and Sanders (1998) regarding construction and interpretation of texts under a psychological approach. However, more studies have to be done about the source of coherence and order of logical utterances in L2 writing texts to further explore hypotheses proposed by Knott and Sanders (1998). New results might provide further theoretical and empirical work in this arena.

In summary, conceptual relations developed through the selected markers represented logical statements, content units, or speech acts. Discourse markers linked logical statements that could be interpreted as an extension or elaboration of content, whose functional, discursive and rhetorical meanings involved the efficient establishment or maintenance of social relationships between writer and reader, the relations and development of referential information, and a communication channel where analytical and logical rhetorical elements formed part of the text structure, text process and text interpretation.

The outcomes of this study have implications for pedagogy in second language acquisition (SLA) theory arena in relation to L2 models of teaching and writing development. Results led to development of a model of teaching and learning writing from a metadiscourse perspective that could be incorporated into the SLA theory. It is presented below.

5.5 Proposing a new model of academic writing in a discipline

Analyses of the literature and data support a theoretical model presented as a result of this research: *"Model for the L2 postgraduate writing process: a metadiscourse perspective''* (Chapter 2). It identifies factors involved in the

writing process and acknowledges the metadiscourse characteristics in academic writing (Hyland, 1998, 1999a, 2001a, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004a). The model provides theoretical foundations to propose a second model in this study that could be considered in the L2 teaching-learning arena: *"A model: writing process of an L2 disciplinary text"*. This model involves learning and teaching principles that might be taken into consideration when constructing a disciplinary text in an L2 postgraduate context. It is important to note at this point, that though the proposed model has been created based on findings obtained from data provided by MBA students, the model can be also considered a generic model. That is, the model can be applied to any other disciplines where a postgraduate writing analysis practice is occurring.

The model highlights the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and the high-level writing skills students as writers have to apply to succeed in an L2 writing task. The task in this model involves the concept of task-based language teaching within the context of education in general presented by Nunan (2004), which has been adapted to the context of postgraduate education for this study. According to Nunan (2004), task designers have suggested that a task should take into consideration the following elements: content, materials, activities, goals, students, and social community.

The proposed model is one in which a writing task at postgraduate level gives explicit focus to:

- **Contextual factors — *content, audience, and purpose***: *Content* to be learnt and applied in real world tasks requiring a specific academic discourse and genres. *Audience* for whom the text is addressed to signify shared knowledge between writer (learner) and reader (teacher). *Purpose* indicates the academic goals to be achieved behind the writing task in a discipline learning process.

- **Motivational factors — *social context, beliefs and attitudes, and communicative goals***: *The social context* is the active personal interaction between writer and reader, which is achieved through audience engagement. *Beliefs and attitudes* are revealed as writer and reader project to the text. Motivation includes needs, interest and abilities. *Communicative goals* are achieved by discourse organisation, text structure and text interpretation. They establish and maintain interpersonal relations for exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, and attitudes. A coherent text engages readers when the writer makes appropriate language choices, links utterances logically, and creates convincing arguments according to the social context and previous academic references.

- **Cognitive factors — communicative literacy skills, organisational skills, L2 communicative competence and knowledge bases:** cognitive factors are related to different competences writers and readers require for succeeding in the task process. *Communicative literacy skills,* which demand that writers (as learners) apply their reading and writing skills according to their academic task requirements. *Organisational skills* related to a task demand: goal setting, task organisation and planning, task assessment, written text, evaluation, and attribution of success and failure. *L2 communicative competence* presupposes learners have a second language understanding and knowledge of the systematic nature of language and its use. It includes academic and cultural use of the language in an academic context. This competence comprises linguistic, strategic, discourse, pragmatic and intercultural competences of the L2 language in use. *Knowledge bases* cover the variety of knowledge writers have and readers recognise to build up and assess an academic text, specifically, topic knowledge, audience knowledge, linguistic knowledge and genre knowledge.

- **Linguistic features — functional discursive and rhetorical devices, and communicative higher-order literacy skills:** *in which functional*

discursive and rhetorical devices are linguistic and non-linguistic resources that refer to the text itself, to the writer and to the potential reader of that text. Their use and organisation in the text embody an interaction between the writer and the reader. They are structured through authentic texts and specific genres according to the demands and expectations of the target discourse communities and audiences. *The communicative higher-order literacy skills are* the skills postgraduate students are required to use to perform successfully in their disciplinary areas. They are considered as means to understand the discursive practices in different academic communities and are associated with the students' involvement and socialisation into their discourse communities.

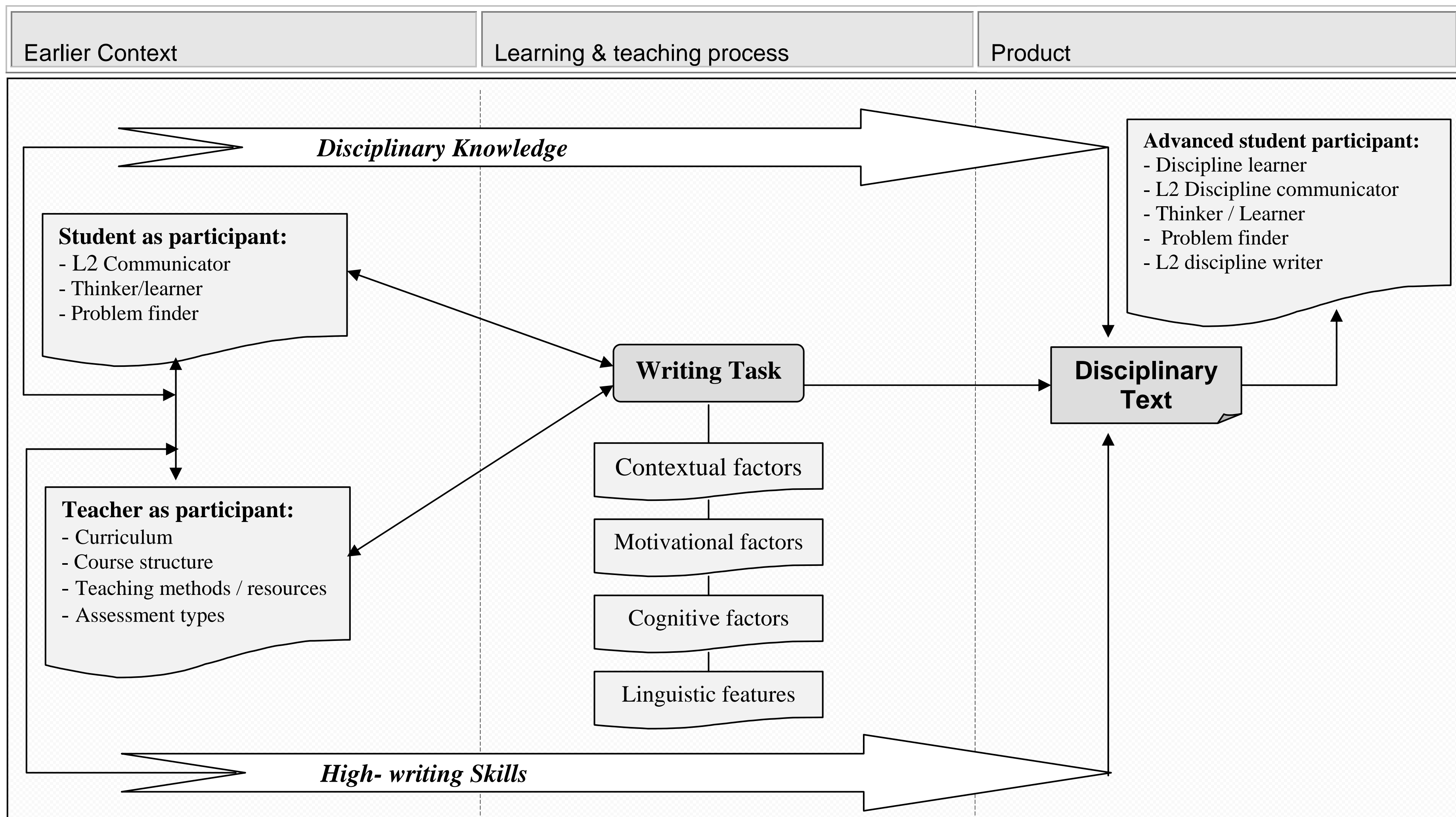

Figure 5.2 A new holistic model: writing process of a L2 disciplinary text (Developed from this study)

The proposed model indicates the relevance of L2 writing in academic contexts. It represents how L2 writing has to be understood and valued as a complex process in learning and teaching contexts. It identifies functions in contexts of writing, and the role writing plays when L2 students are involved in the discourse practices of an academic community. The model assumes that a writer as a beginner/novice language and discipline learner moves from a preliminary level to a more advanced level during the writing process. Writer-learners thus go from an earlier context where they are L2 communicators, thinker learners and problem finders to a later level where they are more disciplined learners, L2 discipline communicators, thinker and learner problem finders, and L2 discipline writers. This progression through levels of writing practice is the guarantee that a writing learner becomes an active member in his/her discipline community and with it achieves recognition in a discipline field.

It has to be said that all the elements in the model intertwine to build up the academic text as a whole, through the proposed academic writing task.

5.6 Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that L2 postgraduate writers apply very different writing processes and strategies, and might also have different perceptions of writing behaviours. These differences may be due to different strengths and weaknesses that learners bring to their academic writing tasks and practices. Previous academic knowledge relating to subject knowledge and L2 competence also lead to different writing perspectives and experiences that students face when they need to write in their discipline. This study has proved that writing is a complex skill that is learnt through the practice of writing.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together conclusions and implications of the research findings and is presented in seven sections (Figure 6.1). After this introductory section (Section 6.1), the overview of the research reviews the main points of the earlier five chapters of the thesis in section 6.2. A summary of the research method is presented in section 6.3 and the main findings summarised in section 6.4. The limitations of this research are discussed in section 6.5 and the chapter concludes with section 6.6, which indicates the research implications. Section 6.6 includes implications for theory (Section 6.6.1), implications for practice (Section 6.6.2) and implications for further research in this field of study. Section 6.7 presents the conclusions for this chapter.

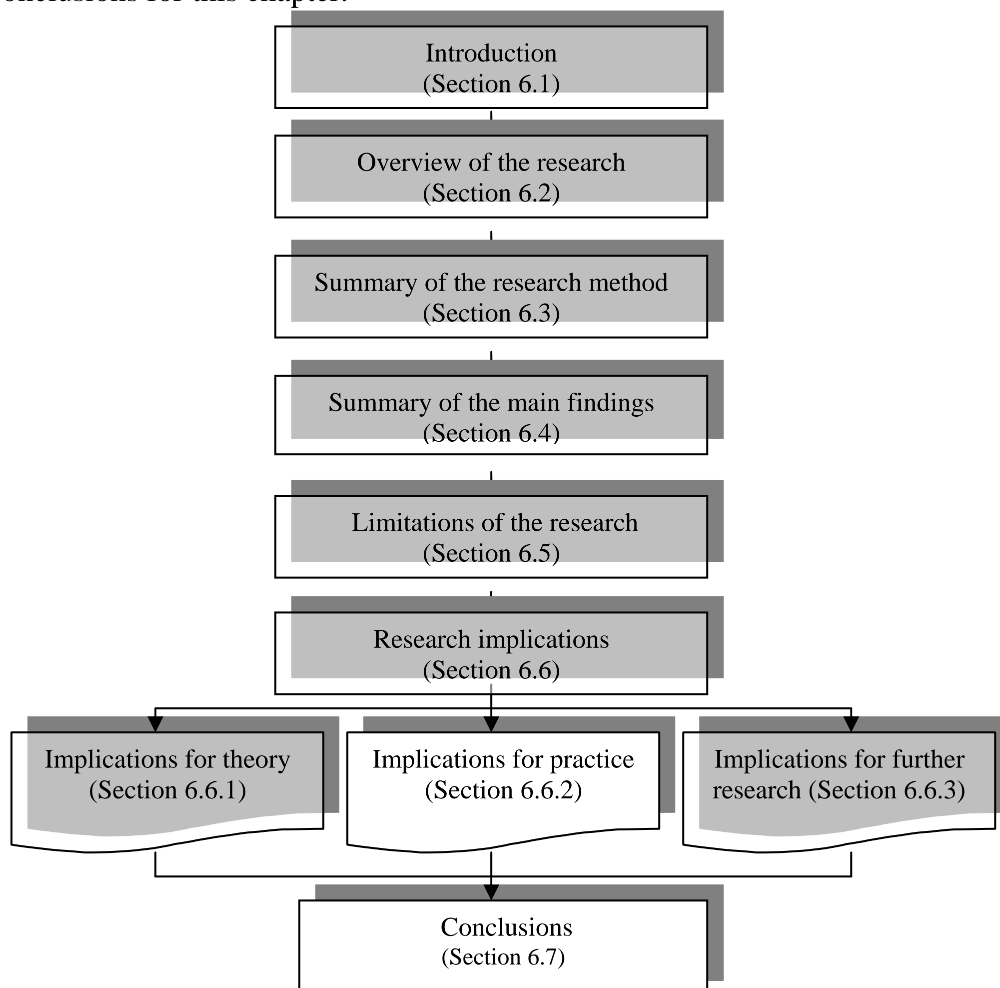

Figure 6.1. Outline of Chapter 6, with section numbers and their interrelations.

6.2 Overview of the research

The main objective of this study was to identify the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in L2 postgraduate writing. Although significant research has been done recently about academic writing, this study noted that no studies of L2 writers had directly examined the articulation of subject discipline and writing skills (Leki & Carson, 1997). Likewise, despite previous studies exploring metadiscoursal aspects of academic writing, there was no model of the L2 postgraduate writing process from a metadiscourse perspective. Therefore, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the articulation between writing practices and writing demands in a postgraduate Business course at an Australian university. Specifically, it raises implications for theoretical and practical support applications in L2 teaching and learning practices.

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 presented a general view of the research objectives, plan, background, and it emphasised the research problem, namely: *What is the link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in L2 postgraduate writing?* To investigate this proposed research problem, theoretical approaches and relevant previous research in literature were explored in Chapter 2. Three main theoretical areas were reviewed and summarised to bring a better understanding of the academic writing process in a discipline field at postgraduate level. The three areas were: Second language writing, theory and practice of academic writing and metadiscourse in academic writing. Understanding the relationship between these three theoretical components was crucial for developing the proposed model of L2 writing: *A Model for L2 postgraduate writing process: A metadiscourse perspective.* The proposed model was the result of the literature review exploration.

Chapter 3 outlined the research design for the theoretical framework and research questions, as background to the in-depth-interviews and context analysis which constituted qualitative and quantitative methods presented in this chapter. In the data analysis stage, a categorisation method was applied to data obtained from interviews. These data were then reported in tables in the first part of Chapter 4.

Data from corpora analysis obtained from students' written assignments were provided in the second part of Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presented the interpretation and discussion of findings from the interview data and textual analysis of the corpora. As a result of the discussion and analyses of data a model was proposed at the end of chapter 5: *"A new holistic model: writing process of an L2 disciplinary text"*. The model provides theoretical foundations that may be considered in the L2 teaching-learning arena for constructing a disciplinary text in an L2 postgraduate context given that the model involves learning and teaching principles. Though development of a model was not a research objective, the proposed new model in Chapter 5 was developed from the analysis of literature and findings of this study.

6.3 Summary of the research method

There were two methods selected for this study: In-depth interviews and text analysis. The in-depth interviews were used to gather participants' perceptions of writing practices at postgraduate level, as a means of achieving the research aims. This methodological technique allowed students to voice their personal concerns about their experiences in the academic process as well as capturing the lecturer's viewpoints about students' academic writing in a discipline.

Data analysis for interviews included a categorisation of data which required validity and reliability testing to confirm the interpretation and objectivity of the results. By conducting interviews to establish a collection of participants' views, concerns and perceptions of academic writing, the researcher developed an understanding of relevant processes, strategies, difficulties, worries, strengths, weaknesses and learning experienced by postgraduate students as academic writers in a discipline.

Text analysis was the second method used in this study, and was applied to two electronic corpora created from students' written assignments. It helped to identified both the social and the functional orientations the students deployed in their discourse. This method provided data that helped to explain the postgraduate

students' ability, as second language writers, to use discipline-specific discursive, rhetorical and linguistic conventions in a particular academic discourse community. Student data were validated by the lecturer's responses, thus enhancing reliability of the study outcomes and supported the interpretation adopted in this study.

6.4 Summary of the main findings

Having justified the need for this research, its aims and objectives, four research questions were posed to answer the primary research question. The in-depth interviews and text analysis were conducted to address the sub-themes in the research question.

6.4.1 L2 students' processes and composing strategies: development of academic writing skills in a disciplinary field

A content analysis approach was applied to the interview transcripts and led to identification of appropriate categories and units of analysis; these reflected the participants' perceptions regarding academic writing practices. The categorisation and coding of the information obtained from the interviews facilitated analysis of the results and the discussion of findings. This process enhanced the authenticity and validity of the data collection, study findings and research discussion. Interpretation of the data indicated that both students and lecturer acknowledged that students used a different process or processes and composing strategies when writing their assignments.

Four processes were identified, along with eight main composing strategies. The first process was: *understanding the assignment question*. This process demanded multiple readings and discussion with peers and/or lecturer in order to identify the objectives, content and how to conduct a critical analysis in order to write an essay. One positive outcome from this study has been the identification of the constructive influence of the peer-teacher discussions in a writing process to

achieve disciplinary literacy in a second language (L2). Such a finding has not been widely documented or highly recognised previously in the literature (Hansen, 2000). The second process was *identification and selection of the sources that best could support writing the assignment. Researching the topic well* was the third process. These last two processes were related and demanded complex skills from students: reading skills not only to thoroughly research the topic but also to select the relevant literature to develop a critical analysis and provide discussion according to the assignment requirements. The fourth process was *designing a plan for writing the assignment*, which helped students to create a clear and unambiguous text for the reader.

The four processes were a complement to the eight identified composing strategies students employed to succeed in their writing tasks. Individual use of specific strategies corresponded to the student's writing difficulties, writing worries, as well as their L2 competence and proficiency. The strategies students used were strongly related to their content understanding, content knowledge and their previous academic writing experience. Students particularly highlighted two strategies they used in order to complete their tasks successfully. One was related to *the need to thoroughly understand the task topic well in order to read and write properly*, taking account of the purpose, content, and audience of the assignments. The second was related to the importance they gave to writing so that the reader could understand their texts. *Writing clearly to aid understanding* was one of the main concerns students mentioned through the study.

Analyse and select available information according to the task questions and apply effective reading skills were the third and fourth strategy students used in preparing to write. Reading helped students not only to analyse and select proper information but also allowed students to strengthen their strategic competence when they opted to learn and increase new vocabulary, by identifying technical vocabulary and following models of information that were commonly used by people in their discipline.

Planning the assignment was the fifth composing strategy students used. Half of the participants, those who had undertaken previous writing training in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses decided to create a plan of activities to follow during the writing process. This group of students indicated the importance of designing and planning a sequence of activities, not only to develop a schedule for their task, but also to successfully complete specific, embedded writing tasks as part of their assignment. This study has therefore reduced the gap in the literature regarding researchers' concerns about transferability of skills learnt in EAP courses to students' discipline-specific academic contexts (Hansen, 2000; Riazi, 1997; Swales, 1990). Further research on transferability is required at all levels of L2 writer's formal education, particularly at higher education.

The sixth strategy mentioned in the research was: *following an assignment structure to link ideas in a paragraph and to link paragraphs appropriately*. This study found that students applied communication strategies purposely when they faced a writing task where it was crucial to communicate their meaning effectively. Students also indicated how aware they were of applying their best linguistic knowledge to succeed academically.

With regard to composing strategies and considering the students' linguistic competence (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Ellis, 1994; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006b, 2006c), a seventh strategy was *using the computer as a tool to qualify their writing*. It allowed students to check or verify vocabulary, correct spelling of the words to be used in their texts or to correct their sentence constructions. Students thought that applying this strategy helped them to express their thoughts more accurately, and to construct discourse appropriately as L2 users.

Finally, strategy eighth was used by only one student; *she started again and did further research* when the information was not enough to produce a successful assignment. This study shows that students variously used the eight composing strategies while writing because they wanted to communicate clearly and

effectively with their reader i.e., their lecturer. Because students were aware of their audience, they selected information from sources and wrote so that the reader could identify not only their content knowledge, but also their presence in the texts they were producing: they wrote their assignments, considering their position as writers, and trying to build a relationship with their audience.

The academic strategies these students chose and followed to become writers in their discipline complement those identified in previous studies by Hyland (1998, 1999c, 2001a, 2001b, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d, 2002e, 2002f, 2003, 2004b, 2005b), Hyland & Tse (2004a) and Tardy (2005), where they explored disciplinary interactions, and metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. Specifically, they identified rhetorical devices that postgraduate students used to be part of or to be recognised in their discipline community. This research, however, demonstrates that not only having the content knowledge but also, being able to write properly in the discipline gave students control over their writing and enabled them to meet the challenges of participating actively as members of their discipline community.

Hence, findings from this study about writing processes and composing strategies that L2 postgraduate student apply in their writing, offer significant insights to reduce the gap in the literature regarding acquisition of communicative competence in writing. More specifically, this study provides evidence of L2 postgraduate writers' development of their writing ability as well as their communicative competence acquisition. Carson (2001) reported a lack of development of a perspective on acquisition of writing ability as significant for L2 models of teaching and learning writing. She also pointed out the lack of research on acquiring communicative competence and of an adequate explanatory theory to account for the ways in which L2 writers, readers, texts and contexts interact, and the ways in which these factors might be defined and expressed. As a result of this study *"A model: writing process of an L2 disciplinary text"* has been proposed as a way forward, and is outlined in Chapter 5. It requires further testing in other postgraduate disciplines and institutions.

6.4.2 Learning while writing assignments

Interviews with the students showed that they felt they learnt and knew more about academic writing as they went through their writing tasks. For them, this was an experience that helped them learn how to write in their academic discipline; the assignment writing practice helped them to understand disciplinary content, disciplinary genre, and engagement with their discipline community through their texts, as well as gaining understanding of their role as academic writers in their discipline.

The study also found students learnt how to manage writing difficulties and worries while writing their assignments, by applying an effective writing process and strategies when they found tasks to be challenging. Not only did they learn more about discipline content but also about L2 academic writing. By solving this research question, the study verified what previous studies have indicated regarding the importance of learners' motivation when trying to respond to reasonable challenges, because on the perceived appropriate difficulty in completing their tasks (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Skehan, 1998; M. Williams & Burden, 1997a, 1997b).

To sum up, students learnt more about academic writing through the writing experience. They also learnt how to use the reading process to improve the writing process, to update academic vocabulary and expressions, and to extend research experience. The study also demonstrated that students were aware of the use of a computer as a writing tool that enabled them to work better. They learnt more about computer facilities (i.e., grammar and spelling checks) and effective computer use (See Chapters 4 and 5).

6.4.3 Deployment of interpersonal features: metadiscourse in students' disciplinary texts

The students' ability to employ discipline-specific discursive, rhetorical and linguistic conventions in their written tasks served their purposes as L2 writers. The deployment of discourse and rhetorical markers identified both the social and

functional orientations the students used in their discourse. Analyses of corpora indicated that there were discourse markers identified as visible expressions, which indicated the students' presence in their texts as well as expressions students used to engage their reader in their written discourse.

The use of personal pronouns, for instance, allowed students to project themselves as writers, and to signal their attitude toward both the content and the audience. The writer's voice was evident when students as writers selected particular personal markers in their texts. The writer's voice was identified in construction of the writer's discourse identity through the texts. Considering the discourse functions of the personal markers, students overcame their propositional meaning to acknowledge, construct and negotiate their texts with their reader.

In addition, students used discourse markers as logical connectors and modals to establish interaction between themselves as writers and with their reader. The use of rhetorical and discourse markers enabled writers and reader to interchange meanings in academic and social circumstances. As writers, students constructed and maintained social and disciplinary relationships with the reader in their discipline community through their writing practice, when they explored through their texts the ideational, interpersonal and textual function of the discourse markers as elements of language. (Halliday, 2002a, 2002b). Additional details regarding writer and reader interaction through the deployment of interpersonal features and other metadiscourse features in the students' texts are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

6.4.4 Linguistic, non-linguistic, functional and rhetorical features in academic writing

Textual analysis of the students' two assignments identified discourse markers as metadiscourse elements in the students' writing. Analyses showed that students used the discourse markers as cohesive features that helped them to orient the reader, to guide the reading process and to organise their discourse in a structured text. Students used discourse markers to support topic relations and functional

relations that could reflect the ways in which they, as writers, and their lecturer as reader, could relate to one other. They were also used to reflect the students' and lecturer's orientation toward the text as whole.

The selection of rhetorical elements in the students' work revealed a student's effort to persuade the reader of claims and arguments. Through those rhetorical choices, students acknowledged their reader and consolidated interpersonal negotiation of meanings based upon the beliefs, attitudes and expectations of the reader. This negotiation of meaning was achieved by using linguistic and non-linguistic resources of the language, and it endorsed the rhetorical, functional, and discourse features of the L2 in the students' assignments.

In general, the study found that use of discourse markers in the students' texts stood for the ongoing organisation and management of discipline knowledge students had. In addition, they indicated the metadiscourse knowledge students developed through the text and its discourse. The use of this metadiscourse knowledge led the reader to identify students as writers and as members of her discipline community.

6.5 Limitations of the research

This section analyses the limitations of this research and examines the impact they have on the research conclusions. There were three main limitations in this study. The first limitation was related to the number of the participants. The data and analysis obtained from the investigation might not be representative of a larger population. Students' language proficiency, cultural backgrounds, discipline areas and writing skills differ in nature, so each of them could provide elements to be analysed differently in another group of non-English postgraduate students (NNPS).

The second limitation is related to method application. Because interviews with the students were conducted immediately after the students submitted their assignments, the participants did not have trouble answering the questions.

However, this was not the case with the lone interview conducted with the teacher. She had to review the feedback summary that she had created after marking each assignment, and to recall and reflect on particular aspects relating to the assignment marking. She replied to questions based on her teaching experience with that class. This issue could have affected the findings. This study serves as a foundation for further studies related to L2 academic writing at postgraduate level.

The third limitation refers to the sample, methods and processes applied during the research, and the impact on the obtained findings. Thus, further research will be required to test the results and proposed theoretical model with other NNPSs where there might be variations in the teaching and learning processes, students' and lecturers' perceptions of writing needs, writing difficulties, L2 competence, academic areas, cultural backgrounds, and writing productions. A fourth limitation is related to the short experience and skills that the author has as a researcher.

6.6 Research implications

This section outlines the implications of research findings for theory and practice, and for further research.

6.6.1 Implications for theory

The main aim of this study was to identify a link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in the postgraduate writing process. More specifically, the research aimed at identifying the strong relationship between disciplinary knowledge and writing texts created by L2 postgraduate students.

Because the outcomes of this study have implications for pedagogy in second language acquisition (SLA) theory, and L2 models of teaching and learning writing, results were crucial in proposing "A model: writing process of an L2 disciplinary text" (See Chapter 5). The model was developed from the theoretical model: "Model for the L2 postgraduate writing process: a metadiscourse

perspective''. This model was also created in this study from the theory review in Chapter 2. Both proposed models of the writing process assume a metadiscourse perspective. Further research is required to test the proposed models considering discipline differences and implications of the models in particular contexts.

On one hand, the theoretical model, "Model for the L2 postgraduate writing process: a metadiscourse perspective'', involves the main factors that influence the L2 postgraduate writing process. Content knowledge and the communicative competence of an L2 postgraduate writer are crucial. The model indicates that a disciplinary text comprises disciplinary knowledge and substantial writing skills, which are supported by contextual factors, linguistic features, motivational factors and cognitive factors. These factors are intertwined to construct the academic text as a whole.

On the other hand, the proposed model, "A model: writing process of an L2 disciplinary text" indicates the link between L2 development and learning to write in L2 to negotiate meaning. Researchers have stated that this active role of an L2 user may facilitate the acquisition of writing as a literacy skill (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Ellis, 1994; Riazi, 1997; Skehan, 1998; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006c; J. Williams & Severino, 2004). The model not only points out the active role of the writer in the process of learning how to write in L2, but also suggests that the L2 writer moves on from an initial stage to a more advanced stage where both disciplinary knowledge and academic writing skills improve each time. At postgraduate level, an L2 student who is a communicator, a deep learner and a problem finder becomes an effective learner within a discipline, and an L2 discipline communicator, through the writing process.

The writing process, thus, becomes a learning/teaching process when contextual factors, motivational factors and cognitive factors interact with each other. The proposed model indicates that each time L2 writers go through the writing process in their discipline, they move from an earlier stage of academic writing knowledge to the next stage of development. The change of state in the learning

and teaching process consolidates the acquisition of writing as a literacy skill of the L2 user, and thus, helps the L2 writer to become an active member of their academic community, with recognition as a member of that community.

Other important contributions of this study are related to the processes and composing strategies students use when they write applying their L2 competence including metadiscourse aspects in their writing process (See Chapters 4 and 5). In general, the proposed models provided add new insights into understanding the academic writing process of L2 users at postgraduate level and they extend the literature discipline writing.

6.6.2 Implications for practice

The practical implications of this study are important to L2 learning and teaching practices. This research found a significant link between content knowledge and application of students' literacy skills that are produced work in academic writing contexts. The findings have the potential to assist L2 teachers to meet L2 students' needs in terms of (1) how they write the knowledge they have in their field; and (2) how they apply rhetorical and language organisation skills when writing an assignment in a second language. Though this study focussed mainly on the L2 writing process, the findings can also be applied to the first language academic writing process.

The study presents various issues associated with success in academic writing. One recommendation for teaching is the need to present course objectives clearly. A well defined course structure and clear presentation of assessment items will help students to achieve class goals. Results show that the presentation by the lecturer of the main objectives of the course, objectives of the assignments to be written as evaluation tasks, and clear presentation of assignment hints, all assist students to develop their academic writing. The benefits are enhanced when the lecturer provides specific details about the purpose of assignments, shares specific strategies with the class, and conducts individual/group consultations and

discussions that focus attention on elements for students to apply in writing assignments.

Several suggestions are offered to lecturers engaging with L2 postgraduate writers. The study suggests that L2 postgraduate writers need help to understand the nature of writing in their discipline. Thus, lecturers should support and guide their students as soon as they can identify that students are experiencing difficulties in adopting their new role as writers in their academic field. Lecturers' guidance could provide students with possible academic strategies that will help them to succeed in the completion of their writing tasks. This study revealed that permanent discussions on the assignment content and writing process during the semester were successful. Lecturers, however, need to be aware that the engagement and participation of the students in the discussion process might be affected by different factors including factors that are also part of the writing process: contextual, motivational, cognitive factors and linguistic features. Further research might be addressed to identify factors that affect engagement of students in the discussion whose final aim is to support the student's writing process.

This study is likely to provide further insights about the active role of the teacher in helping students to explore and learn more about academic writing in their discipline as proposed by Hyland (2004b). The study has highlighted the importance of assistance for students from teachers regarding different academic practices and demands in the disciplines and ways of expressing knowledge according to subject-specific literacies. However, more study is required to identify how teaching and learning assistance for L2 postgraduate novice-writers in the discipline can be made, to enable them to acquire literacy experience in their discipline. Analysis of teaching and learning assistance might involve the timing and staging of such intervention during the writing process.

This study also has practical implications for the complex nature of expressing meaning for and use of discourse markers in writing academic texts. Learners

have to be aware of the discourse markers they use to satisfy the expectations of the target audience. The study found that teachers should alert students to the rhetorical selection they as learner-writers have to make through their texts when they are seeking to negotiate meanings, for effective communication between writer and reader, and to promote for active involvement of the reader with the students' texts.

Use of personal pronouns has to be discussed by teachers according to the discipline demands. It has to be pointed out that use of pronouns is valid for presenting arguments and ideas by creating identity, voice and authority in texts. A personal note for the author of this study, from the perspective of an L2 postgraduate student refers to the voice and authority that I have through this thesis. It has to be said that because of the objective style followed in this study, my presence as writer has been weak. This goes against my role as opinion-holder initiator that I brought to this research. As with the students in this study, by following an objective style in this document, my voice and presence as a researcher were hidden. However, I do consider that I have presented thoughts and arguments in this document through linguistic forms that I have adjusted to communicate my points of view.

6.6.3 Implications and recommendations for further research

The main finding and thus the main contribution of this research to the knowledge of the field of second language writing has been its integral, connected and comprehensive approach towards understanding the complex link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills that L2 postgraduate writers engage in through in their academic community. Documented results from an authentic enquiry of a specific group of L2 participants in an academic discipline-specific community have provided the necessary evidence.

As a result the findings are useful for preparing strategies, methods, and curricula whose purposes are to assist not only postgraduate students, but also

undergraduate students in their disciplinary writing. The research question and sub-questions may be modified in future research projects.

Future study will also attempt to link students' perceptions about factors influencing the success in academic writing with their actual performance. This will provide the opportunity to investigate numerous issues that came up in this study. One such issue is the influence of peers' and lecturer's assistance on students' writing success. The present study found that support by the peer group as well as the lecturer was a positive factor in students' understanding of the assignment question, and helped students to focus their writing practices. Further research might focus on the importance of the influence of peers and lecturers on first year postgraduate students' writing process as well as varying influences on first year students and senior students in a postgraduate program.

A further issue to be explored in future research is the influence of discipline-specific academic literacy on students' experiences at university. Though L2 postgraduate writers may be considered to be independent learners, this study might inspire further research regarding the role of a disciplinary tutor when L2 postgraduate writers are acquiring academic literacy in their academic community. A comparative research study could address exactly what happens to L2 postgraduate writers when they work with disciplinary and language tutors and when they approach their writing process with a low level of disciplinary and language tutor assistance. Research of this kind might bring together two streams of research that currently seem to be running in parallel – research into students' and lecturers' perceptions about postgraduate academic writing in the disciplines, and research into faculty views on the importance of academic writing and commitment to teach and respond to writing in the disciplines.

Further studies are also needed regarding discourse markers as metadiscourse elements. Replicating this study in another business subject or other disciplines is required to get a deeper understanding of metadiscourse elements in the novice-writers productions. Though results of this study provide insights into the study

of L2 writer identity in academic writing, a relatively unexplored area in research (Tang & John, 1999), further studies are required. As a complement of this research, other studies could be orientated to analyse L2 postgraduate students' texts in a Business discipline, where the students have been alerted to the possibility of identity and connotation of authority projected by them as writers using powerful rhetorical forms such *"I"*, and the various forms of the first-person pronoun ("*my*", "*me*", *"my"*, *"mine"*, *"we"*, *"us"*, *"our" and "ours"*). Results might indicate whether the underuse of these pronouns depends only on the academic writing style students have been taught, or if other issues associated with the students' knowledge, culture, language competence and previous writing experience in their discipline also provide elements in order that students opt for their rhetorical invisibility in their texts.

6.7 Conclusions

This chapter recapitulates the study that has been conducted. It outlines and summarises the main findings of the research; it also presents the limitations and points out the research implications of the study has. Much of what postgraduate students need to write is linked specifically to their discipline — writing production, content knowledge, communicative conventions, academic writing skills and the student's role are intricate and intertwined.

Finally, this research project provided a better understanding of the key matters and theoretical requirements that lead to effective academic text writing. There are still many questions regarding a discipline text production to be solved, but this study offered valid elements to continue exploring the area of the L2 acquisition, L2 competence and L2 academic writing in a discipline.

Personally, writing the documents to this study has been a personal challenge as a second language writer. Similar to the student-participant in the study I had to develop reading and writing processes, apply academic strategies and go through a permanent learning process which led me to the final paper I present today to your consideration. I can say that by exploring how to write in a second language

in a discipline I have learnt how to write and become an L2 writer in my professional area. It is my aim to continue contributing to new knowledge in this research context.

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Appendices

Appendix A Learning strategies in a writing process

Learning Strategy	Description
Metacognitive	
Advance organizers	Making a general but comprehensive preview of the concept or principle in an anticipated learning activity.
Directed attention	Deciding in advance to attend in general to a learning task and to ignore irrelevant distractors.
Selective attention	Deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of language input or situational details that will cue the retention of language input.
Self-management	Understanding the conditions that help one learn and arranging for the presence of those conditions.
Advance preparation	Planning for and rehearsing linguistic components necessary to carry out an upcoming language task.
Self-evaluation	Checking the outcomes of one's own language learning against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy.
Cognitive	
Resourcing	Defining or expanding a definition of a word or concept through use of target language reference material.
Translation	Using the first language as a base for understanding and/or producing the second language.
Grouping	Reordering or reclassifying and perhaps labelling the material to be learnt based on common attributes.
Note-taking	Writing down the main idea, important points, outline, or summary of information presented orally or in writing.
Deduction	Consciously applying rules to produce or understand the second language.
Recombination	Constructing a meaningful sentence or larger language sequence by combining known elements in a new way.
Imagery	Relating new information to visual concepts in memory via familiar easily retrievable visualizations, phrases, or locations.
Key word	Remembering a new word in the second language by (1) identifying a familiar word in the first language that sounds like or otherwise resembles the new word, and (2) generating easily recalled images of some relationship with the new word.
Contextualization	Placing a word or phrase in a meaningful language sequence.
Elaboration	Relating new information to other concepts in memory.
Transfer	Using previously acquired linguistic and/or conceptual knowledge to facilitate a new language learning task.
Social/affective	
Cooperation	Working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information, or model a language activity.
Question for clarification.	Asking a teacher or other native speaker for repetition, paraphrasing, explanation and/or example

O'Malley and Chamot's typology of learning strategies (Ellis, 1994, p. 537).

Appendix B Communication strategies in a writing process

Communication strategy	Description of strategy
1 A*voidance*	
- *T*opic avoidance	Avoiding reference to a salient object for which learner does not have necessary vocabulary.
2 P*araphrase*	
-Word coinage	The learner makes up a new word (e.g. ´person worm` to describe a picture of an animated caterpillar).
-Circumlocution	The learner describes the characteristics of the object instead of using the appropriate TL items(s).
3C*onscious transfer*	
-Literal translation	The learner translates word for word from the native language.
-Language switch	The learner inserts words from another language.
4 *appeal for assistance*	The learner consults some authority – a native speaker, a dictionary.

Tarone's typology of communication strategies (Ellis, 1994, p. 397).

Appendix C Research Consent Form

The University of Southern Queensland
OPACS / Faculty of Education
Link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in second language postgraduate writing
Consent Form

Researcher: Patricia Salinas Gómez.
Master of Philosophy student - OPACS / Faculty of Education USQ
gomez@usq.edu.au , mMGT5000le number 04 3160 2457

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

I intend to identify specific aspects of the complexity of writing in second language (L2) in the context of a postgraduate program, specifically in a MBA coursework, MGT 5000 Management and Organisational Behaviour - Semester 1/2005. The study will mainly look at students' submitted first and second assignment texts, but also it will explore the students' and marker's ideas related to the writing process, composing strategies, and the strengths and weaknesses of the students' academic writing production. Collection of an electronic copy of each assignment as well as a semi-structured interview after each assignment submission will be used to collect information for this study. Two interviews, each taking about 30 minutes, will be conducted in person at OPACS- USQ. Both interviews will be recorded. From the obtained information, I will write a dissertation as a result of the investigation.

You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that I am using in the study. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me; please contact me at any time at the e-mail address / phone number listed above.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

1) Your real name will be only used for administrative purposes at point of information collection, or in the written assignment texts; instead, you and any other person and place names involved in your data will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports. In other words, your responses will be made in confidence, and will only be published in summary form after collation and analysis of all student responses.

2) If you grant permission for audio taping, no audio tapes will be used for any purpose other than to do this study, and will not be played for any reason other than to do this study. At your discretion, these tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you.

3) Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice, and the information collected, records and reports written will be returned to you. Be assured that if you choose not to participate in the study, or to withdraw from the study there would be no bearing on your marks.

4) You will receive a copy of the final report, so you will have the opportunity to know the results of the research.

Do you grant permission to be quoted directly? Yes ________ No ________

Do you grant permission to be audiotaped? Yes ________ No ________

I agree to the terms:

Respondent ____ Date _____________

I agree to the terms:

Researcher ____ Date _____________

If you have a concern regarding the implementation of the project, you should contact The Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee USQ or telephone (07)4631 2956.

Appendix D Interview-questionnaires

The University of Southern Queensland
Faculty of Education
Link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in second language postgraduate writing
Interview with students

This interview is part of a research, which intends to identify specific aspects of the complexity of writing in second language (L2) in the context of a postgraduate program, specifically in a MBA coursework. The study will mainly look at students' submitted first and second assignment texts, but also it will explore the students' and marker's ideas related to the writing process, composing strategies, and the strengths and weaknesses of the students' academic writing production.
Answer from your own experience. Your responses will be made in confidence and will remain anonymous. The following demographic details are for administrative purposes and will not be published.

Name:……………………..…………………….……………………….Date:…………..,..…….

Contact telephone number:………………………E-mail address:…………..…….….…………

Course: MGT 5000 Management and Organisational Behaviour **Semester**: 1/2005

1 What do you think makes a good assignment?
2 What process or processes (i.e. plan of activities) did you use for producing your assignment?
3 What composing strategies (i.e. sequence of writing activities) did you use for producing your assignment?
4 Did you have any difficulties or worries about writing up your assignment? What were they, if any?
5 What composition difficulties or worries did you have when writing your assignment?
6 What do you need to know about academic writing, disciplinary thinking, and communication processes to be successful?
7 How do you think writing for business is similar to or different from writing in another discipline?
8 Did you think about the reader of your assignment (i.e. your lecturer) when you were writing? What aspects of your writing did you think?
9 Do you think this influenced your writing? In what ways? (Did you change anything because of this?)
10 Did you use any kind of expressions to state your opinion, or to express something you were not sure it was correct or not? Can you remember which ones you used?
11 What do you think you have learnt while you were writing your assignment (i.e. content, writing process, academic expressions)?
12 What kind of strengths do you see in your academic writing?
13 What kind of weaknesses do you see in your academic writing?
14 Is there anything that I did not ask but you would like to add related to postgraduate student writing process?

Thank you for your help and information with this study.

The University of Southern Queensland
OPACS / Faculty of Education
Link between disciplinary knowledge and writing skills in second language postgraduate writing
Interview with markers

This interview is part of a research, which intends to identify specific aspects of the complexity of writing in second language (L2) in the context of a postgraduate program, specifically in a MBA coursework. The study will mainly look at students' submitted first and second assignment texts, but also it will explore the students' and marker's ideas related to the writing process, composing strategies, and the strengths and weaknesses of the students' academic writing production.
Answer from your own experience. Your responses will be made in confidence and will remain anonymous. The following demographic details are for administrative purposes and will not be published.

Name:…………………………………………………………Date:…………….......

Contact telephone number:……………… E-mail address:………………………….……

Course: MGT 5000 Management and Organisational Behaviour **Semester**: 1 – 2005

1 What do you think makes a good assignment?
2 What processes and strategies do you consider the students should use to produce their assignment?
3 What are the skills and strategies that students would need in order to write successfully in the MGT 5000 course?
4 How do you think writing for business is similar to or different from writing in another discipline?
5 What are some of the things that you have presented to students along with content teaching that could help them to decide what to include in their assignment?
6 Do you consider that students might have faced any kind of difficulties or worries about writing their assignment? What might they have been?
7 Do you consider students kept you in mind as their assignment reader when they were writing? How do you know?
8 What do you think students should have learnt while they were writing their assignment?
9 What kind of strengths do you see in the students' academic writing?
10 What kind of weaknesses do you see in the students' academic writing?
11 Is there anything that I did not ask but you would like to add related to postgraduate student writing process?

Thank you for your help and information with this study.

Appendix E Examples of categorisation

1. What do you think makes a good assignment?

c Have a good understanding of the assignment questions

(a) Ah, the other thing is that you have to understand the question. Eh, what, what it means? What is the, the tutor asks you in the question. What they want that you answer **(S1Int1)**.
(b) …, to have a clear understanding of the task eh question, in order to know how we need to answer all of the things and in order to clarify which ones are the ideas that you want lecturer checks over giving the assignment knowledge **(S2Int1)**
(c) A good assignment requires to read too much. For me in the second assignment even I have worked, I had to think about the topic and the questions that I have to answer. I had to discuss about the assignment with my classmates to understand well the questions, to understand about the assignment because I don't have good background in English **(S5Int2)**.

5. What composition difficulties or worries did you have when writing your assignment?

b. Lack of or low proficiency in L2

(a) Lack of… or low proficiency in L2 **(S3Int2)**
(b) Yes, Ah…English is difficult for me, so I'm worried about whether or not I misunderstand the topic **(S3Int2)**
(c) … for the background that I have in Spanish, we use to write down in different way and I already have experience writing down in Business area. So, I cannot write down like this, and sometimes when I start the assignment even that I was thinking in,… in my lecturer, ah when I review again my assignment I, I feel that I was writing down like in Spanish, so I should change the contents a little bit because I'm writing for, for my lecturer and maybe she will not understand my idea if I put it in this way **(S2Int1)**.

d. Not using vocabulary properly

(a) The skill of writing yeah is, is also difficult for me. The way to write, the thinking to write, the vocabulary to use… **(S4Int1)**
(b) I know vocabulary, but it's not enough. I think for example for the assignment two I, I had a problem with the, the vocabulary for example. I write a sentence I used eh some words, but when I asked someone for look of my assignment, read for me. He told me that I use to select very stronger, stronger words…but this is not very good, so I changed it. Because I need to change it, vocabulary changes, some I, I try to associate ba, ba, ba rather than the men do you know the difference **(S7Int2)**
(c) Do not use vocabulary properly **(S3Int1)**

11 What do you think you have learnt while you were writing your assignment (i.e. content, writing process, academic expressions)

a. Know more about writing academically through the writing experience itself

(a) Know more about assignment content **(S4Int1)**
(b) Know how to express conclusions in your paper **(S3Int1)**
(c) I learnt more the structure of the assignment, the introduction, the conclusion, I have more experience now about the structure **(S5Int2)**
(d) Know how to express own point of view **(S6Int1)**
(e) Achieve more writing experience **(S2Int2)**

Appendix F Discourse markers - Pronouns

They means 'I'

(1) Feedback is important for employee personal development as from a feedback an *employee* come to know how well **they** are performing **(L163A1)**

They means 'we'

(2)… However, as we know *people* are humane; **they** have conscience in the depths of their heart … **(L265A1)**.

'I' pronoun occurrences

(3) Communication: The MOF as employee such one arrive, which **I** have seen happen, the leadership trust for employee (X) to do report on department of budget…**(L575A2)**

(4)…one of the organisations that has undergone a change in structures; **I** have chosen Bharath Heavy Electrical Limited **(L993A2)**.

'Us' meaning writer and reader or I

(5) To support this statement, let **us** see some organisations which gave high priority to customers. **(L449A1)**

Appendix G Discourse markers - logical connectors

(1) These days many employees cognize the skill is important relevant to their ability in particular for future, **for instance** language training, engineering technical training, professionals training **(L319A1)**

(2) Because of his knowledge, background and reputation his employees trust Morris Chang to make the right decisions. He employed assertiveness with expertise. **For instance**, he strongly suggests his team member compliance with his decisions or requests when his team members cannot solve or argue about some uncertain situations. **(L102A2)**

(3) Most of the consultations should be addressed to solve individual management issues. **For example**, how to save money by changing suppliers… **(L310A2)**

(4) The use of non financial rewards **such as** training, flexible work hours, good employee relations, feedback and recognition at the workplace to motivate people are generating commitment, loyalty and long term motivation on employees. **(L407A1)**

(5) Some recommendations are given to facilitate the organisational change: the organisation has to follow and consider specific issues **such as** the top management support, structural support, communication and human resources **(L60A2)**

(6)…the good manager has other characteristics that must still be taken referring to aspects **as** high inhibition or controlled action, itself control – and wish to serve others stimulating… **(L79A1)**

(7) …traits **like** self reliance and independence enhances the group productivity **(L200A1)**

(8) So they are concentrating maximum on non-financial rewards **like** training, feedback, flexible work hours, recognition, etc. **(L490A1)**

(9) Softthink lacks such a groupware facilities **like** The Ford Motor Company... **(L195A1)**

(10) It is a code of moral and can be determined **as** value and any one in the organisation must have respect… **(L452A2)**

(11) This culture is generally great, **but** there is a need to pay attention to the balance of employees' workload, as the opposite of high standards… **(L104A2)**

(12) Communication and education were not developed properly by the leader, he planned to do it from the beginning **but** this was never done. **(L357A2)**

(13) It is not easy for a new manager to implement change successfully; **however** Mr Chen-hao overcame many barriers during change. **(L208A2)**

(14) In Softthink the decision making of the group is not effective **because of** the conflict between the two members. **(L251A1)**

(15) The general manager has to be present during the process of change **because** he is the person who brought the idea of change. **(L403A2)**

(16) In this case, the leader is one of the founders and he has managing the leadership of the company from the beginning. **As a result**, most of the norms, organisational values, routines and rituals… **(L327L2)**

Appendix H Discourse markers – Modals

(1) …a new lob title, promotion or simply recognise a well done job that could be a more effective motivator than money and **will** increase the loyalty toward the company. **(L410A1)**

(2) Money **may** not be an effective motivator in your culture although it may have some effect in short time. Your employees **may** also see factors aside from money as prime motivators. **(L479A1)**

(3) …appraisal results are used to identify the poorer performers who **may** require some form of counselling, training … **(L496A1)**

(4) In OPT some actions **can** be incompatible with one or more members and interpersonal frictions arise but the ability to resolve conflicts is an important attribute for members of the team. **(L112A1)**

(5) ..., however, from this case study, it **can** be seen that money is not the crucial incentive to work motivation. **(L78A2)**

(6) High performance occasionally **could** satisfy needs of an individual through any kind of reward, but sometimes not necessarily will lead to the satisfaction of these needs. **(L77A1)**

(7) …all these points support the main purpose of this strategy, and how the organisation **could** address those using non financial and financial rewards to find good performance of employees and of the company. **(L406A1)**

(8) …sales personnel needed to be convinced that customers **would** continue to trust their products. **(L48A2)**

(9) Manager **should** talk with employees, not just for give them more job or complain about their performance. **(L32A1)**

(10) The group **must** also follow the behavioural rules of company for decision making. **(L510A1)**

(11) The leader of the process **must** be an experienced person who has to be able to give a degree of formalization, standardization and centralization of the procedures and information from the beginning of the process. **(L403A2)**