

Research Proposal and Thesis Writing: Narrative of a Recently Graduated Researcher in Applied Linguistics.

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1 Introduction

In the last two and half decades, various disciplinary and organizational studies across the world have demonstrated a growing interest in narrative. As a fundamental form of human expression through which individuals are able to make sense of themselves, their lives, and events (Gergen, 1994; Hanninen, 2004), narratives construct a spatio-temporal context that assists in meaning-making. In particular, referring to narratives in organizational studies, Boyce (1995) posits that narratives constitute symbolic forms through which groups and members of organizations can construct meaning. Narratives also provide individuals with a means to express and shape their identities. A narrative approach can thus be useful for studying the process of doctoral writing.

Experiences in doctoral research education have been narrated largely from the perspectives of supervisors and examiners, although in the last decade we have begun to encounter an emerging large body of literature dealing with doctoral students' experiences recounted by the students themselves (e.g. Hanranhan *et al.*, 1999; Morton & Thornley, 2001; Noy, 2003; Stanley, 2004). This recent trend has partly been dictated by the influence of post-structuralism, critical discourse analysis, and feminism, which has challenged the way doctoral research education is reported. A key contribution of these orientations is the role of subjectivity, against the age-old valorization of objectivity, in reporting research.

Against this background, I first offer an account of the theory that underpins this paper. I then outline my quest for a PhD. Further, I focus on my engagement with the writing of three rhetorical units: the introduction, literature review, and methodology, in two related pedagogic genres (research proposal and thesis). In a reflective assessment of my experiences, I conclude the paper by highlighting some implications and suggest some areas for further research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

I adopt a reflective-narrative framework in this paper to explore the writing of the doctoral research proposal (RP) and thesis. The framework adopted locates a researcher firmly within the research process and acknowledges the role of the researcher's subjectivity.

Within this broad theoretical framework, I follow Noy (2003) by adopting an auto-ethnographic stance, suggesting that writing about and through oneself is a scholarly illumination. Here, the writer addresses himself/herself ('auto') as a subject of a larger social or cultural inquiry ('ethno') vis-à-vis revealing writing ('graphy') (Ellis, 1997). This genre enables a writer to foreground constitutive dimensions that might ordinarily be trivialized or silenced in conventional scientific discourse. In this sense, I foreground my personal, lived experience and voice the relationship with my research and processes, rather than product.

There are two ways by which auto-ethnography is presented. On the one hand, an auto-ethnography may be woven around theoretical issues, either implicitly or tangentially (Ronai, 1999; Dent, 2002). In such a case, its theoretical contribution revolves around the writers' intimate knowledge of the subject matter, and its complex articulation through the text. On the other hand, the theoretical and the personal perspectives can both be explicitly presented, sometimes separately (Ellis, 1997), and sometimes in an intertwined way, where they are in dialogue throughout the text (Gurevitch, 2000; Jones, 2002). The latter approach is chosen in this paper as I consider it to be more suitable in conveying my doctoral experience.

The choice of the latter approach implies allowing the theoretical and personal perspectives to be in dialogue. Throughout this paper, therefore, I may be seen to speak in two voices simultaneously: the narrator's voice that presents an experience, or a gamut of experiences, and the theoretical voice that conceptualizes what is presented. Though this may be a complicated task, there are benefits to be derived from this dialogic approach. On the one hand, those interested in the narration may benefit from a theoretical understanding of the process in which they are engaged. On the other hand, those who are favourably disposed to theoretical discourse may benefit from paying attention to

experiential testimony, at the risk of being put off by the seemingly under-developed argumentative structure of my narrative account.

In general, I adopt the narrative-reflective enquiry in my doctoral experience because such an approach can be revealing in terms of adding to the scholarship on narrative enquiry from a setting under-researched in the literature. Moreover, the narrative-reflective enquiry has often been used in the reflective practice traditions of Education, the Health Sciences, Gender Studies, and feminist research, but less so in Applied Linguistics, my broad area of interest. Besides, the present paper contributes to the scholarship on doctoral writing, and academic identity.

3 TOWARDS OBTAINING A PHD

I studied English at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), a preferred public university for many students in Ghana, graduating as a professional English Language and Literature teacher. Thereafter, I taught English Language and Literature in three different senior high schools, an elite school and two less-endowed schools, for eight years at different times. I pursued postgraduate studies in English at UCC and on completion taught at the Department of English at the same university for three years before commencing my doctoral studies overseas.

At the National University of Singapore (NUS), where I pursued my doctoral education, I explored the relationship between rhetoric and disciplinary variation in undergraduate writing produced by Ghanaian university students, focusing on the examination essays of representative courses in Literature, Sociology, and Zoology. My doctoral research contributes significantly, first, to the area of research in disciplinary writing at undergraduate level in a setting under-researched in the literature. Second, it contributes to genre studies by arguing that Swales' (1990) more rhetorical approach, which has often been associated with published writing, can be applied to undergraduate writing, given the findings in my research that suggest that students appropriate distinct 'moves' in writing their introductions and conclusions.

4 ENGAGING WITH THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (RP) AND THESIS

Swales (2004:101), a well-known applied linguist and genre analysis scholar, refers to doctoral research as a “generic chain”: Proposal, defense, thesis, approval for the thesis defense, defense of thesis, revisions to thesis, and award of degree. This paper focuses on the RP and thesis in this chain, given their relative importance in doctoral research education (Swales, 2004).

The doctoral RP is taken as a statement of intent, a legal document (Hofstee, 2006) which outlines the trajectory of the ‘theorology’ (theory-and-methodology) along which a researcher seeks to travel in order to reach his/her destination. It is also illuminating to consider a RP, argued by Punch (2000), as a phase, plan, process, and product in the entire doctoral research. Its audience primarily consists of a board of graduate studies, department, and a thesis committee whose concern is to assess whether the topic is suited to a doctoral level of study, whether the research scope is acceptable given the time available for completion, whether there is likely to be difficulty accessing sources to fulfill topic objectives, and what technologies might need to be learnt and used. Moreover, in this genre a doctoral researcher is obligated to market his/her research.

On the other hand, a completed and passed doctoral thesis is broadly conceived as a report of findings of a higher research study and represents substantial subject knowledge gained as well as the cultural, professional norms, and practices acquired during many years’ socialization process in a discipline. A good doctoral thesis also demonstrates accuracy, methodological rigour, meaningfulness to society, originality, contribution to knowledge, and publishability. In contrast to the RP, a thesis is of considerable size and seeks to show that the research has been properly conducted within, according to Parry (1998), the norms, argument structure, and discourse structure of a particular discipline. Besides, the audience for the thesis is widened from a board of graduate studies, department, and thesis committee to include examiners who are considered to be the primary audience. Ultimately, a doctoral thesis represents the peak of a student’s academic attainment.

4.1 First, the research proposal

At the outset, it should be pointed out that there were different versions of the RP, both in the process of writing and in meeting the demands of different audiences. Throughout this section, however, I refer to the final 50-page document I defended in an oral examination.

4.1.1 Topic and Introduction

Conle (2000) observes that feelings and experience come together in the first step of any doctoral research and, in particular, the RP. They come together in the motivation that generates initial involvement with a topic. Conle further indicates that this motivation traditionally derives from the researcher's personal interests, expertise, and the needs of the field, that is, from gaps in a body of knowledge

In my experience, these observations were largely accurate as, first, I had become interested in disciplinary writing, seeing that undergraduates from different disciplinary backgrounds who took a general university course (*Language, Literature and Society*) I had taught seemed to attach different levels of importance to the different organizational aspects of their essays. Second, I felt confident that my knowledge of discourse analysis was sufficient to help me undertake this task, though I later realized that it was not. Besides, the field of discourse analysis had expanded more rapidly in the last decades than I had thought. There was a need, therefore, for me to read broadly in order to adopt the most appropriate discursive analytical approach to my research. Third, I noted, rather faintly, the needs of the field, which only became clearer as I proceeded with the research and continued to navigate the terrain of disciplinary studies.

Apart from these intellectual considerations, I felt that the choice of a research topic should be constrained by practicalities. A study that might involve extensive and expensive travel was to be ordinarily out of the question. But given that my primary data were to be examination essays of Ghanaian students, and that I also needed to interview faculty and students at the University of Cape Coast – in Ghana – it was likely that I would have to travel from Singapore to Ghana for the data collection. This was what eventually happened. It was worth the trouble though as on my return to Ghana, I spent some time with my family, whom I had left for a year.

Against such intellectual and practical considerations, I chose to investigate this topic in Applied Linguistics: the interface between rhetoric and disciplinary variation. I discussed the viability of this topic with two professors who had served on my Master's thesis committee. Fortunately, they pledged their support. Specifically, I initially wanted to investigate three issues in relation to undergraduate writing: the macro-level aspects (introduction and conclusion) of examination essays; the micro-level aspects (cohesive devices); and the correlation between the quality of writing on the one hand and these macro and micro linguistic features on the other hand. Interestingly, my thesis committee members differed in their opinion each time the issue of the scope of my research topic came up. Whereas my supervisor felt there was the need for me to read widely on all three aspects and to decide later which one to focus on, one thesis committee member felt strongly that the scope was overly ambitious, arguing that the first (that is, the macro structure of student writing) could effectively be managed for a doctoral research. I eventually agreed with my supervisor.

Throughout the discussions with my thesis committee members on the scope of my research topic, I had had some uneasiness due to the experience I had in my Master's research. My Master's supervisor had commented that it was close to a doctoral thesis (in both breadth and depth of analysis) and felt that it could be upgraded to a doctoral thesis. However, due to the bureaucratic steps required at the University of Cape Coast, this idea was not followed through. Not quite certain about the difference between the scope of the Master's research and doctoral research, I had to ensure that my topic would allow for the depth, breadth, and rigour of analysis and discussion required in a doctoral work.

Once I was sure about the scope of my PhD research topic, I started working on the introduction to the RP. I considered the introduction crucial, given its contextualizing function for the entire research. Writing the introduction was quite a formidable task, as I had obtained much information from my reading. Since I needed to offer a background of the study and review the existing literature later in another chapter, the challenge was how much information I was to include in this early part of the RP. In response to my supervisor's suggestion, I adopted the general-specific discourse structure (Swales, 1990; Weissberg & Buker, 1990) in writing my introduction.

With specific reference to the content of my RP introduction, I had subheadings such as ‘motivation for the study’, ‘assumptions’, ‘scope of study’, ‘definitions of terms’, ‘limitations’, and ‘importance of study’, as advised in many pedagogic texts (e.g. Weissberg & Buker, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994, Hofstee, 2006). Looking at the content of RP later, I found that my RP did not contain a heading such as ‘background to the study’, although a close reading of my RP introduction revealed that the first seven paragraphs should have been titled as such. I feel the omission of this sub-heading made the initial part of the RP introduction less reader-friendly.

Also, the ‘statement of problem’ section often located early in the doctoral RP did not appear in my RP. My committee members did not seem to agree on its position as again one member felt strongly that it would be more logical to state it after the literature review section; I pandered to this view, though now I feel that to engage readers about my topic, the statement of the problem should have been made up front. The statement of problem was formulated as follows:

This research focuses on the relationship between knowledge of the subject content and discursal expression within the genre of examination answers written by nonnative users (Ghanaian undergraduate students) of English in three different disciplines, namely Biology, History, and Economics.

4.1.2 Literature Review

As I continued to search for the relevant information on my topic, I realized how my information literacy skills, computer literacy skills, and critical literacy skills had increased and improved. A by-product of all this too was that I began to experience ‘information overload’. Excited greatly about my ‘new discoveries’ and with the field becoming clearer, the pertinent issue became how much information to include in my literature review.

On the advice of my supervisor, I had to consider categorizing the various strands of information I had obtained. Categorizing the vast amount of literature into two broad sections as theories and empirical studies greatly helped to impose order on it and to focus my reading. At the time, the choice of four theories postulated by H. Grice, Michael Hoey, James Kinneavy, and John Swales was dictated by the research questions and my expectation that this would greatly assist in the interpretation of my findings.

Studies on discursive strategies (later changed to ‘rhetoric’ in the thesis) were organized on thematic and geographical lines. Apart from the principle of relevance, I upheld the principles of representativeness and currency in prioritizing the use of my sources for the literature review section.

Also, given that the literature review section offers the doctoral researcher the opportunity to deeply engage with other scholars in one’s disciplinary community (Hart, 1998; Dunleavy, 2003), one of my thesis committee members often reminded and constantly encouraged me to adopt a critical stance – to which I gladly and gratefully adhered. As I was not very familiar with this notion of a ‘critical stance’, I had an initial problem, rather simplistically perceiving it sometimes as sniffing for flaws in a work. When I found something wrong about a work, my position as a researcher who was yet to make my presence felt in the field made it difficult for me to express a clear position. My supervisor’s encouragement and her occasional reformulation of some aspects of my writing gradually led me to demonstrate a critical engagement in my RP.

4.1.3 Methodology

Once my topic had been conceptualized and I had framed an introduction, I turned my attention to the research approach that would enable me to answer the research questions.

To some extent, the literature on research methodology (e.g. Bell, 1993; Flick, 1999; Creswell, 2002) I read offered some guidance with regard to the possible approaches I might use. At the time, one basic approach that appealed to me was the ‘descriptive research paradigm’, which broadly emphasized the benefit of collecting data in an authentic situation, rather than having a contrived set of data (Allison, 2002). It was also clear at the onset that I needed not only the examination essays for the textual analysis but also the interviews and questionnaire as a device by which to ‘triangulate’ the data. At this point, much as I tried to anticipate what my actual fieldwork was going to be like, I was limited in my ability to capture every detail.

Nonetheless, as advised by my supervisor, I had to consider some the number of scripts that might be accepted as a reasonable sample for a study at the PhD level, the number of questionnaire respondents, and the number of faculty and students to be

interviewed. Deciding on the exact number in each case meant dealing with the issue of sampling technique. Here my knowledge of research methodology helped me to choose a particular sampling technique with respect to the three research areas. Of course, I also had to describe the research site, that is, Ghana, which had not featured in studies in disciplinary variation. I also had to spell out two stages in the collection of data: the pilot and the main study.

Writing the methodology section, I did not experience as much difficulty as I did when I wrote the introduction. This relative ease might have been due to the expository nature of the methodology section in RPs, in contrast to the more cognitively demanding and argumentative nature of the introduction. Besides, although scholars such as Tang and John (1999) as well as Starfield and Ravelli (2006) have mentioned the frequent use of the personal pronoun in conjunction with verbs denoting research activities in the methodology section, there was only one instance where I used the personal pronoun 'I' in my methodology section. Even more surprising was the absence of cited references. Possibly, I was still trying to find my way in either the general research methodology literature or the research methodology literature of Applied Linguistics.

4.2 And then, the thesis

As was the case in my engagement with the RP (Section 4.1), I focus on the final version of the thesis which was submitted for examination. This version had undergone several drafts with the guidance of my supervisor and other thesis committee members.

4.2.1 Topic and Introduction

I count myself fortunate that from the beginning of my doctoral education, I did not encounter problems with the choice of a topic for my research. As discussed above (Section 4.1.1), this topic had been motivated by professional, pragmatic, and personal concerns.

Following discussions with my thesis committee members after the defence of the RP, the issue of the scope of my research topic had to be revisited. With support from my supervisor, I decided to focus only on the first strand, that is, the relationship between the macro aspects (introductions and conclusions) and disciplinary variation (Literature,

Sociology, and Zoology). The choice of different disciplines from the ones in the RP, namely Biology, Economics, and History, was pragmatic. I had to change from Biology to Zoology as I noted that there was no department or discipline by that name at UCC, my research site. Although I was interested in disciplines that encouraged a reasonable amount of sustained writing, I thought History students were likely to write too much, thus making the basis of comparison very difficult. In place of History, therefore, I chose Literature. On arriving in Ghana to collect data, the head of Department of Economics did not allow me access to the examination essay scripts, insisting that they were 'security materials'. I was disappointed and surprised about this turn of event as I had thought that my status as an 'insider' (that is, a member of the university) should have guaranteed easy accessibility to those scripts. I quickly contacted my supervisor by e-mail and agreed to select Sociology in place of Economics. Fortunately, the head of department of Sociology was very co-operative.

In hindsight, I realize that a second strand involving the correlation between the quality of writing on the one hand and these macro linguistic features on the other hand would have made my research more interesting. In fact, one examiner had expressed a similar opinion. At the time I thought the inclusion of this aspect would make my research too unwieldy, given the time constraint. When I presented a report on my completed PhD work to my department at UCC, the discussion that ensued similarly revealed how this aspect (that is, the correlation between quality of writing and the use of the selected macro features) would have added to the quality of my research. I take these views as complimentary; indeed, I had alluded to this interest in my work as a possible area for further research in my concluding chapter (see Afful, 2005).

In addition, I spent much time working on the introduction of the thesis. Craswell (1994) opines that two approaches tend to be adopted in the writing of introductions: writing the introduction first so as to gain a sense of the whole study, even though this will eventually need to be re-written, and writing the introduction after the body of the thesis is complete. I chose the former. Since part of my research itself was on introductions in undergraduate writing, I was conscious about the nature, length, and quality of the introduction to my own doctoral thesis. At issue again, as was the case in the writing of the RP, was the extent to which I had to include some of the literature

review material in the background of the study. This became even more pronounced as I had to substantially rewrite the introduction. There was very little resemblance between the RP and thesis introductions; of course, the latter was lengthier than the former. The idea was to give readers just enough to whet their appetite.

However, as I continued to read the literature after the defence of my RP, I realized together with my supervisor that instead of having ‘statement of problem’ as I did in the RP, I could have a section titled ‘Research questions’ made up of a general statement followed by the underpinning research questions of the study. The earlier part of the section entitled ‘Research questions’ in my thesis read as follows:

The study examines the extent of disciplinary variation in two salient rhetorical features within the examination essays written by non-native speakers of English, viz, Ghanaian undergraduates. In particular, I explore how second-year undergraduates orient their readers to their examination essays with respect to the use of introductions and conclusions in three different disciplines, namely English, Sociology, and Zoology.

As noted, this articulation of the purpose of my research in the thesis did not markedly differ from the ‘statement of the problem’ in the RP (refer to Section 4.1.1). I feel the location of the research questions in the thesis had one key merit: it provided the reader with knowledge of the driving force behind the research from the onset.

4.2.2 Literature review

I now recount how I handled the literature review section in my thesis along the following lines: source identification, source use (paraphrase, quotation, summary), positioning in relation to sources, technical accuracy, and organizational format.

First, concerning source identification, when I started writing drafts of my thesis, I was already familiar with various information-seeking behaviors expected of doctoral researchers: the use of data bases, search engines, e-journals, inter-library loan facilities, library staff, and personal communication. There was very little assistance that was offered by my supervisor, who had correctly assumed my competence in these areas. By using search engines, especially Google, and various databases for the Humanities, I located materials that became useful for the literature review section and other aspects of the thesis. In addition, I obtained three relevant theses from overseas universities through

the inter-loan library facility of NUS. As I was experiencing ‘information overload’, I began to wonder about the extent to which all the information I had accessed could be used.

Bruce’s (2001) instructive discussion on the eight criteria – topicality, comprehensiveness, exclusion, breadth, relevance, currency, availability, and authority – to consider under coverage when writing the literature review section proved liberating and enlightening. Although I tried very hard to record the details of all references, I realized that citation details such as date, place and name of publisher, and page (depending on the type of materials) were missing in some cases. This was frustrating, especially when the information involved was crucial to my ability to make an argument, and I had time limits set for the submission of my drafts. I also had to decide whether to paraphrase or quote (phrases, rather than sentences or whole passages). As advised by one of my thesis committee members, I quoted passages that were more than a sentence only when I felt absolutely sure that there was no substitute or better way of recapturing points raised in my thesis.

On my positioning in relation to the literature, I tended to allow my voice to run through the personal pronoun. Interestingly, discourse analysts such as Hyland and Swales have noted that the first personal pronoun appears to be the most visible way of demonstrating one’s voice. At the same time, Kamler and Thomson (2006: 57) argue: “the question of the personal and doctoral writing is more complex than that suggested by advocating or abhorring the use of I/we”. One examiner noted that I had generously used the personal pronoun in the thesis. Referring to Ivanic’s (1998) and Tang’s and John’s (1999) work on authorial visibility enabled me to correct this anomaly; the methodology section provided ample opportunity for me to use the personal pronoun, but less so in the results, discussion, and conclusion sections. Also in positioning myself in relation to the extant literature, I used hedging strategies, reporting verbs, and evaluative terms. All these linguistic features enabled me to assert an authorial voice through a careful interaction between my personal opinion, other author’s work, and my research activities.

The next aspect of my engagement with the literature related to technicalities in terms of the accuracy of citation such as correct spelling of names of scholars, punctuation in in-text citation, and the consistency of the principle adopted in the

sequencing of the names of scholars in multiple-author in-text citations. I noted that ensuring consistency in the use of punctuation in multiple-author in-text citations and the choice of chronology, recency, or alphabetical principle, could add to the scholarly nature of the thesis. I adopted the chronological principle in my multiple-author in-text citations as I felt that that was most logical. My supervisor's caution that any carelessness in handling the above-mentioned technical aspects of the thesis would indicate solecism and lead to examiners 'nosing' for more 'serious' errors was helpful.

Apart from these four aspects of my engagement with the literature, my literature review section was organized around two aspects: conceptual framework and empirical studies, as already mentioned in my writing of the RP. However, instead of a combined framework of four theories in the RP, I chose only one, the Swalesian socio-rhetorical approach. A new dimension in my discussion of Swales was an exhaustive explanation of why other socio-rhetorical approaches were rejected. Similarly, in the empirical studies section of the thesis, I included studies on disciplinary variation from the view point of synchronic/diachronic studies, nature of disciplinarity, mode of studies, and linguistic features. As it turned out, I had two chapters for the literature review, one for the theoretical framework and the other for the empirical studies. This became necessary given the extensive nature of my literature review, which in itself reflected the expanding nature of the field of disciplinary studies.

4.2.3 Methodology

After the defence of my RP, I decided that a case-study research approach was an appropriate way in which to begin to examine the fundamental aspects of my research topic. Case studies can comprise a single person, or household, department, an institution or organization or community or even a country. This focus can be on description or an explanation, and they involve a single case or multiple case studies (Wallace, 1998; Bassegy, 1999). Case studies allow for a mixing of methodological approaches from, for example, participant observation or intensive interviewing, to quantitative surveys. In a case study, the actual data gathered by researchers is specific to a particular context (Gillham, 2000), and thus the results may not be statistically generalisable. However, I

still hoped that my choice of multiple-case studies approach will provide an insight into disciplinary proclivities in undergraduate writing.

The most appropriate unit for analysis in my research was the department. The main issue, however, was one which confronts many researchers conducting studies in the various disciplinary communities. How many case studies should be used? A large number of cases would allow more comparison to be made, and would presumably render the findings more generalized. But as I clarified the theoretical constructs underpinning my work, it became clear that detailed studies of three departments would yield more valuable insights than would the coverage of more departments.

Throughout the period of my PhD thesis writing, I became increasingly aware of the importance that should be attached to methodology, particularly in a mainly qualitative study where the ground rules are less precise. This concern with methodology was itself a developmental process to me as I immersed myself in the literature of qualitative methods and experienced first-hand research in the field. So I was able to extend my understanding and to adapt and develop a type of methodology which I believed was appropriate to the nature of my research and more importantly in line with the trend in genre analysis, which combines both textual analysis and interviews (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2000).

As in the previous rhetorical sections (that is, introduction and literature review) the question of how much information to incorporate in the methodology chapter proved equally onerous. One key issue was whether or not I should include the pilot study I had conducted. It was difficult to resolve this issue, but in the end I reported the pilot study in the methodology chapter and reported the preliminary analysis later in a separate chapter to ensure a 'thick' description and the reliability of the entire research. The second issue was whether or not to include mention of the limitations of the study in the methodology section. Concerned that the chapter on methodology was becoming too long, I included only the limitations pertaining to the data collection process in the methodology chapter, and included the others in the last chapter (conclusion).

In general, I found the writing of both the RP and thesis 'messy' and reiterative, thus reflecting the view that doctoral education is an interaction of the research activity itself and writing, as posited by Lee (1998) and Kamler and Thomson (2006).

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this concluding section, I discuss three main implications in respect of my engagement with the doctoral RP and thesis, before suggesting some areas for future research.

The first implication of this paper is the contribution my work makes to the emerging scholarship on narrative research as a mode of reporting the experiences of doctoral researchers (e.g. Gonzalez *et al*, 2001; Bench *et al*. 2002; Stanley, 2004). Undoubtedly, doctoral students live their lives through telling stories about themselves; through these stories they express what they value and construct others' opinion about themselves. These stories may be told in different ways, from a fluent to a chaotic narrative; mine is none of the two. Further, my account can be regarded as a therapeutic process in which I try to cope with my doctoral writing experiences. My 'story' highlights uncertainties, frustrations, and an eventual sense of victory – all part of the doctoral experience. Beyond all this, by making a relatively personal account of my experiences public, I believe my story can serve as an inspiration and a challenge to many doctoral researchers who are either writing the RP or thesis.

Second, my story makes a contribution to doctoral writing research. In particular, it centers on the writing of three rhetorical aspects of both the RP and thesis in Applied Linguistics. An upshot of the account is the relatedness of the two genres and yet how different they are (Swales, 2004) in terms of their purpose, audience, complexity and length. My experience shows that both genres offer very useful points of entry into a disciplinary community in view of the differing level of depth and breadth of socialization conveyed through constant writing of drafts, dialoguing with a number of disciplinary specialists, and interacting with various support systems (either face-to-face or virtual), consistent with the literature on Higher Education and Advanced Academic Literacy (Swales, 2004; Hofstee, 2006). Moreover, there are recognizable changes in the process of writing both the RP and thesis, suggesting both genres as living and working documents, as demonstrated in my reflections on both genres.

The final issue is academic identity, which is embedded in the doctoral researchers' interaction with various support networks as they (doctoral researchers) start writing the RP, culminating in the thesis. My 341-page thesis is a build-up of my 50-page

RP; but as I now look at the two documents, they are different. Can it be said that a "different work" amounts to a "different researcher?" If so, this is in accord with Kamler and Thomson (2006) and Starfield and Ravelli (2006), who suggest that doctoral thesis writing constitutes a becoming or identity work. Clearly, in both the doctoral RP and thesis writing, we undergo some transformation. That change, or shift, is a natural consequence of intellectual and scholarly growth, and unfolds within psychological, social, organizational and research contexts (Delamont *et al.*, 2000; Austin, 2002). I noticed how I had acquired a scholarly or academic identity: My becoming is reflected in my doctoral RP and thesis, which I now view not only as products, but also as a reflection of their own becoming.

Based on my narrative and its implications, I offer some suggestions for further research. First, in my narrative three rhetorical units, namely introduction, literature review, and research methodology of the RP and thesis were highlighted. Other internal rhetorical aspects such as discussion and conclusion as well as peripheral rhetorical units such as table of contents, acknowledgements, abstract, and bibliography could be investigated with a view to showing how doctoral researchers engage with them. Secondly, my narrative takes into account my background as an applied linguist, hence my narrative was woven around rhetorical units with the interpretation grounded not only in the literature of applied linguistics but also in higher education and advanced academic literacy literature. Further research, still employing the narrative mode, could flag the emotions of the researcher as s/he experiences the various rhetorical aspects of doctoral research. Finally, interested researchers could also consider how doctoral researchers experience other equally significant aspects of doctoral research education such as the revision of thesis and thesis defence.

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