READING BETWEEN TEXTS: THAI POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' INTERTEXTUAL FRAMING AND METACOGNITION USE IN READING

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Abstract

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Many factors influence students' reading practices. In the case of international students, home country educational practices and socio-cultural factors may pose a greater influence than for local students. This study reported here, part of a larger study, investigated the intertextual framing practices used in reading by a cohort of Thai postgraduate students in their first and third semesters at an Australian university and their self knowledge of these practices. An ethnographic approach was used incorporating individual interviews and pair think-aloud protocols. In addition, interviews were conducted with postgraduate students at a Thai university to provide further explanation of Thai postgraduate reading practices. It was found that there were significant changes between first and third semesters as the students accommodated to the new cultural environment and the requirements of their studies. These changes were facilitating the amount and kind of reading they were required to interpret and evaluate.

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Introduction

Many universities over the last decades have had increasing enrolments of international students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Many of these students experience difficulties as they have to face a double cultural shift i.e. a shift from school to university study and from study where they use their first language to a place of study where they have to use their second language. Postgraduate students, in particular, can experience significant difficulties. One area that is often problematic, but which has received little attention, is the reading practices of international postgraduate students (Zuber-Skerritt and Ryan, 1998).

Reading is a complex skill influenced by background knowledge, educational upbringings, cultural attitudes to reading and expectations regarding the purpose of reading. International students arrive at Australian universities with diverse cultural, linguistic, religious and educational backgrounds (Ninnes et al., 1999) sometimes far removed from those of their host country. These differing backgrounds may lead to differing expectations and hence differing approaches to their reading which may or may not serve the requirements of their postgraduate studies. The factors which may influence their reading approaches include the way the English language was used in their home country, the educational style of teaching language in Thailand and background knowledge which can be applied to a text to aid understanding.

English Language Use in Thailand

In Thailand English is used in all the public domains but little used in the private domains, e.g. in the home. Pornpimol (1984 cited in Cheshire, 1991) has listed six domains in which English is currently used in Thailand: the educational system; government agencies; the private sector; the élite community in Thailand; the media; publications.

The élite English speaking Thais are often those who have studied in English speaking countries overseas and have been given the name of 'nag-rêan-noog' by other Thais. Pornpimol, according to Cheshire (1991), believes there is a unique Thai variety of English and the Thainess in Thai English can be seen in the use of pretentious words, wordiness and modes of address. The Thai English to which the Thai student has been exposed may have implications for the English authored text structures they have to negotiate when studying at an Australian university.

While English language usage in students' home countries is an important factor to consider when investigating the influences on reading at an Australian university, it is difficult to separate language from culture (an underlying assumption of intercultural theory is that language and culture are inextricably intertwined (Milhouse, 1996).

Instructional time is often not given to connotative awareness in international students' home countries. A study by Yamamoto and Swan (1989) illustrates this. They conducted a survey and a test with 76 Japanese teachers of English and 28 native English speaking teachers and found that teachers immersed in one cultural background may 'pass along images that do not necessarily correspond to the connotations held in other societies' (p.244).

Lexico-Grammatical Competence

Lexico-grammatical competence, while encompassing the notion of grammatical and structural competence, also relates to the type of English learnt in the home country. Moreover, 'different cultures may promote different levels of metalinguistic awareness' (Hall and Guthrie, 1982:133) thus influencing a student's interpretation of a text. For example, at the purely linguistic level, students may miss cohesive markers and other signposts in texts and, if reading is slow, may not have the time to relate a text to other related texts to gain further understanding.

Students may, of course, have a high level of English language but of a variety more appropriate for intranational use in their own country than in the host country (Pride, 1982). A study by Bell (1994) set up to investigate the variety of Englishes and cultural assumptions learnt by Singaporeans in their home country and the implications when these students studied at an Australian university, found these students were not aware of the linguistic differences they may meet and have to address in Australia. As Pride (1982) says, '…the language learner cannot help but transfer into his use of English certain of the more deep-seated culture-bound communicative competencies which he has acquired and developed in his native language or languages, while at the same time having to learn new communicative competencies appropriate to the target, non-native language' (p.5).

Much of the reading research has tended to focus on the comprehension abilities of a reader i.e. the product of reading, or on individual components of the reading process. For example there have been a variety of studies incorporating the examination of the influence of text structure on reading. Another area of research has focussed on the difficulties experienced by readers related to the structures of academic texts (Bhatia, 1993; Hinkel, 1994; Swales, 1990).

Background Knowledge

Other researchers have examined the construction of the meaning process of academic texts in relation to the cultural context of a text. In an attempt to investigate the connection between appropriate strategy use and comprehension of science texts McLoughlin (1995), for example, specifically designed a study to explore how cultural background knowledge and linguistic variables influence students' reconstruction of scientific texts. No differences emerged between the Australian and the Singaporean students with regard to recall of main ideas or awareness of text structures. The Malaysian students, in the study, however, recalled fewer main ideas and showed less awareness of argument structure.

One of the most important insights from a review of 66 studies involving traditional written texts and on-line texts incorporating both knowledge and interests by Alexander et al. (1994) was the impact of subject-specific knowledge. 'Specifically when there was a match between subjects' avocations or vocations and the subject matter of the text, there were significant and positive outcomes reported'(p.219). They added that when there is a poor match, readers cannot process the information in the text effectively. In this situation, students must rely on whatever relevant conceptual knowledge they can muster.

Methodology

The research reported here used metacognitive and framing theories as a grounding to explore the reading practices, adjustments and self awareness of adjustments to the reading practices of a Thai cohort of postgraduate students when reading in English at an Australian university.

Armbruster et al.(1982) and other researchers discuss reading to learn from a metacognitive perspective as it relates to four specific variables: Knowledge of tasks, Knowledge of text structures, Knowledge of strategies and their applications, and Knowledge of own learner characteristics (Knowledge of Self). This aspect of metacogniton, Self Knowledge was explored in this study. Another aspect of metacognition, the notion of self-efficacy, embodying the elements of self-appraisal and self-management, is generally accepted as part of any definition of metacognition (Paris and Winograd, 1990). Insights on this aspects arose in this study.

Reid et al. (1998) argue that construction of meaning always involves framing. The basic premise of frame analysis, according to Reid (1996:92) 'is that appropriate interpretation presupposes an ability to recognise the framing devices (mainly linguistic) which convey metamessages'.

MacLachlan and Reid (1994) describe the four types of framing as follows:

- Extratextual framing occurs when a reader uses his background knowledge and experience to assist in interpreting the text;
- Intratextual framing is when a reader uses cues, such as headings and subheadings, cohesive devices etc. within a passage to interpret;
- Circumtextual framing occurs when a reader takes into account the cover of a book or journal, and peripheral features such as title and abstract to build a picture of the text; and
- Intertextual farming is when a reader links other readings with his present reading to help make sense of the present reading.

Intertextual framing was explored in the part of the study reported here.

Specifically, this part of the research reported here set out to:

- Investigate the intertextual framing and Self Knowledge aspects of the reading practices of a group of Thai postgraduate students while studying at an Australian university during their first semester and third semesters;
- Identify the educational and socio-cultural influences on these reading practices, some of which would be derived from practices and experiences in their home countries;
- Identify the changing influences which had impacted on their reading practices in order to gain an understanding of the reasons for the adaptations in reading practices.

This study, using an ethnographic approach, incorporated qualitative case studies, an appropriate method when the purpose of the study was to 'provide a rich, intensive description of a single entity and the phenomena surrounding it' (Ivey, 1999:176). It incorporated individual interviews to investigate the reading practices involved in interpreting academic text by a sample of international postgraduate students from Thailand who were studying at an Australian university. The individual interviews elicited information on general aspects of reading and background reading as well as reading practices related to subject-specific text in the Australian context.

Pair think-aloud protocols, followed by retrospective interviews, were also conducted in order to establish how students read general-interest text while in the process of reading. The pair think-aloud protocols provided data on the actual thinking processes of the students at the time of reading general-interest text. In this way, data could be gathered for a comparative study of the students when interpreting general-interest text and when interpreting subject-specific, academic text and, for a longitudinal study to show the changes in reading practices used by the students between first and third semester. The use of pair think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews gave the participants the opportunity to become aware of, and then reflect on, their reading practices between first and third semester.

Inductive data analysis was employed as an ethnographic approach was used. In other words, broad categories were used to analyse the data but detailed categories were not imposed upon the data. The data analysis incorporated seven phases. Firstly, data were coded and put into categories, broadly defined framing and

metacognitive categories, from the Thai individual interviews and the Thai pair think-alouds. Secondly the interviews were then grouped, compared and re-analysed; thirdly the interviews and pair think-alouds were grouped together and re-analysed and interpreted to provide explanations of the students' reading practices. The same process took place in third semester enabling a seventh phase, a comparison between case studies in first and third semester.

Two texts were used for the study, a discipline-specific academic text (chosen by each participant) and a general-interest text (chosen by the researcher). The participants were asked to read their own discipline-specific text prior to the interview and were advised that they would be asked questions relating to how they had approached the reading of this article.

The general-interest texts for the pair think-aloud protocols were chosen from the New Scientist, 'This Week' segment. The text used for first semester protocols was entitled 'Deadly worm may be turning drug-resistant' and the one for the third semester protocols was entitled 'French officials on poisoning charge'. These particular texts were chosen because they were one page general-interest pieces with intratextual features of a picture, a table and a highlighted sentence situated in the middle of the piece. As the texts both came from the 'This Week' page they also incorporated a similar style of writing, enabling a comparison and examination of the changes in reading practices between first and third semester. In addition, the texts did not require any technical knowledge and the participants could be expected to have some background knowledge of the topics to assist them. The texts, also, did not deal with political, religious or any culturally sensitive matter.

The texts, moreover, comprised only approximately 750 words and so could be read within the time allowance of one hour. It was important that participants had the time to read an entire article and not just a few paragraphs of a text. In this way, they could observe the structure of the entire text and use any knowledge they had of intratextual features. The texts, too, were authentic in that there were no 'planted' inconsistencies or errors.

The texts were read by pairs of participants who were asked to vocalize their thoughts as they were reading. Data were also gathered from a field trip to a Thai university. These data helped to explain and better understand Thai students' experiences and reflections on their reading practices during their study at an Australian university.

The six Thai participants were chosen for the study because they had only just arrived in Australia to embark on postgraduate study. They had all completed their undergraduate study at Thai universities and the main language they used at home was Thai. These common aspects enabled the researcher to investigate the Thai socio-cultural and educational influences which might impact on their reading practices on first taking up their study at an Australian university and later in third semester when the researcher was able to identify the changes in reading practices which were taking place as they progressed through their study. While not being able to compare the practices of Thai students reading texts from a particular discipline area, the fact that the participants were studying in different fields enabled the researcher to gain insights into the relationships between the differing educational and

knowledge backgrounds of the participants and their reading practices. Brief profiles of the participants now follow.

A1, aged 33 and female, as well as completing her studies in Thailand had also been a lecturer at a Thai university. She was enrolled in a PhD in chemistry in Australia. She had a secondary and tertiary background in chemistry. She explained that her reading experience in Thailand latterly consisted of reading textbooks related to teaching as she had had no time for research. The texts she read were in Thai or English.

A2, aged 25 and female, was a Thai Chinese enrolled in a graduate Diploma course in Design. In Thailand she had been a research assistant at Thammaset University, a journalist, an assistant teacher in German and Thai languages and secondary school teacher of art. She withdrew from her course after the first pair think-aloud and was replaced by a male (A2[2]) who had been a lecturer in computer science in Thailand at a Bangkok College. At the time of the interview, he was enrolled in a PhD in computing. During his last ten years of lecturing in Thailand he reported that he had not written in English and only spoke in English when an English speaking lecturer visited. Like A1 he had done little reading in Thailand due to lack of time.

B1, female, was studying for a PhD in computer science; she had been a university lecturer in Thailand. Her experience in Thailand was similar to that of the other students. She said she only read to prepare for classes for her students. There had been no time for research.

B2 was also a university lecturer in Thailand and he was enrolled in the Public Health field of study. He withdrew from the university shortly after his first pair think-aloud. He was replaced with a postgraduate female student from the education faculty (B2[2]).

C1, aged 30 and male, was a lecturer of art in Thailand. He was enrolled in a Masters in Visual Arts in Australia.

C2, aged 24 and female, was enrolled in a graduate Diploma in Banking and Finance in Australia.

The part of the study reported here focuses on the Knowledge of Self component of metacognition and the intertextual framing used by this Thai cohort.

Knowledge of Self

Early in first semester the six Thai participants appeared generally to already have realised that they had much reading to do. Their earlier reading was not sufficient to meet the expectations of their new study environment and their postgraduate requirements, in particular. The purposes for reading, they realised, too, were different in their new study environment.

The participants recognized that, because of the volume of reading required, it was not possible to read to memorise facts for examinations; they were, however, still

reading, as one participant stated, to 'get' ideas, i.e. reading facts to 'get ideas' rather than to discuss or critique any texts they read. A2 pointed to the influence of the educational system in Thailand which encouraged reading to learn facts rather than reading to critique, a necessary skill even at undergraduate level at an Australian university.

Although discussion of texts was encouraged in their tutorials, the participants said discussion posed a considerable challenge for them. A2 explained that, in Thailand, students could not argue about a text out of 'respect for teacher' and so the students read for information.

They were also challenged because of their imperfect pronunciation, the practice of translation and the lack of confidence in their oral abilities. A1 explained that she not only translated when taking down notes at lectures but while trying to speak with her supervisor even though she was aware that translating was making her discussions a slow and difficult process; translation was confusing for her, she reported, because she was not confident about putting 'words in the right order'. However, she was managing to memorize technical terms in English.

There was a cultural expectation that the lecturer would lead. At the same time, there was the desire by the participants to be self-directed and to participate on an equal basis with the other students. However, their oral capacity and lack of knowledge of technical terms inhibited them.

B2[2] pointed out that she had been used to step-by-step guidance. She explained the mismatch in expectations between the Australian lecturers and herself:

> *They* [Australian lecturers] *do not say, 'I want the issue, I want the problem': we have to think about that.*

The participants soon found, then, that learning in an Australian university was an independent enterprise.

Observations in Thailand showed that students were accustomed to working in informal groups and, in fact, it seemed almost impossible for them to work alone and offer comment on a text without first consulting with their peers. They expressed, too, how they found it difficult to express orally what they were thinking. One student explained his difficulty this way to me:

> *I don't speaking English but I smile!*

Differing Expectations

The participants soon found out that learning in an Australian university was an independent enterprise and they were expected to engage in self-directed learning. Even lecturer assistance was not available when questions needed to be answered as B2 found. When she asked a lecturer for assistance, his response only served to reinforce the fact that she could not expect the same level of guidance as in Thailand:

> *Now everybody listen in the same time what I said; it mean you got the same information from me*

Intertextual Framing

Generally the participants had come to Australia with little reading behind them and so it was difficult for them to link arguments and views presented in their current reading with previous readings. C2 explained why it would have been unwise to have read academic texts in Thailand other than those suggested by lecturers. Students, she said, read to answer examination questions and there was the fear that, if they read other than the prescribed texts, information learnt from those might not be appropriate for the examination questions. Besides, she added, lecturers in Thailand gave out outlines of the examination and advised students which chapters would cover the questions. There was also little opportunity to discuss different cultural examples for lecturers used Thai examples instead of the American examples from the prescribed texts.

In addition, lecturers such as B1 had little time for research and, in any case, it was difficult to find research articles in Thailand – especially ones such as she brought to the interview – an overview of multimedia systems. There was also difficulty in following up references because the process of borrowing was long and complex. C1 and As reported that, even if they visited the prestigious Chulalongkorn university library, it could take a whole day or they might not be able to borrow at all if the university chose to admit only its own students.

Intertextual framing can also be carried out through the Internet but the participants considered this method had limitations because, for them, it was time consuming.

Cartoons

The text used for first semester protocols discussed how a human parasite, according to British scientists, could have begun to resist the drug, mainly used, Praziquantel; other researchers and the WHO discounted this claim.

Childhood non-academic reading proved useful for understanding this general-interest text. As C1 and C2 explained, additional knowledge of snails came from their reading of Japanese cartoons. Japanese cartoons, they explained, were very important to Thai children as they were educational; 'the writers have sound scientific knowledge', the participants said. Another interesting observation was that the Japanese cartoons 'make students have imagination'; American cartoons, on the other hand, were 'too fixed' leaving little room for personal projection and construction. Thai cartoons were not particularly liked because they were very serious; as these participants explained, 'Thai culture, we don't want to teach the student in enjoying, in enjoyable way' and C1 and C2 reported that they had to convince their parents that these cartoons contributed to their education.

Newspaper Articles

Other sources of information came from the reading of newspapers. Many of the Thailand-based students stated that they often read the *Student Weekly* to help them with the English language. Their understanding was due to their knowledge of the issues through viewing television. In Thailand, moreover, readings in undergraduate classes were generally supplied by the lecturers and usually comprised newspaper articles. Over half of the Thailand-based cohort stated also that they did not read texts in their English classes; they focussed on grammar and writing lessons.

This helps to explain their lack of confidence with the language and their reticence about tackling academic texts on their own during their first semester.

The Thailand-based students described a range of difficulties they had with reading: lack of vocabulary, knowledge of meaning, grammar, structure and lack of time. One poignant comment said it all:

> *I can reading but I no meanings.*

Making Analogies

The pair think-aloud protocols provided insights into a strategy used by the participants – making analogies, made possible through their background knowledge and media viewing and experiences from their home countries. C1 and C2 used the analogy of the eating of raw fish by certain groups of the Thai population to relate to the ingestion of parasites discussed in the text. There were many education programmes in Thailand, they said, designed to alert the population to the risks of ingesting parasites from the raw fish and this knowledge helped them to understand the importance of finding a suitable drug to counteract the effects of the parasites, they reported.

Evaluation of Text

Evaluation of text is an important skill for postgraduate students, indeed for undergraduate students too. Evaluation of text content, however, was demonstrated to only a limited extent in the case of both the academic text and the general-interest text as there had been little related other reading. Whereas the evaluation of the academic text centred around textual elements such as the conclusion and the credibility of the author, evaluation with the general-interest text focussed on the content and meaning, using background knowledge and experiences. On reading about the disagreement between the World Health Organization and the British scientists, C1 and C2 stated that this situation was 'funny', showing their reaction to the behaviour displayed by the WHO and the scientists. In the retrospective interview C1 explained why he judged the situation to be 'funny':

> *It is funny because I think WHO is the organization which works without benefit and they do work for the people … they [the researchers] don't have the evidence … I don't think they can talk like that; I think they have no right to speak like that.*

C1 thus demonstrated his ability to scrutinize a text for supporting evidence for an argument and, at the same time, articulated the conflict he found in the text – the reputable organization with high ideals engaging in arguments with researchers without sufficient evidence.

C1 and C2 also evaluated the type of research that was carried out prior to the building of the dam and criticised the lack of awareness of possible consequences, showing their ability to go 'behind' the text content:

C2: *sometimes they did not think about the effects because they think of only, ok, we will improve the human life to be better than before so*

C1: *dams, to get the farms*

C2*: they did not think about what will come after*

C1: *yea, they are not, no real knowledge, their research is not covered all of the things or effects to humans, maybe before they made the dam* [there should have been] *the research about the culture*

In first semester the Thai students soon became aware that the Thai teaching methods, reading practices, purposes and expectations influenced their reading in a way which was not necessarily appropriate in the Australian university environment. How a second language is acquired can have a bearing on the level of comprehension. C1 explained how there had been little opportunity to acquire effective reading strategies. Children were not generally read to by parents. Children, on the other hand, were often asked to read to the elderly. He himself, he said, used to read books about plants to his grandmother. Although the practice may have been good in some ways, it did not allow children to acquire effective reading strategies because the topics did not interest them and they did not really understand what they were reading.

New strategies, however, were being developed even in first semester. Memorisation was a strategy which was heavily relied upon in Thailand. The participants realised that they could not now remember the large amount of material incorporating unfamiliar vocabulary. They now spoke of reading for understanding rather than to acquire vocabulary or memorise facts. A different sequence, important for their postgraduate study, was also mentioned: reading for understanding *followed* by memorisation. A study by Marton et al. (1996) with 17 Chinese mainland teacher-educators identified various relationships between memorization and understanding. Among them was the notion, that 'we more readily memorize or remember what we understand' (p.76). Identified in this study, also, was the concept of understanding *through* memorization.

Linked to memorisation is translation – another strategy which was commonly used in Thailand. Again, because of the large amounts of reading, the difficulty of finding appropriate meanings and the time it took to translate, meant this was no longer a satisfactory strategy. The participants stated they were already making transitions by trying to read and think in English through taking notes in English when possible, using English/English dictionaries instead of English/Thai dictionaries and asking non Thai speakers for assistance.

The participants, however, apart from A2[2] were still content to read single, simple texts rather than try to compare and critique multiple texts as required in postgraduate study. Reading was perceived to be a solitary activity at an Australian university. As B2 explained:

No-one going to tell you how to do that; no-one care; you have to do it [the reading] *yourself – quite private.*

Third Semester Reading Practices

In third semester the participants demonstrated their awareness of the need to acquire cultural as well as linguistic and discipline-specific knowledge. To increase local background knowledge, all the participants in first semester said they were reading local newspapers. Now newspapers were only read for specific purposes, according to B1 and B2[2], such as finding a car because the newspapers were perceived as 'boring'. It was difficult to understand current situations because of their lack of background knowledge. Other 'texts' such as television and film were also being used to fill knowledge gaps.

In addition to the general reading, all of the participants reported increased academic reading which arose from the necessity to add to their knowledge in their disciplines. Of particular note, was the reading of journal articles. Now that they had ready access to these articles, the participants realised how useful this up-to-date resource could be.

In third semester, argument by analogy and comparison were demonstrated to a greater degree than in first semester. These analogies were possible due to a combination of participants' background knowledge and reading in Thailand and in Australia. The general-interest text used for the pair think-aloud protocols in third semester discussed a public health scandal in France. It was alleged that two former officials at the Central Pharmacy of Hospitals in Paris released doses of growth hormone that had not been treated to inactivate the rogue 'prion' thought to cause Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

For example C2 related the text to events reported in Thailand. She recalled that drug companies sent new drugs to Thailand for testing on HIV patients. Doctors were concerned about the drugs but the patients were going to die so they did not worry, she said. A1 also recalled the thalidomide tragedy. She inferred that the discovery of the cause of these events related to the situation described in the text:

Maybe like this case, CJD, they found what is the cause of this disease after – after, they find out this come from growth hormone.

The participants' accounts in their individual interviews and the pair think-aloud data revealed that understandings were derived not only from background knowledge and experiences but also from reading other texts. The benefit was explained by B1:

Read more frequently and help to more understanding.

C1 reported that finding texts was, for him, still a laborious, time consuming task but he realised he needed to visit the library now to find books to explain terms he did not understand. He realised, too, that increased reading was leading to increased understanding and gave an example from an article entitled *Art, the Spiritual:*

> *The rock which Joshua use to sleep on and he dream about God … so I can link the idea of spirituality in earth and rock with the very old… and I know how the artist use that spirituality in this material*

Even in third semester, however, C1 never followed up references from reference lists, preferring to find texts specific to his needs in the library at random. He explained how following up references would take too much time:

> *Some* [references] *is very interesting but if I stop my reading to find out I lost my time … Thai people we don't give importance to reference so much.*

C1 was clearly still influenced by his lack of experience in following up references in Thailand. He was also not used to citing authors in text and, as a result, found this a difficult practice. In fact all the Thai participants, while recognising the importance of following up references were still tentative about doing so. This seems to stem from an educational system which requires little referencing.

Other benefits were reported.

Making Connections with Other Academic Readings
    The participants' accounts in their individual interviews and the pair think-aloud data revealed that understandings were derived not only from background knowledge and experiences but also from reading other texts. The significance of intertextual framing had been noted by all the participants. A2^2 said he could now predict through his greater reading of academic articles, the content but not the details, of an academic journal article and B23 stated that her increased reading had enabled her to become aware of contradictions.

    Another benefit of increased reading was a greater awareness of in-text referencing, according to C2. She had not known in first semester that she would have to develop this skill. In Thailand, she explained, 'you wrote from the head or from your understanding' without citing the works of others. B2^2 corroborated this statement saying that in Thailand, lecturers 'did not pay attention to quoting' and she had had to seek advice on plagiarism from her supervisor when she first arrived in Australia.

Memorization
    All participants in first semester had mentioned the use of memorisation to remember facts from a single text. In third semester, A1 explained the use of memorisation when reading a range of texts. She reported she consciously tried to memorise, then jotted down notes in order to remind herself of the different viewpoints presented in different journal articles. She wrote the notes in order to 'see the relationships'. Making connections between texts is a significant change from first semester when she had reported she was 'very confused' when reading. She still translated, though, because it was easier for her, she said, 'to memorise in my own language' but memorising enabled her to make connections between texts:

> *If I can memorise something I can relate each other* [information from different authors]*, I can understand all of them.*

Other Reading Sources

In first semester, two of the participants, C1 and C2 had explained the importance of reading cartoons when young. This semester they could understand the term 'dwarfism' in the general-interest text because of their reading of fairy tales during childhood.

Two other sources were mentioned as being increasingly important – the library and the Internet. Nevertheless, the participants were still not at ease using the internet:

> *Oh, is too much, it overwhelm me, overload, like you find one word, they give you on thousand record, oh God …*

This certainly seems to be an area where greater assistance could be given. There are many library tutorials available at the university; it may be that some of the students did not sign up for the tutorials possibly because they did not think they were specific to their requirements. Perhaps students such as these require the assistance of their supervisors in the first instance so that they know they are accessing the appropriate kinds of texts from the most useful sources.

Overall intertextual framing, necessary for academic study, had increased significantly by third semester. Of note was the more confident reading of journal articles, an unfamiliar genre to most of the participants. The greater amount of reading, moreover, had changed the type of reading that was being done. Instead of reading to memorise facts, the participants were considering their texts from an evaluative, critical perspective.

Knowledge of Self

By third semester the participants had begun initiating changes in their reading practices. A major influence on these changes appeared to have been substantially increased self-efficacy. At the same time, increasing self-efficacy was a consequence of the more successful reading practices now being used by the participants. C1 mentioned his 'comfort' zone. In first semester all reading was 'scary' but now at least he felt comfortable reading magazines and newspapers because they were not 'serious'. B2[2] reported being able to understand her readings:

> *I can pick up very fast*

B1, too, reported that she could 'pull out' the main ideas easier and faster and understood more. This ability had led to her now being able to discuss her research with her supervisor, providing him with details of key points, a process which was long and difficult in first semester.

A1 reported that she could, from her increased reading remember the 'form of the sentence' which had an impact on her writing abilities. In lectures, she could understand 'more and longer sentences' although, she said, she still needed a break between sentences to think about the meaning.

<u>Evaluating</u>

The students' increased understandings led to greater efforts being made to evaluate text content. At the same time, there was still some reticence in evaluating an author's work because the students assumed the author knew more than they did and it would be disrespectful to challenge the author's writings.

Participants demonstrated awareness not only of their increasing abilities, but also of where they lacked efficient strategies. A1, although now able to discuss her research with her supervisor explained her limitations:

> *I only answer the questions that supervisor ask me; I don't dare to tell, to ask him first or to argue some points, you know.*

A1's confidence was undermined by the teaching style of her supervisor. Her purpose in reading academic texts was to gain knowledge of crystallography and, specifically, to find an appropriate method for her own experiments. Her supervisor, however, felt it was important for her 'to read and learn by error'. This did not feel 'safe' to A1 as Thai people generally like to feel 'safe', she said.

A comparative analysis of the seven Thai participants' reflections on their reading practices between first and third semester showed increased intertextual framing, reflecting the participants' increased metacognition: greater awareness of postgraduate study expectations, greater confidence in their reading practices and abilities to negotiate meaning from a variety of texts.

The participants demonstrated determination to improve their reading practices but they still felt many anxieties. C1 in his final comment gave insights into his own, and possibly the other participants' lingering anxieties. He reported he was still 'riding on the tiger's back'. It was dangerous, he explained, to try and stay on the tiger's back and equally dangerous to fall off!

To overcome these anxieties and the tentativeness displayed by several of the participants, curriculum processes could include certain features. For example there could be built in more discussion of texts with peer groups and/or supervisor. It has been noted by Hofstede (1986) and Cheng (1995) that students from collectivist societies enjoy working in groups. Moreover, students may feel they have interpreted a text in the only way possible and it is only through sharing their interpretations with a group of students that they can 'expand on their individual understandings of the text by merging their understandings with others' (Hacker 1998:186).

Other assistance could take the form of sending discipline-related texts to the students before they arrive at university in Australia, discussing readings with students and guiding a critical approach to their readings through helping them identify differences in argument and theoretical positions displayed in other texts, highlighting some of the academic writing conventions to be found in English authored, discipline-related texts, adding home country references to their suggested reading lists, and stimulating group examination and interpretation of a variety of discipline-related texts from differing cultural backgrounds.

Such adaptations to curriculum content and processes and supervisory teaching style could significantly enhance the international postgraduate student's learning experience in Australia.

At the same time, consideration could be given to the fact that international students, like local students, are individuals. The findings indicated that, while, for example, all the participants used the strategy of translation, there were small differences in the extent to which this strategy was used in first semester even within the national grouping and there were more distinct differences in the extent to which translation was used by third semester. It is, therefore, important to somehow or other accommodate individual differences and preferences such as these.

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