Poetry as Research

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Poetry as Research. Exploring second language poetry writing
by David Ian Hanauer

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Exploring second language poetry writing

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I dedicate this book
to all my students who have so willingly shared their poetry with me
and to all who read and write poetry across the world

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Acknowledgements

In many ways, this book is the result of accumulated experiences and interactions over my entire career as an applied linguist interested in poetry and accordingly there are many people that really should be acknowledged for their contribution to my understanding. I thank them all, but would like to mention a few who have made a particular contribution. First of all, I would like to thank Will Van Peer and Sonia Zyngier for the willingness, as series editors, to enter into this project, for their careful feedback and support in writing this book and for many years of collegial dialogue and research. In conducting this project, I was helped by several research assistants. I would like to thank Ana Maria Wetzl, Kevin Dvojak, Kyle Nuske and Wei Wu for their help at various stages of analysis and to thank my interns Pisarn Bee Chamcharatsri, Atsushi Iida, and Alex Lapidus for help in collecting data. I also thank the many tutors who volunteered their time to work with me and to my students for creating and sharing their poetry with me. My interest in second language writing is the result of close interaction and discussion with a series of my colleagues in my department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I thank the compositionists Claude Mark Hurlbert, Pat Bizarro and Gian Pagnucci for making writing exciting again and introducing me to a different way of considering composition. Finally, I would like to thank Joel Walters, Elana Shohamy and Johan Hoorn for teaching me the real meaning of conducting empirical research so many years ago and to Ellen and Bernard Spolsky for explaining the dangers and values of interdisciplinary work, a lesson still relevant today. While many people have helped me, the responsibility for the positions, analyses, and conclusions presented in this book rests with me alone.

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CHAPTER 1

Crossing disciplinary boundaries

1.1 Arts-based research

There is a quiet revolution going on at the outer margins of qualitative research. This revolution involves the extension of qualitative research to include artistic methods of inquiry and representation. Under the heading of arts-based research, the genre and methods of artistic practice are being used to conduct research. The sources of this approach can be traced back to educational inquiries since the 1970's (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer, 2006) in work from researchers such as (Eisner, 1976 and Grumet, 1978), and developments in art therapy research during the 1990's (see researchers such as McNiff, 1998). Recent developments suggest that this approach is reaching a degree of maturity within the wider framework of qualitative research across various disciplines, as illustrated by the production of handbooks (Leavy, 2009 and Knowles & Cole, 2007), of special edited journal issues (Finley, 2003; Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2007), overviews of doctoral dissertations (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer, 2006) and conferences such as the Art-Based Educational Research or the International Symposium of Poetic Inquiry. Within a range of disciplines such as education, psychology, counseling, expressive art therapy, social work, medicine, and nursing forms of art-based research are being employed to explore disciplinary research questions.

As a consequence of crossing disciplinary boundaries, art-based research may integrate approaches that are thought by some to be antithetical. Art is sometimes seen as lacking the ability to provide a basis upon which a rational and justified construction of knowledge is possible and thus art and science are considered as two conceptually different activities. In exploring the role of art, McNiff (2007), an art-therapist and leading proponent of artistic inquiry, states that "Art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies" (p. 29). In this characterization, McNiff (2007) defines the two core features of an art-based approach: the positioning of artistic expression as research and the primary use of artistic processes as a way of understanding human experience.

From this perspective, the usage of processes and creative practices of the arts involves a very particular orientation towards the activity of conducting research. As stated by Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer (2006) "research is an inquiry-laden process focused on opening up spaces to trouble and address differences through creative acts" in which researchers see their work as a "*journey of transformation*" involving "creative ways of knowing" (p. 1237, my italics). This metaphor of movement and change captures the open-ended nature of several of the arts-based studies. McNiff (1998) states this in a slightly different way: "The creative researcher avoids stock theories and rigid methods of inquiry and prefers insights emerging from sustained reflections on phenomena" (p. 47). These formulations sustain that creative art processes as inquiry emphasize the emergent and creative nature of understanding. Rather than a process directed by *a priori* assumptions, or in some cases even clearly formulated research questions, art-based research develops through the entry into an artistic process of exploration resulting slowly over time with the production of a series of artistic products that represent the collected, personal understanding of the phenomenon under consideration.

A central aspect of this approach is the way the artwork is positioned as a research object. The artwork is considered to integrate "practice, process and product" (Sinner et. al, 2006, p. 1226). To understand this position, it is helpful to refer to Alexander's (2003) philosophical discussion of aesthetic inquiry. According to him, arts-based inquiries utilize a "whole thinking-feeling person" to produce a "virtual reality" that employs "metaphoric language, symbolic behavior, or virtual shapes, sounds or movement" (p. 5). From this perspective, aesthetic inquiry is different from other qualitative approaches in that it does not describe another's experience but rather recreates it for the reader/observer. This reconstruction of experience is actually the practice-process-product. Therefore, the actual experience of the art work by the research recipient is the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation without the need for subsequent analysis or explanation.

A distinction is generally made between using the arts in research and using artistic processes as research. According to McNiff (2007), art-based inquiries "are distinguished from research activities where the arts may play a significant role but are essentially used as data for investigations that take place within academic disciplines that utilize more traditional scientific, verbal, and mathematic descriptions and analyses of phenomena" (p. 29). According to this approach, the presence of art within an investigation does not necessarily mean that it is an arts-based inquiry. It is the usage of the art process and the positioning of the experience of the artwork as a research outcome that defines the core of arts-based research.

Some proponents position art-based research as a challenge to other forms of research. For example, Finley (2007) states that at "the heart of arts-based inquiry is a radical, politically grounded statement about social justice and control over

the production and dissemination of knowledge" (p. 72). Smith-Shank and Keifer-Boyd (2007) add that arts-based research "acknowledges the power of art to interrogate, inform, and challenge more traditional systems of linear text-based research" (p. 2). Indeed, this line of investigation does raise serious questions about the assumptions of research practice and outcomes, the forms that knowledge can take and how it is disseminated. Arts-based researchers recognize that this approach to research is considered to be deeply troubling and controversial for many traditional qualitative researchers (Richardson, 1997; Smith-Shank and Keifer-Boyd, 2007).

This book emerges from the belief that art-based research can contribute to the wider endeavor of human inquiry and that it is necessary to carefully explore how this actually can be done. The current book extends arts-based research into the field of language studies and aims to explore whether poetry writing can be used as a research method for the exploration of questions relating to second language learners. This book develops an approach that uses poetry writing within a broader framework of qualitative research. In rather conventional terms and using a range of paradigms, it explores two different core research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of poetry writing?
2. In what ways can poetry writing be used as data in the study of research questions within the humanities and social sciences?

Broadly, the aim here is to investigate the characteristics of poetry writing by using a range of methodologies and then use the insights derived from the knowledge acquired to develop an approach to using poetry writing as an integral part of a qualitative, arts-based, research method. I do not assume that this is the only way to conduct arts-based investigations; but this may be valuable as it provides an informed basis upon which poetry writing can be used for research and validates the usage of arts-based inquiries within a qualitative framework for a variety of disciplines, researchers and research questions.

1.2 Personal crossings of disciplinary boundaries

My own career as a researcher has been defined by the crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the integration of methodologies across paradigms and fields. Ironically, perhaps for the current book, my initial crossings in the mid 1990s consisted of using quantitative research tools associated with cognitive psychology to explore the processes of reading poetry (Hanauer, 1997; for a full review, see Hanauer 2001a). In later work, I applied systematic qualitative methods to explore how second language learners read poetry in the second language classroom

(Hanauer, 2001b). In this book, I will once again cross disciplinary boundaries to bring poetry writing as a research method to bear on research questions within the field of applied linguistics. This book integrates art-based research with approaches to qualitative research, theories and research from applied linguistics and the empirical study of literature. In particular, I am interested in developing ways in which poetry writing can be brought to bear on issues of human experience with second language speakers. However, it is my belief that the approach developed here may be useful to a range of researchers who deal with a wide set of questions within the humanities and social sciences that go beyond second language learners.

In 2003 I edited a special edition of the *Canadian Modern Language Review* dedicated to the relationship between applied linguistics and literature where I argued that the situation of disciplinary division and conceptual distancing between poetry and research was artificial and based on a mistaken understanding of both poetry as a genre and research as an investigative practice (Hanauer, 2003). The aim of this book is to rectify this situation and explore the nature of second language poetry writing and the ways in which this form of writing can be used as data for exploring specific research questions of interest specifically within the disciplines of applied linguistics, empirical studies of literature and composition and more broadly within the humanities and social sciences. In other words, here I situate poetry writing as both a research question to be investigated and a research methodology that can be used to explore subsequent questions within the realm of social research.

The usage of poetry writing as a research method, however, is not unique (see for example Richardson, 1990, 1997, 2003a, 2003b; Prendergast, 2009; Leggo. 2005; and Furman, Lietz and Langer, 2006) and has reached a certain initial maturity as evidenced in a recent edited volume of poetic inquiries (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009). From a historical perspective, Butler-Kisber and Stewart (2009) trace the development of poetic inquiry back to the 1980s in early anthropological research. Prendergast (2009) gives an even earlier date describing Muriel Rukeyser's 1938 *Book of the Dead*, an ethnographic and poetic depiction of West Virginian miners dying of lung cancer, as an early example of poetic inquiry. Eliot Eisner's initiation of American Educational Research Association's Arts-based Winter Institute on qualitative research as well as the inclusion of Laurel Richardson's poetic inquiries within the *Handbook of Qualitative Research: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Miles and Huberman, 1994) are milestones that mark the movement of poetry writing into the field of qualitative research (Butler-Kisber and Stewart, 2009).

There are also different approaches to the understanding of what a poetic inquiry actually consists of. Using the concept of authorial voice, Monica Prendergast (2009) differentiates between *Vox Theoria* (literature voiced poems), *Vox*

Autobiographia/Autoethnographia (researcher voiced poems), and *Vox Participare* (participant voiced poems). The first group consists of poems written "in response to works of literature/theory in a discipline or field" (idem, 2009, p .xxii). Research-voiced poems "are written from field notes, journal entries, or reflective/creative/autobiographical/autoethnographical writing as a data source" (idem, p. xxii). The third group derives from "interview transcripts or solicited directly from participants, sometimes in an action research model where the poems are co-created with the researchers" (idem, p. xxii). This approach sees the production of a poem as the essence of the poetic inquiry. It does not analyze the poem produced but presents it as the study itself. Furthermore, her approach, like that of Piirto (2002), places a value on the need for anybody who conducts a poetic inquiry to first be a qualified and experienced poet. The suggestion is that poetic inquiries be conducted by practicing (but not necessarily professional) poets.

Arguably the best known proponent of using poetry within qualitative research is Laurel Richardson (1990, 1997, and 2003b). Her research method consists of rewriting interview data in the form of poems and is premised on the proposition that there is a crisis of representation that requires a range of different forms of genre to be used in explaining and disseminating research findings. Her approach is situated within the conceptual developments of postmodern philosophy. In her own terms, the usage of poetry as a means of presenting interview data challenges the assumed normalcy of presenting interviews in academic prose and highlights the representational and interpretive shifts within other research writing and scientific knowledge dissemination. Instead of eliciting poetic data, this researcher actually writes poems using elicited interview data.

A different direction has been enacted against the backdrop of a series of developments within qualitative health and social work research. At the forefront stands Rich Furman and his collaborators, to whom poetry writing resides mainly in relation to auto-ethnographic approaches to research. For example in Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006), poems written by Furman himself concerning his experiences working with psychological and physiologically disabled children are presented; or in a different paper, he explores his own understanding of existential themes and therapeutic practice (Furman, 2007). The approach to poetry exemplified in these papers consists of building upon the aspects of self-reflection and personal understanding that poetry allows, creating a form of auto-ethnographic self-inquiry. However, Furman has also elicited data from other participants. Together with social work students during an international experience, he presents their self-reflective poems (Furman, Coyne, & Junko Negi, 2008).

In sum, the emphasis within this body of research is on the writing of poetry as process, practice and product. The emergent poem is considered the study itself and research outcomes for the recipient of a poetic inquiry consist of participation

in the experience of the poem. This approach is very much within the guidelines and conceptions of arts-based research and aesthetic inquiry as formulated by Alexander (2003). This approach does, however, raise two important problems: 1) expertise in poetry writing would seem to be a requirement for a successful poetic inquiry; 2) the process of analysis of poetry has not been theoretically explicated so far. Both of these issues limit the applicability of this method to a range of questions of interest to qualitative researchers in different disciplines. I agree with Furman (2007) that the strength of poetic inquiry is its reflective, auto-ethnographic qualities that address personal understandings of human experience and that these qualities need to be used to explore how people (not only the poetic researcher) experience life. This means that poetry writing as a research method needs to be used by those who are *not* qualified as poets and that an approach to the analysis of this type of data needs to be developed.

The current endeavor is situated within prior research that utilizes poetic inquiry but differs from the majority of these studies in two ways: 1) an acceptance of the principles of qualitative research that elicited data needs to be analysed; 2) recognition that poetry writing as a research method can be used with inexperienced poetry writers. This approach builds upon the idea that poetry writing can be elicited from a wide range of participants who may or may not have any prior knowledge of poetry writing. Accordingly, for this to be possible poetry writing needs to be facilitated. This involves integrating writing instruction with a research process and the development of personal, self-reflective understandings with data collection. This approach, which is fully explicated in Chapter 5, situates the data collection process in an educational process of writing instruction. The poems that emerge from this educational context are considered to be data for further analysis as well as artworks that should be appreciated for the entry into another's lived experience. This approach combines qualitative and arts-based approaches to research and may make poetic inquiry applicable to a wider range of populations. In this sense, the educational context for the development of poetic writing is a central issue. In the next section, a description of the way I facilitate poetry writing for second language learners is described.

Some may object to the use of poetic inquiry with writers who are not qualified or experienced with poetry writing and further claim that the suggestion that poetic inquiry be used with second language learners is implausible. It is commonly perceived that second language writers who by definition have acquired and learnt this second language do not and probably cannot write poetry [although there is evidence that this is not the case – see for example Zyngier and Fialho (in press) for a report on the outcomes of poetry writing in the ESL classroom]. In any case, for those who do not believe, perhaps this can be seen as an extreme case that if indeed poetry writing can be a used as a research method with second

language learners, then first language writers of all types should definitely be within the realm of possibility no matter what their prior literacy experience. The next section describes how the poetry used as data in this book was actually written.

1.3 Facilitating the writing of second language poetry

White Paper
She stares at the paper
It stares blankly at her back
Without any traces of ink
All clean, white and smooth.

She picks up her pen
Gripping it tightly
Time is passing swiftly
She could not think of any

Whispers were heard from a distance
Chairs dragged from the floor above
Doors were slammed by the neighbors
She needs some peace and silence.

20 years of memories?
All to be reflected in a poem
Could that even be possible?
She begins to shed tears.

Hold on.
Her pen starts to move.
It was a piece of paper
But with words and scribbles of all kind

To her delight,
Now she got it
Her first poem!

The poem that appears at the beginning of this section was written in 2008 by a second language English writer in a writing course designed for college-level writers at a public university in Pennsylvania. This poem also starts another book, a collection entitled *Damsel in Distress* written by the same student-poet to explore and describe the pressures faced by her in growing up in Malaysia and throughout her life. The poetry book was carefully produced in three copies with hand-covered red velvet, decorated and cleverly designed page layouts and

original photography. The artistic and time-consuming production of this book of poetry is a testimony to the value the poet assigns to her work. This student-poet's production was facilitated by the design of the course that she studied in; but the book of poetry was very much hers. As she stated in a final reflective piece of writing concerning her poetry book "Writing poetry and this class enable us to have our own voice and speak in English but with our own mother tongue." This statement reflects the central aim and tension of second language poetry writing – the ability to express one's own voice and experiences in a second language.

I originally designed this course for second language writers in 2003 and have been revising and teaching it for the last six years. In many ways I consider it to be the high point of my educational endeavors as a second language literacy instructor since it allows me to give others a voice in a new language. On the first day, I arrange the chairs in a wide circle around a central table upon which I place books of poetry written by English as Second Language (ESL) writers who have taken this course in previous years. I then announce that students will be required to write and artistically produce a full book of poetry that explores the meaningfulness of their lives. The usual reaction is utter shock. Literally most of the students look at me as if I were mad. They look at one another and some sigh. I then ask them to stand up and come to the table and choose a book of poetry to read. Once they have read one I ask them to read another and then another. I tell them that these were written by students from previous years and that these students had as much disbelief about second language poetry writing as they did. The experience of seeing these books of poetry dissipates the myth that poetry cannot be written by second language learners. The evidence, at least within the classroom, is on the table in front of them.

The underpinning educational rationale for this ESL College Writing class is described in the syllabus as a course that is "organized around the idea that literacy develops as a result of the desire by the individual to express personally important understandings." In other words, emphasis is placed on the personal expression of individual experiences, thoughts and feelings. This rationale is an important point of departure for this course in that the core understanding is that writing is a form of deeply personal communication and that it develops when an individual writer actually has something deeply personal to say. Issues of form, while important, are secondary to the actual role of writing as a way of expressing internal meanings. The conventions of writing are dealt with as ways in which personal expression can be formed so as to be both personally and socially communicative. Interestingly, one of my main conclusions after having taught this course for 6 years is that most students have not had much experience of exploring their own internal lives and thoughts and expressing them in writing. Ironically, I have found that it is this

aspect of poetry writing and not issues of language usage and control that are the most difficult for students whether they are first or second language writers.

As any literacy teacher will tell you, writing does not start or end at the actual moment of physical writing. This is especially true for poetry. The process of writing a poem in my ESL College Writing course is an extended project that is carefully scaffolded within a framework of classroom workshops that takes about 8 weeks to complete. The initial workshops explore two interrelated issues: the consideration of personally important experiences and the development of an understanding of poetic genres. The first aim is achieved through exercises of personal reflection, brainstorming and discussion. Of particular importance is the emphasis on detailed, multimodal recall and careful self-analysis. The aim is to produce self-understandings of what is important to them as human beings in the world and specifically and uniquely how they have experienced the world. The second aim of developing an understanding of poetry is conducted through a process of library research and exemplar analysis. The approach is constructivist and is directed by the students themselves. As course instructor, I do not provide a predefined definition of poetry that they need to work with. The students choose their own sets of culturally specific poems (usually in their first language) to analyze for aspects of content and form. This process is accompanied by experimentation with poetry writing concerning their experiences.

The workshops during the central part of the course are directed at the actual writing, reading, revision and presentation of their poetry. A fundamental aspect of these workshops is the emphasis on using language to accurately express the internal meanings and experiences of each writer. In other words, revision is directed not by language correctness in normative terms but rather through the consideration of accuracy of the expression to personally held understandings. Students are asked to carefully think about their own experiences and their insights concerning these experiences as a resource through which the quality of their own writing can be evaluated. Students are asked to make sure that whatever poetry they have produced actually says what they meant it to say. This process involves reading and presenting their poems to other students in the class and graduate level volunteer tutors. Responses are very much along the lines of personal understandings, which allow the student-poet to evaluate the different ways in which other readers understand their poems. In many cases this leads to changes and revisions. It is important to note that the student-poet makes all decisions and that my role as instructor is not to edit these poems but rather to make sure that the student is satisfied that the poem expresses what they want it to express.

The workshops at the end of this course deal with the process of producing a full book of poetry. Concepts of aesthetics and thematic clarity are emphasized. Students need to choose approximately 10 poems from the 20–30 that they have

written to include in their final book of poetry. Each book is considered to be a thematic unit dealing with a significant aspect of the student's life. They are free to choose any theme that they wish to explore. A central criterion is that this is a truly meaningful set of experiences. The final stages involve decisions on how to produce the book. Questions of format, page size, art work, layout and font type are all discussed and the authors make those decisions which, once again, best serve the meanings and understandings of experience that they are trying to express. The final product is publicly presented and read.

Data collection in this sense lasted six years and consisted of 844 poems from 81 different students. The brief description that appears above of how the corpus of second language poems used in this book was produced perhaps removes the fears of those who believe that second language writers will have difficulty in writing poetry. It is not by chance that the method of data collection described here is interactive, participatory and elongated. The type of data that poetry writing provides is the result of extensive self-exploration and careful presentation and it is exactly this issue of self-understanding of experience that poetry as a research method can provide information on.

1.4 The approach, scope, questions and design of this book

The proposal that poetry writing be used as a research method requires some justification. Richardson (1997) in her description of her presentation of poetic renditions of interview data makes it clear that her approach caused contention within the field of sociology. More broadly, the increasing presence of arts-based research in the field of education has elicited a negative response from established researchers. In one of the predominant critiques, Shavelson and Towne (2002) try to establish criteria that will allow them to differentiate research-based, scientific knowledge from other forms of information. Specifically, they critique in their report the development of what they term humanist approaches to knowledge including through their descriptions (although not explicitly named) arts-based research. They argue that it cannot provide replicable and generalizable knowledge and as such is not to be considered scientific knowledge. From this perspective, any form of arts-based research is going to be delegitimized.

The response from proponents of poetic inquiry has been to present philosophical and theoretical arguments supporting the usage of poetic inquiry and to catalogue the ways in which it has been used. While both of these are worthy ways of responding, there is a certain tautology involved in both approaches. They both start and finish with their own self-justification. True to my experience of crossing

disciplinary boundaries and utilizing a variety of approaches to address research questions, in this book I would like to propose that using poetry writing as a research method is a research question in itself that needs to be addressed and fully explicated. Accordingly, each of the core research questions that direct this book can be differentiated as seen in the following subset of questions:

1. *What are the characteristics of poetry writing?*
   - 1.1. What characterizes the process of writing poetry?
   - 1.2. What are the textual and literary characteristics of poems written by adult second language learners?
   - 1.3. What is poetic identity?
   - 1.4. What are the ways in which these poetic identities are expressed?
   - 1.5. What are the ways in which these poetic identities can be analysed?
2. *In what ways can poetry writing be used as data in the study of research questions within the humanities and social sciences?*
   - 2.1. In what ways has poetry writing been used as a research method?
   - 2.2. What research questions are appropriate for poetry writing as a research method?
   - 2.3. How is poetry writing facilitated as research data?
   - 2.4. How is written poetry as research data analysed?
   - 2.5. Is it possible to evaluate the quality of poetry writing as a research method?
   - 2.6. Can poetry writing be considered a form of knowledge?

These questions and sub-questions direct the design of the first five chapters of this book. Chapter 2 explores the question of the process of writing poetry and utilizes a qualitative interview approach and document analysis and presents, as an outcome, a set of general features that characterize poetry writing. Chapter 3 explores the literary and linguistic characteristics of the corpus of second language poems used as data in this book. A computational linguistic and descriptive approach to the analysis of this corpus is used here. The outcome is a quantitative description of second language poems. Chapter 4 looks into the issue of poetic identity as a way of exploring ways in which poetic data can be analysed and positioned. Here, a method for analysing subjective positioning in written poetry is proposed and a case study is presented as illustration. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 build a basis upon which the characteristics of poetry writing can be understood for the purposes of developing an inquiry method.

Chapter 5 addresses the question of the ways in which poetry writing can be used as a research method. It offers literature review, philosophical argumentation and theoretical discussion to support the approach. The proposed method integrates the findings from the studies in the first section of this book. The outcome of this chapter is the specification of poetry writing as a research method that is

situated within both arts-based and qualitative approaches and addresses previous omissions of data analysis and collection.

Chapter 6 follows by presenting a study that uses poetry writing with second language learners. Specifically, this method was used to investigate the question:

3. *How is the study abroad experience characterized and understood in the poetry written by second language study abroad students?*

The chapter demonstrates the ability of poetry writing to provide insights into the experiences of second language learners. This chapter utilizes poetry writing to capture moments of the lived experience of individual poets undergoing the study abroad experience. The chapter presents news ways of understanding this phenomenon as well as exemplifying this approach to research.

The final chapter addresses the philosophical underpinnings of the approach to research developed with this book. The chapter explicates and addresses the core philosophical objections to poetry as scientific knowledge and considers the relationship of literature and empirical methods. Overall, the aim of this book is to develop an approach to the usage of poetry writing as a research method of relevance to second language (and other) writers that is based upon an informed, research-based understanding of the special characteristics of poetry writing.

CHAPTER 2

The process of writing poetry

A qualitative study of first language writers

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to answer the question – *What characterizes the process of writing poetry?* It sees first language poetry writers as a starting point for a broader discussion of poetry writing with second language writers. In particular, the studies reviewed here and the investigation conducted focus on professional or semi-professional poets who write poetry as a regular and consistent literacy act within their lives. The overall objective is to characterize the features of poetry writing so that an informed discussion of poetry writing as a research method for questions in the humanities and social sciences can evolve in later chapters. Ultimately, this chapter proposes a set of general characteristics situated within the broader literature addressing studies of poetry writing and based on the work of young semi-professional poets finalizing a Masters in Fine Arts degree.

2.2 Research on writing poetry

The existing research on first language poetry writing falls into two broad categories: those related to its teaching and those involved in its process. This research has been mainly constituted within the fields of composition or educational literacy studies and addresses first language writers of various ages. The methodological approaches that have been used are qualitative including interview, verbal protocols and document analysis. The major justification presented for conducting these studies was to enhance educational processes involving poetry writing within the language arts classroom.

While the number of studies on the topic is limited, two central characteristics do emerge. First of all, there is quite a broad agreement that the process of revision is central to the poetry writing process (Armstrong, 1984, 1985, 1986; Bizarro, 1990; Gerrish, 2004; Schwartz, 1983). Secondly there is agreement that poetry writing involves a process of personal discovery (Bolton, 1999; Colley, 2005; Hanauer, 2004; Phillips, 1997). Both these characteristics are explained below.

2.2.1 The process of revision

Revision seems to be a major characteristic of the process of poetry writing. In a comparative study of novice and expert poets, Armstrong (1984) found that expert poetry writers spend far more time revising than novices. In this analysis, she suggests that the latter have an underdeveloped sense of poetic critical judgment and understanding of audience. Later, Armstrong (1985) used a case study approach to analyze the writing processes of professional poets, where she utilized both document analysis of six poets' commentary, letters, recorded conversations, interviews, and essays as well as an investigation of a novice and an experienced poet's writing processes. As with her previous study, Armstrong defined a central role for revision and proposed that it was directed by aesthetic considerations. In order to explain the process of revision of expert poets, Amstrong (1985) developed the concept of 'aesthetic revision', which consisted of revisions that were directed by sensitivity to artistic form. In a final study, Armstrong (1986) analysed the working drafts and comments of professional poets. As in her previous works, her conclusion was that poets are extensive revisers. This study does add an extra dimension to this conclusion in that professional poets seem more involved in a process of deletion of text than in one of elaboration. The revision process seems to 'tighten' the text so that it functions poetically. In relation to free verse, the poetry writing process was characterized as an open, free process followed by a refining, tightening revision process. For more tightly controlled genre forms such as the sonnet, the poetry writing process was characterized by writing and then internal substitution of poem sections.

In a series of in-depth interviews with six published poets, Gerrish (2004) concludes that the process of revision is shared across poets and involves rearranging, reducing and refining. He defines rearranging as "moving thoughts and lines around" (p. 106), which may subsequently lead to the deletion of adjacent lines. Rearranging can also involve changes to line breaks. As to reducing, Gerrish (2004) sees it as "the compressing and deleting of words, lines and ideas" (p. 112). Accordingly, reducing brings "focus", "succinctness" and "honesty" to their poetry, which the author defines as "polishing". In particular, Gerrish (2004) specifies that this process of refining utilizes the poets "aesthetic conscious" (p. 118) to refine the artistic aspects of the written poem. As he specifies, this process of refining may continue even after a poem has been published.

Another analysis of a collection of statements made by professional contemporary poets on their writing processes was carried out by Bizarro (1990), who pointed out that "revision is a creative and crucial component of the writing process [...] The intensity and duration of revision vary dramatically, though as the poem moves from draft to draft, those who revise seem to see with increasing clarity what their

poems might become" (p. 56). The studies reviewed here indicate that the process of poetry writing seems to situate revision as a centrally significant process.

2.2.2 The process of discovery

In a self-study of his own adolescent poetry writing, Hanauer (2004) suggests that in the writing of poetry the writer discovers aspects of meaning in the real world experience addressed by the poem that he had not been aware of prior to the writing itself. Within this study, poetry is defined according to its ability to provide insight through linguistic negotiation: "as a literary text that presents the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the writer through a self-referential use of language that creates for the reader and writer a new understanding of the experience, thought or feeling expressed in the text" (p. 10). Poetry writing in this sense is a process of cognitive and emotional insight.

Phillips (1997) describes the development of a young poet over a series of years from 5th to 8th grade. Like Hanauer (2004), she emphasizes the process of personal insight as a central component of the writing process. Poetry places the young poet in the position of witness in which she expresses and interprets her inner and outer worlds. In Phillip's (1997) description and analysis, the development of the young poet followed in her article is characterized by the development of the ability to craft and control the poetic form. The poet herself eloquently describes this process in metaphorical terms as the difference between writing with a thick crayon in fifth grade and doing it with a thin crayon in 8th grade.

There seems to be a connection between the process of revision and the development of cognitive insight in the sense that the process of revision for expert poets relates to the written poetic text as an object that has been externalized and, as such, revision is designed to uncover what the poem itself 'knows' (see Armstrong, 1986). In other words, the presence of an external text allows the writer to critically evaluate positions and understandings as if they came from someone else. A think-aloud study of a single adolescent poet reaches a similar conclusion. Here, McIntyre (2008) considers the presence of the text as an entity as a source for focusing the poets' thoughts and ideas. Other researchers such as Bizarro (1990) and Schwartz (1983) support a similar position when they describe revision and drafting as a process through which clarity in relation to the meanings of the poem emerge. During revision, several drafts are produced and carefully modified and, as a consequence, the poem becomes denser. This process requires knowledge of poetry and self-confidence characteristic of the seasoned poet's drafting process (Schwartz, 1983).

In another study, Colley (2005) presents a description of his usage of poetry writing within a culturally diverse high-school setting. To this purpose, he utilizes

the concept of poetry writing as a process of discovery, connecting it to issues of critical empowerment within the classroom and students' lives. Arguing from the position that current approaches to literacy education directed by processes of standardization have led to a marginalization of student voice, he sees poetry writing as a way of constructing agency and directing a process of critical self-reflection. As described by Colley (2005), engaging students in poetry involves writing it as well as reading each others' poems, dialoging, and carrying out discussions with the teacher. As he states, "poetry is more than words on a page, it is the interaction and experiences sparked by those words on the page written by a particular human being. In this context, student writing becomes a complex process of understanding, accepting, redefining and loving self" (p. 3). In his analysis, poetry writing leads to agency through the process of a critical understanding of the forces of oppression faced by students and their enhanced understanding of the world they live in. His position echoes a previous study (Hanauer, 2003) that argued that poetry allows multicultural moments of contact between human beings in which personal experience is linguistically negotiated and expressed.

These positions concerning writing poetry as a process of discovery are the basis for the development of the clinical field of poetry therapy. According to Bolton (1999:118), "The writing of poetry profoundly alters the writer because the process faces with oneself. Poetry is the exploration of the deepest and most intimate experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas: distilled, pared to succinctness, and made music to the ear by lyricism". As reported by Gerrish (2004), "there is evidence that strong emotion is a factor that led several of the poets to immersion in poetry writing" (p. 62). Therefore, poetry writing would seem to be a form of therapeutic self- discovery that allows strong emotions to be explored, explicated and expressed.

2.2.3 The poetry writing process

The studies referred to in the previous section present two major characteristics: the importance of revision and the focus on personal discovery. They suggest that there is a relationship between these two characteristics with extensive revision slowly leading to a discovery of the hidden meanings within the language of the poem. The reports on poetry writing suggest that this form of creative writing leads to insight and has potential as a critical tool of self-reflection. The emphasis on revision also suggests that the process of poetry writing is directed by awareness of language and explicit consideration of how language functions in creating its meanings. These conclusions are reminiscent of the defined characteristics of the process of reading poetry. As defined by Hanauer (2001a), poetry is a genre that combines attention to meaning with attention to form. This conclusion seems to hold true for both the reading and writing of poetry.

2.3 Methodology

In this section additional data will be offered so as to develop an understanding of how poems are written. The overall methodological approach consisted of the analysis of the gradual development of a series of poems through their drafts and an interview process with the poets to explore their understandings of the specific poems and the poetry writing process. The two research methods are conceptually integrated in that the analysis of the drafts provides evidence as to the historical development and the interview process provides reflective insight into the poets' thought processes in relation to this specific case of poetry writing.

2.3.1 Participants: Three participants took part in this research project. All three were female students in their last year of studies in a Master of Fine Arts degree specializing in poetry writing at an internationally known Midwestern University in the United States. The three participants were chosen because they were in the final stages of completing their poetic theses as a final graduation process and because of their willingness to share their experiences of writing poetry and their actual poems with the researcher. As a result of their preparation for the thesis project, each of them had undergone a process of reflection on their poetic work and the evaluation of their own poetry. The data collection and interviewing was timed to coincide with the period just before theses presentation as this was considered by the researcher to be the optimal time for accessing these young semi-professional poets' understanding of their writing process. In this study the three participants were given the pseudonyms Ellen, Karen, and Sally.

2.3.2 Data Collection: Two types of data were collected: poems and their historical drafts and interview data. The three participants provided the researcher with all the drafts of 3 poems that they had written and completed. The complete data set of poems and drafts consisted of 57 poems. The poems and their drafts were presented to the researcher before the personal interview so that the researcher could analyze them beforehand. The interview consisted of two sections: 1) general understandings about poetry; 2) reflections on the process of writing the specific poems presented. The general questions were as follows:

1. What is a poem for you?
2. Why do you write poetry?
3. What is the importance of poetry?
4. What has influenced your poetry?

The second part of the interview consisted of following the development of each of the poems through the series of drafts. The questions addressed the context of writing and the procedures involved in it. The participants were asked to explain why specific changes were made to the various drafts of each of the poems.

2.3.3 Procedure: The initial stages of this project consisted of gaining the trust of the participants in this research project. The researcher approached the Chair of the poetry-writing program and explained the nature of the project, requesting the opportunity to meet and discuss poetry writing with several students. The Chair was skeptical of the relevance of the proposed plan. In a series of meetings and through the exchange of articles written by the researcher on the process of poetry reading, the Chair eventually changed her mind and suggested the names of several students who were at a suitable stage of development for being potential participants. The researcher provided a brief written description of the aims of the research project and the types of procedure involved. These were given to the Chair and she passed them on to the potential participants. Following initial agreement, students were contacted by phone and the project explained verbally. Over the phone, the participants were asked to choose three of their own poems that they appreciated and that they had the prior drafts of. They were also asked if they were willing to share these with the researcher. Upon agreement, these were brought to the researcher's office a few weeks before the interview process. The interviews were conducted individually and in an on-campus office. Before starting the interview, the aims of the study were once again explained and agreement to be audio-recorded was requested. After consenting, the interview was started and recorded. The interviews took about an hour and were conducted in an open, congenial atmosphere. All three participants reported enjoying the opportunity to discuss their own poetry and writing processes. Following the interview, the audiotapes were transcribed.

2.3.4 Data Analysis: At the outset of this research project it was assumed that the process of writing poetry would be individual to each poet and potentially specific for each of the poems presented for analysis to the researcher. The data analysis consisted of the following stages:

1. A close literary reading of the collected poems and their drafts so as to identify changes among the different drafts of the poems. This close reading was conducted before the interviews and was used to inform the preparation of specific questions relating to the process of writing each of the poems.
2. After the interviews, the collected poems and their drafts were carefully analyzed for changes. This analysis had a quantitative as well as a qualitative component. The number of words, lines and stanzas, and the word/line-ratios

were compiled. Changes to the graphic outline were noticed and recorded. Any changes to the content of the poem across the various drafts were specified and quantified under the heading of Additions to the Text (new written material); Deletions to the Text (material deleted) and Exchanges to the Text (replacing text with new text in the same position in the poem). The number of additions, deletions and changes were counted for each draft of each poem.

3. The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for statements that had to do with the process of writing each of the poems and more general comments relating to the participants' understanding of the poetry writing process. A written analysis of the process was generated for each poem and poet.
4. During the analysis, it became clear that there were broad similarities in the writing process. A cross-description comparison was then conducted in order to arrive at a more general set of characteristics of the writing process. This set of characteristics was both verbally and graphically defined. In order to validate it, this set was applied to the description of each of the more specific poetry writing processes and any divergences evaluated. These were found to be broad enough to incorporate the more specific descriptions without losing the core description of poetry writing provided by the data.

2.4 Results

As described above, the analysis for each poet was conducted individually under the assumption that each poet would provide a different configuration of the poetry writing process that was individualized to the specific poet and potentially to particular poems. However, the results revealed a similar set of characteristics of poetry writing across poets and poems. Here, the overall characteristics will be presented and grounded in the responses and poems of the different participants.

As described by the participants and validated by the analyses, the poetry writing process takes place in four different stages, as presented graphically in Figure 2.1.

The first stage is that of ACTIVATION, in which an experiential and/or associative process triggers the writing process. The second stage is DISCOVERY, in which the writer finds new underlying meanings and gives new directions to the emerging poem. During this stage the writer decides on the real meaning of the poem, its subject and communicative and emotional insight. The third stage is termed PERMUTATION, in which the poem develops through a series of rewritings. The last stage is FINALIZATION. Here the poet produces the last version of the poem. It is important to note that the two middle stages are not presented as linear by the participants. Discovery and permutation are recurrent and cyclical in

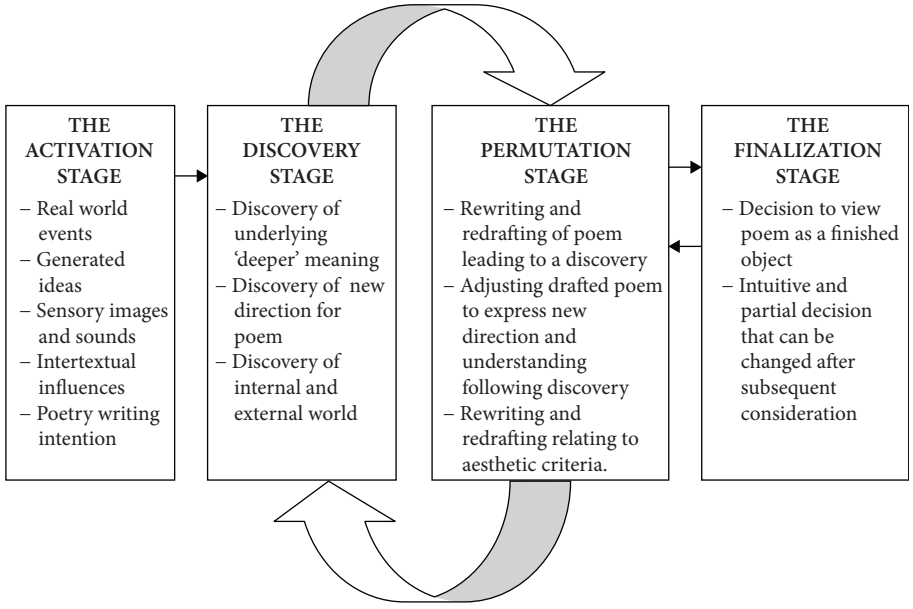

Figure 2.1. Graphic Representation of the Poetry Writing Process

nature, as indicated by the arrows in Figure 2.1. What occurs during the process of writing and rewriting is that discoveries and new insights concerning the meaning of the poem are made. Once a new meaning has been assigned, a process of rewriting and linguistic experimentation may be enacted. One participant described this overall process in the following way:

> Sally: "A poem can have a tremendous number of triggers. In the process you end up with a generated subject. So a poem (.) sort of (.) is that path from if you like from your trigger to the generated subject through its various permutations it sends spirals around. I suppose and you end up with a final version. The final version for me (.) I suppose (.) is a thread that links the ideas that helped you come to the final result". (See Appendix B for transcription conventions).

Using the journey metaphor, this poet describes the writing process as a spiral movement in which ideas are connected and form into a completed text. Rather than a directed, planned process central to this description is the idea of meaning emerging from the process of working on the poem. Another participant who captured the cyclical nature of the discovery and permutation stages formulated her experience in the following terms:

> Karen: "I guess it is a process of discovery, mostly (.) but well (.) and also crafting it and using language in an interesting way to express the discovery. So I guess first

> it's a discovery and language, but then going back and trying to make the language match the discovery that happened in the process of writing it".

As with the Sally's description, here Karen focuses on the way in which meanings emerge during the writing of a poem. For both these poets, this process of discovery would seem central. In the next sections, each of these stages will be described in greater detail.

2.4.1 Activation

As described by the participants, the activation stage is characterized by the initiation of the poetry writing process. Five types of events were identified: real world events, generated ideas, captivating sensory images or sounds, intertextual influences and the basic intention to write. These five options are not mutually exclusive. For example, a real world event may generate an idea and an image, or an image may activate the recollection of a real world event which is then used to start a poem. As with descriptions of other writing processes, producing a poem seems in most cases to start well before the writer sits down in front of the computer screen (or sets pen to paper). Real world events were reported by the participants to be the source of many of their poems. In this data set, participants reported that they were aware during or immediately after a noticeable real world event that this would appear in a poem. Consider the following description:

> Karen: "My husband and I were driving to this birthday dinner and we hit a deer and I didn't write this until later (.) I mean it was probably about a month after it happened. I first wrote a draft (.) but it's the kind of thing you know you're going to write about when it happens (.) it's just like (.) some day I'm going to write about this (1.0) that night we kind of had the conversation, who gets to write the poem. Because he's a poet also so when something happens to both of us we kind of have to battle it out over who (2.0) I was really upset when we hit the deer and it was kind of this thing where we disagreed about it (.) well we didn't disagree about it but that I was really upset that we had hit this deer and he was really relieved that we hadn't hit the deer in a worse way (.) where we were in a big wreck (.) so we had this kind of different perspective on it".

Another participant resorts to past experience in the initiation stage as follows:

> Ellen: "So I had this experience where we were in the funeral home (.) I was there with family and friends who played music with me (.) well we had to go upstairs and pack and everyone else had left and we came back down and it was kind of strange and creepy and this guy I was with he was from a small town and started talking with the funeral director and I was just standing there bewildered. So that was one poem I wanted to write was being in the funeral home when no one else

> was there like the behind the scenes things that you really think you are not supposed to see (2.0) I don't think while I was there I was thinking about writing it but he did (.) the one thing he said the guy I was with sort of pointed to the director and said 'he's an artist with the dead' and that phrase stuck with me and I thought 'what a bizarre thing to say.' So that was actually it used to be the title of the poem (1.0) I wrote it down in my journal pretty close to that time and then later when I was looking around for something to write about I probably came across it. That's how a lot of poems start."

In the two statements presented above, the real world events addressed deal with the issue of death. The majority of the events described in the poetry tended to be distressing. It is possible that disturbing events require more of reflective process and as such lend themselves to poetic writing or perhaps the negative is just more salient in memory. However, in the wider data set not all the real world events were traumatic. Less disturbing events such as eating a grilled cheese sandwich, having a student fall asleep in class, and sitting behind a guy with a big head were all mentioned as real world events that initiated poems. The main criterion for an initiating event seemed to be the strangeness or unusualness of the event as experienced by the poet. Only upon realization of this strangeness is the process generated, culminating in the writing of a poem. This perhaps reflects the type of aesthetic perception captured by the Russian Formalist concept of defamiliarization in which the familiar is estranged and as such is open for new consideration.

Intertextuality is another source for the initiation of poetry writing. In the current data set two types of intertextuality were described: the reading of other works of literature and the reading of one's own journal entries. Here is how one participant verbalized it:

> Ellen: "I sort of got the idea for this poem from one by Billie Collins called 'My Heart". It describes a sword I think (.) some kind of artifact it talks about the handle being all decorated and it's a really interesting poem (.) so I really tried to do that but I wasn't able to do it so I ended up with a few of those ideas".

As described, the movement from reading to writing a new poem is not direct. Rather the text was analyzed for what it aimed to do as a poem (describe an artifact) and then utilized for the creation of a new poem. However, in some cases, the intertextual relationship is more direct. Consider the following statement:

> Sally: "...you need something to begin a poem (.) you need an image or I mean some poems I wrote that just started with a color. You need something to start and it's kind of useful to have a collection of books poetry books (.) so that if you sat there not knowing what to do you can look in the books and find something that appeals to you (1.0) so I started with a line from Brigit Pegeen Kelly and the poem

> evolved from the line and when I wrote this poem I considered it as a kind of experiment because I think it is more motivated by sound than by image".

In this statement, a specific line of poetry from another poet is used as a starting point for a more extended exploration, which is not motivated by the content of the line but rather by the sounds that it evokes. It is these that are explored in the poetry writing process. The same participant also describes how she utilizes her own journal writing in a similar way.

> Sally: "Well I looked through the notebook and I found the quote and then I have a few photographs here of my grandparents and the last one was at a wedding their wedding so I thought Oh I'll write about that".

In this example, a quote from a journal combined with the image in a family photograph functioned as the starting point of a poem. As seen in the statement of another participant presented above, the journal functions as a way of storing memories, experiences and, most importantly, quotes that can be read as a source of poetic material and as a way of initiating a poem.

Finally, the writing process can be triggered by a sensory perception or an idea. Consider the following two statements:

> Karen: "50% of the time I think I'll have a line in my head or I'll just have an idea and I'll sit down to write and sometimes I'll just sit down to write and I'll just stream of consciousness write until I hit something interesting."
> Ellen: "Sometimes I don't have an intention I have an image and I'll start writing about it and go somewhere from there."

In these quotes, a poetry writing sequence is initiated through a multi-sensory experience. It is not clear to the writer at the point of activation how this poem will develop but there is an imagistic or ideational thought that starts an associative process. The written poem emerges through an associative written and reflective response to this activating image, line or thought.

2.4.2 Discovery

This stage consists of a process in which a new, unexpected meaning or direction is found for the poem that has already been initiated and may exist in draft form. This discovery seems to go beyond what the poet already knows about the poem, as illustrated in following statement:

> Sally: "The discovery can be a discovery that is sort of driven by image that you're writing through an associative process you start to investigate another subject and through that you investigate something else and something else and I think that the discovery can be the final sort of revelation of the poem that comes at the end

> or it can come sooner than that. You know you are sort of in the middle of the poem can open up into a completely different area and you realize that that is probably what you were writing about. And usually that's something deeper".

This description suggests that writing a poem develops through an associative process without the poet having a clear understanding of the subject of the written text. Finding out what the poem is about comes as a 'revelation' that changes the direction of the poem. Thus, although every poem has an initiating event, the discovery stage reveals a deeper meaning or understanding of the text itself and of the writer's own internal world and thoughts. Another participant in discussing changes to one of her poems extends this point:

> Karen: "It's the key it's kind of the key moment of the poem and in the poem it only took a few lines and so I felt like it needed to be that moment needed to be slowed down in the poem since it's an important moment (.) and then the main thing I added is the story about the father and the deer when my husband was a kid (.) which is strange that I hadn't put in there before because that (.) that (.) hearing that story after we hit the deer really haunted (.) the story really haunted me because I thought how awful to put a deer in the back seat with the kids (.) and just how horrific and (.) but I didn't even ever think to put it in until, until this point and so that's the big discovery (.) like (.) realizing that the poem's about that."

Here Karen explains why she added a new section to a draft version of her poem. She is surprised that she had not added it before as it really struck her emotionally in the real world event. The specific section deals with a childhood memory of her husband, in essence someone else's narrative. But in a poetic way this memory and narrative encapsulates the lived-through experience of horror at hitting a deer. Accordingly, it was this component that was missing from the draft version of the poem. The addition is a discovery that allows the poet to understand the direction of the poem and the actual experience described in the text. Another participant reinforces this point in the following words:

> Ellen: "I learn so much about my own experiences and my own feelings just by writing it down as poetry (.) even if sometimes I change so fast so it's not necessarily a recording of what's happened (.) but it allows me to discover things that I wouldn't have known if I had just sat and thought about it."

Here the participant connects the discovery process with learning about her own experiences and feelings. The actual writing helps her to realize the meaning of the experience or feeling that she is writing about. It is in this sense that writing poetry involves a refocusing of both the poetic content and the internal world that the poem refers to. As such and as directly stated in this next quote, the stage of discovery is in some ways the heart and core of poetic writing.

> Karen: "The whole attraction of it is that you are discovering something in yourself (2.0) if you don't discover something in the process of writing it's almost guaranteed to be a bad poem (.) because you're not learning (.) you're just spitting out what you already knew."

In this sense the poetry writing process is a form of inquiry in which meanings of personal experience are discovered during the process of writing. As opposed to other forms of academic writing in which what is known is stated and writing is point driven, the process of writing a poem as reflected in these young poets' statements suggests a process of self discovery through the writing itself.

2.4.3 Permutation

Rewriting and redrafting during which the poem is carefully considered and changed characterize this stage. In some cases these changes are radical and involve the deletion or exchange of large sections. In other cases, they can be minor. In the current data set, the number of drafts per poem ranged from 4 to 12. Table 2.1 below presents the frequencies of addition, deletion and exchange for each poem through its variety of drafts and the frequency of changes of the graphic form.

The categories in this table capture in broad terms the changes made to the poems through their various drafts. Most but not all the poems underwent serious rewriting during the permutation stage. Only one had minor revisions (Sally, Poem 1) with four undergoing extensive revision (Sally, Poem 3; Ellen Poems 2 & 3; Karen, Poem 2). As the totals indicate, exchange was preferred by these poets followed by deletion and addition. This result suggests that permutation mainly consists of reworking within the framework of the existing text – either by deleting

Table 2.1. Frequency of Graphic Forms, Additions, Deletions and Exchanges of Draft Versions

Poet	Poem #	Additions	Deletions	Exchanges	Graphic form
Sally	1	0	3	0	2
Sally	2	2	13	11	3
Sally	3	29	38	24	4
Ellen	1	6	2	5	3
Ellen	2	3	8	23	2
Ellen	3	7	12	28	2
Karen	1	0	8	7	2
Karen	2	14	11	24	3
Karen	3	3	2	5	2
Total		**64**	**97**	**127**	**23**

or by exchanging the components. It is interesting to notice that all the poems underwent at least two changes in graphic form. This suggests attention to layout. Overall, Table 2.1 indicates permutation as a stage in which the draft versions undergo a series of changes in form and content.

These numbers, however, do not capture the type of changes nor the reasons why they occurred. Explanations presented by the participants during the interview suggested two reasons for changing their poems: a) a discovery of the real subject; and b) an aesthetic evaluation. In relation to the first category, one participant stated:

> Ellen: "I think a lot of times something will kinda have like a lot of the poems I worked on for my thesis (.) I was working really hard and they didn't seem to work and then finally I had a breakthrough of some kind and then I was able to put things in a different order and add something new (.) something that would make it seem to just click into place."

As described by this participant, the process of permutation and discovery are intertwined. She starts with experimentation, which leads to a discovery of the underlying issue that she wishes to address, after which the poem can be reordered and reworked. The discovery directs the need for new material and a new order. Another participant addressed this issue in a slightly different way:

> Karen: "Poetry I write a lot more slowly (.) poetry is much more condensed. I'm more careful about the language. There's something psychological with poetry where you're (1.0) it's kind of, you're trying to be as precise as you can"

In this statement, precision is based on the connection between the internal world that desires to be expressed (but may not be fully comprehended) and the linguistic manifestation of this world in the emerging poem. Precision, in the sense expressed here, refers to the idea of concisely constructing language that reflects and recreates internal meanings while being aware of the constant inaccuracy of language to succeed in this task. Hence, permutation results in the constant search for the precise statement that captures an internal thought.

As for aesthetic quality, participants provided a series of different criteria. Some were more general comments related to the concept of "poetic language", such as in:

> Karen: "there's poetic in a good way and poetic in a bad way (.) poetic in a bad way is, you can feel the writer saying I need to sound like a poet here, here I go (.) rather than just writing in a real voice".

The participant here holds that poetry can sometimes sound too contrived and thus too distancing for the audience. Paradoxically, this criterion directed the exchange of large sections of her second poem, in order to make it sound more real

and less contrived. In contrast, most of the comments were very specific and addressed particular issues in their aesthetic tastes, such as the issues of lining, graphic form, sound patterns, emotional impact, spacing, order of information, word association, density of information and stanza structure.

In this data set there was one additional component to the permutation stage. The participants were all members of a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program directed specifically at writing poetry. Part of this educational context consists in sharing poems with the other poets and instructors in the course. They reported that this had influenced some of their decisions. For example, consider the following comment:

> Karen: "well in an MFA program we have to workshop and so we get responses and Mary's ((the poet/instructor)) an influence so she's certainly critiqued (.) I think this draft to this draft it's my husband who read it (.) and I think he suggested to cut the beginning".

This participant points out that the workshop created a situation in which various aspects of her poems were questioned and different ways of writing were suggested. This workshop dialogue promotes a process of permutation and change in the poems themselves.

What these comments indicate is that the permutation and discovery stages are intertwined. The discovery of the underlying meaning and specific form of the poem results from the rewriting and redrafting of the poem. It is essentially the connection between these two processes that generates the poem and its special relationship with the internal world of the poet. The following comment reinforces this notion:

> Karen: "poetry can sometimes express something that you didn't know you felt (.) like you read it and realize (.) I mean partly you discover something from reading it but you sort of (.) it's like you discover something that you already knew but you didn't know you knew it or it's just like something makes sense in a new way".

This process of self-discovery is experienced as a form of surprise. The process of rewriting and working on the poem, the careful rereading of externalized, linguistically negotiated thought, allows the poet to find new meanings in old experiences. It seems to be a process of defamiliarization of internal thought that allows a new appraisal of what is actually known by the writer.

2.4.4 Finalization

This stage is characterized by a decision to finish the rewriting and redrafting and to view the text as a finished object. To be more exact, the participants in this study

describe this decision as being more intuitive and partial rather than clear-cut and final. It is in a way final- until- the- next-reading, in which potentially there may be more changes that need to be made. But at some point, a sense of balance is reached in which the poem is considered to be final and ready for other readers and listeners. This is how one of the participants described it:

> Karen: "When I wrote the ending I completely thought I had it (.) I mean (.) I thought the ending was right on and the poem was done which is what always happens and (.) I mean now (.) when I look back I don't think so (.) but you know (.) at that time I thought, okay."

In this statement both the original sense of ending and the potential for more re-writing are addressed. As in the discussion of the permutation stage, poets function with a set of aesthetic criteria for the evaluation of poetry. This implies that during a rereading, poets become an audience for their own poem and new things can be observed leading to additional changes. This potential for future change is enhanced by the nature of the finalization process. Consider the following two quotes:

> Ellen: "I usually can diagnose that feeling of ending when I read a poem cause I always read them out loud when I think I have a draft that is readable and I read it out loud and I think that nothing is horrible wrong then I think it may be okay".
> Sally: "The resolution which is maybe what I meant in the first place is kind of the ending of the poem and you feel that the poem has not come full circle but is something kind of shaped like a letter c you sort of come partly the way around but you don't want to make everything totally full circle".

In both these quotes, it is the intuitive sense of ending that directs the decision that the poem is finished. This decision is described as being holistic and to a certain extent interpretive. When the poem feels right and has the right balance among its various components and provides the appropriate emotional impact, then it is felt to be finished.

2.5 Discussion

All empirical research is sensitive to the context of its own data collection. The current study presents a series of characteristics of poetry writing that are shared by three young poets who, at the time of data collection, were finishing their MFA degrees in the same programme. These poets all knew each other and had taken poetry workshops together. However, it is noticeable that the ways in which they describe the process of poetry writing replicates many of the findings of previous studies, which allows more general statements. In other words, the fact that similar

descriptions were developed independently in several different studies offers greater strength to the current description of the process of writing poetry. For instance, the relationship between the discovery and permutation stages presented in this chapter is parallel to the findings in the investigations reviewed above which see revision as a major characteristic of poetry writing and as related to the process of discovery (Armstrong, 1984, 1985, 1986; Bizarro, 1990; Gerrish, 2004; Schwartz, 1983). The findings reported by Armstrong (1986), that expert poets delete more often than they elaborate, are also supported by the current study. As seen here, the participants did delete more than they added new material and were involved in a process of exchange (deleting and adding different material) more than just deleting. This process involved aesthetic evaluation (Armstrong, 1986) as well as new insight. Revision moved the poems towards a more succinct, focused and accurate expression of the poet's meaning (Gerrish, 2004). In addition, both previous research and the present study indicate that poetry writing involves a movement towards personal discovery (Bolton, 1999; Colley, 2005; Hanauer, 2004; Phillips, 1997). It actually triggers a process of learning and understanding personal experience, a revisiting and interpretation of personal events and experiences.

A further finding is that poetry writing is partly recursive and not linear, which is not surprising (see, for instance, McIntyre, 2008). Previous research has posited that there are a series of initiating events for poetry writing. Gerrish (2004) presents several writing routines (such as journals and notebooks) and poem triggers (such as strong emotions, images and textual influences) that initiate the process. This chapter has shown a similar concept of an activation stage in which real world events, ideas, images and intertextual influences initiate the process of writing a poem. Noticeably, the internal and external worlds of the individual play a role in the initiating process. There is also agreement that in the first stages poets may not have a clear understanding of the content of their poem. There seems to be an initiating event that is then explored through a series of literacy experiments (or games), which ultimately lead to an internal discovery about what the real subject of the poem is (Armstrong, 1984, 1985, 1986; Gerrish, 2004). Through several textual refinements and adjustments, the poem moves in a new direction and an understanding of the text and its issues is developed. This process leads to greater awareness on the part of the poet of their own internal world and the world that is around them (Colley, 2005; Hanauer, 2004). As presented by Gerrish (2004), the poem has a provisional ending. A decision is made that the poem is finished, albeit provisionally, as even after the poem is published the poet may continue to revise and change it. Once a discovery has been made and the language and form of the poem explored, the poet reaches a sense of balance in relation to the components and it is at this stage that the poem is provisionally considered to be finished.

Of all the studies of poetry writing so far, the most developed model has been that of Gerrish (2004), who analysed the processes involved in the writing of six specific poems by professional poets, allowing her to propose seven categories of action: the original impetus to write, writing routines, triggers for writing, drafting, revising, ending and external influences. There are striking similarities between her findings and the current study. The activation stage described in this chapter incorporates the impetus, routines and triggers presented by Gerrish (2004). The permutation stage includes what Gerrish called the drafting and revising stages. The finalization stage parallels her ending category. As in the previous study, the one described here also takes into account that discussion with other poets and the reading of poetry influence the writing of the poem. However, Gerrish sees discovery as part of the revision stage, whereas it is here seen as a separate and central component of the poetry writing process, but also situated within the context of the working and reworking of the poem in conjunction with the permutation stage.

Contrary to the tendency to assume a plurality of writing processes individualized for each poet, the evidence of the studies reviewed here suggests that a more general set of characteristics may be proposed. In this sense, poetry writing would start as a response to a series of potential triggers such as real world events, strong emotions, and sensory images. The poem is initiated without a clear, formed understanding of its content and meaning or the described experience, thought or feeling. It evolves through processes of drafting and revision leading to a sense of discovery, in which insights into the original event, experience, thought or feeling are revealed to the writer. Through the permutation stage, the poet tries to make the poem as succinct, focused, honest and accurate as possible. Once the insight is obtained and a balance between the aesthetic and cognitive components is reached, the poem is considered to be provisionally finished.

2.6 Poetry writing and qualitative research

Before this chapter concludes, some assumptions concerning the characteristics of poetry writing as a research method should be made clear. In a widely referenced book on qualitative research design, Maxwell (1996) states the first purpose of qualitative research is:

> "Understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences. I am using 'meaning' here in a broad sense to include cognition, affect, intentions, and anything else that can be included in what qualitative researchers often refer to as the 'participants' perspective ... ... In a qualitative study,

> you are interested not only in the physical events and behavior that is taking place, but also in how your participants in your study make sense of this and how their understandings influence their behavior" (p. 17)

As seen in this chapter, the process of writing a poem is also one of reflection, discovery and expression of personal experience, thoughts and feelings. In other words, poetry writing is a process in which participants attempt to make sense of their own experiences and express them in a way that other readers may have an insight into their own subjective interpretation of personally meaningful events. Powerful emotions and real world events form an impetus for poetry writing and, through the different revisions of the poem, its meaning and the meaning of the events addressed slowly emerge. As such, a poem is qualitative data which presents personal events and the specific ways in which the writer understands and feels their significance. It is this aspect of poetry writing that makes it a valuable tool for qualitative research. The poem is not an immediate response, but rather a deliberative, personally meaningful interpretation of the portrayed events.

CHAPTER 3

Second language poetry writing

Textual and literary characteristics

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the characteristics of the process of writing poetry as revealed through a qualitative study were addressed and presented. In addition, some initial conceptions about the relationship between the process of writing poetry and qualitative research were proposed. The current chapter widens this discussion. More specifically, here it is discussed whether writing poetry in a second language is a dauntingly difficult (perhaps even impossible) task for most second language learners. In order to evaluate this concern, the literature on second language learners and poetry is reviewed and the characteristics of advanced second language writers are explored. The aim is to try and establish what we currently know about the abilities of second language learners in dealing with poetic text and writing. This study is designed to answer the research question: *What are the textual and literary characteristics of poems written by adult second language learners?* The answer should allow us to define what characterizes the type of poetry written by second language learners in a context of this kind and whether this has value as a research method. It must be pointed out that, as there is only limited research which addresses the issue at hand, this chapter will present a detailed analysis of the textual and literary characteristics of the corpus of second language poetry described in Chapter One. This is the same data that will be used in subsequent chapters in this book for other research questions.

3.2 Poetry and the second language learner

There is relatively little research on literature and second language learners and only a small subset deals with poetry. In addition, this research has, on the whole, focused on reading and not writing. This is the reason why the data in this book will provide some relevant initial groundwork. As seen in Chapter 2, writing poetry involves reading and revising one's written text. In fact, one of the main aspects addressed involves discovering personal meanings within the written poem.

Accordingly, previous research on how second language learners read poetry is of interest. In relation to this body of research, it is a logical conclusion that there is a threshold level of language proficiency that is needed in order to read literature (Hall, 2005). This conclusion is an extrapolation from existing research on reading in a second language that shows that while reading in a second language involves both bottom up (decoding) and top down (meaning construction processes), a threshold of decoding processes and word level semantic activation has to be achieved in order for the meaning construction process to be initiated. As pointed out by Bernhardt (1991), second language reading requires more effort than first language reading because basic decoding and word level semantic activation processes are slower even for advanced level, proficient second language learners. The outcome of this situation is that in second language reading, the automaticity with an exclusive focus on the meaning construction of content knowledge so characteristic of advanced first language reading is never fully manifested. The relatively slow decoding and semantic activation processes of second language readers leads to a situation in which the L2 reader always has some cognizance of the actual surface features of the text that they are reading (Hall, 2005; Krusche, 1995; Van Peer & Theodoridou, 2007).

Against this backdrop of lessened automaticity and heightened awareness of surface level textual features, poetry reading poses a rather interesting situation. The basic characteristics of poetry are its foregrounded language and difficulties in automatic meaning construction (Hall, 2005; Hanauer, 2001a; Paran, 2008). In a series of studies, first language poetry reading has been shown to direct readers' attention to the surface features of the text (Hanauer, 1998a; Hoorn, 1996; van Peer, 1990) and that this added degree of attention enhanced surface information recall of poetically manipulated texts (Hanauer, 1997a, 1998a, 1998b).

The importance of formal textual features in a first language poetry reading has been explored in empirical, theoretical and linguistic research which indicates that readers direct their attention to formal features and use them as an information source for the interpretation of the poem (Hanauer 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 2001b; Miall & Kuiken 1998; van Peer 1986, 1990, 2007). Much before these empirical studies, Culler (1975) had described poetry reading as a convention-driven activity in which readers search for veiled meanings in the text and expect all levels of linguistic information to function in unison in establishing meaning. From a linguistic perspective, Jakobson (1960) and Mukarovsky (1964) determined that poetry reading was a linguistically directed process in which the specific patterns of language found in the poem would cause the reader to focus attention on the formal features. In fact, as early as the beginning of the 20th century, Russian Formalists argued that poetry reading involved texts that were linguistically constructed so as to specifically overcome the automaticity of first language reading.

Ironically, perhaps, these statements seem to suggest that poetry reading turns first language readers into second language readers; or to put this in a different way, poetry reading for first and second language readers may be a similar process (Hall, 2005).

A major aspect of the previous chapter consisted in showing how poetry writing involves a process of discovering the meaning of experiences. In the same line, it is important to explore how second language readers construct meaning while reading poetry in a second language. Using a dyadic protocol method in which pairs of advanced second language students were required to verbalize their thoughts to one another as they constructed meaning while reading the poem 'Suzanne' by Leonard Cohen, Hanauer (2001b) characterized poetry reading as a "meaning construction task that involves high levels of close consideration, analysis and elaboration of textual meanings" (p. 320). The participants of this study were extensively involved in noticing specific elements of the poem (a function termed collecting data) and used these elements for the construction and then elaboration of an interpretation of the poem. They spent most of their time understanding particular sections of the poem and looking closely for specific lines, unusual grammatical usage and patterns of repetition. The construction of meaning itself was complex and included their use of linguistic and schematic knowledge. This process involved resorting to world knowledge and to a form of cultural negotiation in which readers explored new potential cultural meanings, which indicated a process of personal discovery.

An aspect of this process that is worth noting is that the second language readers studied were not experts in literary analysis and in completing the poetry reading task focused on linguistic rather than literary concepts in order to construct an understanding of the poem. However, in their discussion they did use some literary concepts and in particular in their noticing of specific elements of the poem, they responded and commented on repetition. In other words, they demonstrated ability to recognize aspects of aesthetic textual manipulation (such as rhyme) and used it in the actual meaning construction process.

The issue of whether advanced second language learners who read literature use literary features was raised by Fecteau (1999), who explored whether the product of literary reading included literary categories. In particular, he looked at the categories of narrator, tone, themes and authorial aim, and concluded that the participants were "inconsistent" in their ability to define and use literary concepts. Both Hanauer (2001b) and Fecteau (1999) concluded that the ability to actually use literary components is to a certain extent an open question.

A different aspect of poetry reading in a second language is the ability of literature to elicit emotional responses. Looking at a classroom context utilizing the literary teaching method of reading circles, Kim (2004) found evidence for emotional

engagement during the process of reading and discussing second language literature. She suggests that second language readers are capable of responding personally and emotionally to literary texts as, in her analysis, the processes of literal comprehension, personal connections, cross-cultural themes, interpretation and evaluation were all integrated within the process of discussing second language literature. There is no additional empirical data to support Kim's (2004) conclusion; however, Paran (2008) in an extended overview of the literary reading in a second language, states that literature is "motivating and engaging" (p. 490). A more conservative evaluation of this data would suggest that there is initial evidence to suggest that literature may elicit emotional responses in second language readers.

In sum, these studies hold that advanced second language readers are capable of reading and interpreting poetry and are oriented by the processes of directing attention to meaning construction and linguistic form. As shown in Hanauer (2001b), the second language learner seems first to notice and analyze linguistic form and from this enter into a process of interpretation and elaboration in relation to the understanding of the poem. A similar conclusion and was found in work on literary awareness conducted by Zyngier (1994). According to Fecteau (1999), it is not clear how literary categories are used in this process and, as argued by Hall (2005), it may be that the poetry interpretation process for second language readers is directed initially by the requirement to understand and only at a later stage by the need to evaluate aesthetic qualities. The studies reviewed suggest that advanced second language writers can contend with the process of reading and interpreting their own poetry, are aware of the ways linguistic information can be manipulated in order to construct meaning, and that this process may involve personal and emotional engagement.

3.3 Advanced, second language writers

The section above presented some studies that present an initial discussion of whether second language writers can write poetry. Here, the literature on second language writing will be addressed directly. Referring to the "second language writer" as a unitary concept, however, is misleading in that it covers a wide range of individuals with very different characteristics. A second language writer could vary in relation to age, educational background, literacy experiences, ethnicity, nationality, profession, motivation, language exposure, linguistic aptitude, personality, etc. In other words, the phrase second language writer is actually a collective term that covers extensive internal diversity. The particular population that the current study explores consists of adult, undergraduate students from a variety of ethnicities and nationalities all studying in an American university. The university

that the participants of the study described here were enrolled in required a minimum score of 500 on the TOEFL. In relation to the literature on undergraduate students in the US such scores usually indicate advanced language learners.

The research on advanced L2, undergraduate writers within an academic setting has tended to focus on the writing of academic texts. A central trend is to compare second language to first language writers. This direction has been critiqued under the heading of what is known as the 'comparative fallacy', defined by Bley-Vroman (1983) as "the mistake of studying the systematic character of one language by comparing it to another". The core problem is in the assumption that the language target is defined by the language used by first language speakers. The outcome of most of these studies is the definition of a series of deficits or errors that second language writers 'suffer' from. Probably the best known of these studies is the work conducted by Hinkel (2002) in which 1,457 essays from both first language English speakers (termed Native English Speakers- NES) and second language writers (termed Non-Native Speakers – NNS) were compared. Her conclusion was that a series of areas need further work. For example, Hinkel (2002) states that "NNS's need to learn more contextualized and advanced academic vocabulary, as well as idioms and collocations to develop a substantial arsenal to improve their writing in English" (p. 247). Or "NNS's overuse exemplification to a point where example giving and recounts of past-time events represent the main content of their academic text" (p. 248). These examples show that defining first language writing as the target of second writers detracts from the value of second language writing by consistently seeing it in terms of absence of features found in first language writing.

A better avenue for exploring second language writing which avoids the 'comparative fallacy' consists of comparing advanced and novice L2 writers, in which the central finding seems to be that the former have a more discourse level perspective of their writing and written texts (Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008). In an early study of six university ESL learners, Zamel (1983) found that more advanced writers focused on larger sections and grammatical components than less skilled writers. This wider perspective has direct ramifications on the way these students conduct the writing process. Utilizing verbal reports, Cumming (1990) found that more advanced writers spent more time thinking about language use and gist while they composed than less skilled writers. Advanced L2 writers were seen to be more strategic and meta-cognitive in their writing resorting to a range of planning procedures (Sasaki, 2000; Skibniewski, 1988; Victori, 1999). In addition, they were found to do more revision than novice students and to direct their revisions processes towards global and high level revision (Sasaki, 2000; Skibniewski, 1988). They were also more likely to address the organizational pattern of their writing before and during their writing process than their novice counterparts (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Victori, 1999).

Advanced L2 writers discourse perspective was also reflected in the greater attendance to content, consideration of audience and the exploration of different rhetorical options (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Sasaki, 2000; Victori, 1999). Academic texts written by advanced L2 writers involve higher frequencies of appropriately used meta-discourse and organizational complexity (Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995; Sasaki, 2000). Their texts exhibit more enhanced linguistic richness when compared to novice L2 writers. This richness includes increased usage of a wider range of parts of speech and grammatical features (Grant & Ginther, 2000). They produce more text than novice L2 writers (Grant & Ginther, 2000; Intaraprawat & Stevenson, 1995; Sasaki, 2000) and use a wider range of vocabulary items, longer words, and demonstrate more originality in usage than novice writers (Grant & Ginther, 2000; Linnarud, 1983). The research concerning the textual characteristics of advanced L2 writers suggests that these writers are concerned with the appropriate expression of their ideas and have the linguistic knowledge and abilities through which to produce complex, extended written text in a second language. This brief review suggests that advanced L2 writers are capable of writing poetry although this is a task that they are not usually exposed to and a hypothesis that still needs to be investigated.

3.4 Textual and literary characteristics of second language poetry

The studies reviewed above, although quite solid, are indirect in relation to the nature of second language poetry. To a certain extent, they support the position that writing poetry in a second language should be possible; but they do not provide direct evidence. If poetry writing with second language learners is going to be used as a research method, it is important to explore their textual and literary characteristics, a topic which this section will address. Subsequent chapters look in detail at individual poems, their expressed content and the associated writers' concerns and identities.

The corpus of 844 poems used for analysis here was produced by 81second language poets over the years 2003–2009. The actual existence of these poems answers the general question: can advanced second language learners write poetry? Since I have 81 books of poetry written by 81second language poets, the answer to the question whether they can write poetry is an obvious yes. However, the mere existence of these poems does not tell us anything about their value or textual or literary characteristics. What needs to be addressed at this point is the description of the textual features of this collection, which the study described below tries to do.

3.4.1 Corpus description

The poems in this corpus were originally organized as books of poetry with adjacent artwork and photography. The poems were written by students from China, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Poland, Russia, Cyprus, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Kenya, and Burkina Faso. All the writers were ESL undergraduate students enrolled in a course on College Writing.

3.4.2 Data analysis

From an operative perspective, describing the features of a corpus of second language poems involves the definition of patterns of frequencies in relation to both linguistic and literary categories of relevance. In the present case, the corpus was comprised of poems written by advanced second language learners and an array of different descriptive measures were used to analyze it. As summarized in Table 3.1 below, seven categories were discriminated: text size, lexical category, Lexical Frequency Profile (Laufer & Nation, 1995; Laufer, 2005), poetic features, thematic organization, lexical content, and expressed emotion.

Table 3.1. Categories, Analytical Method and Objective

Categories	Analytical method	Objective
1. **Text Size**	Statistics on word, line and stanza.	Establish size and length
2. **Lexical Category**	Frequency of: pronouns, articles, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, negations, and quantifiers using LWIC2007.	Establish use of lexical category
3. **Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP)**	Use of the Range software program.	Establish the Lexical Frequency Profile of vocabulary.
4. **Poetic Features**	Statistics on frequency of usage of sound patterns, imagery, and figurative language.	Establish frequency of different micro-features
5. **Thematic Organization**	Statistics on different macro-level patterns of thematic poetic text organization.	Establish how texts were organized on thematic macro-level.
6. **Lexical Content**	Use of Concordance software programs to chart word frequency.	Establish frequency of content words in their immediate verbal context.
7. **Expressed Emotion**	Use of LWIC2007 emotive word frequencies.	Establish the presence and extent of vocabulary that expresses emotion

The data analysis was conducted according to the following stages:

1. *Poetry Transcription*: each book of poetry was transcribed and transformed into word documents. Each poem was given a single page and was typed using exactly the same page layout, font, and spelling as the original. The attempt was to reproduce the poems *ipsis litteris*.
2. *Analysis of Text Size*: A random subset of the corpus consisting of 216 poems were analysed for basic statistics on text size characteristics. These poems were read and word, lines and stanza counts conducted independently by the researcher and an assistant in order to assure accuracy. The results were tabulated and the following statistics were obtained: mode and average number of words per poem; mode and average words per line; mode and average number of lines per poem; mode and average number of stanzas per poem.
3. *Linguistic Category Analysis*: The corpus of 844 poems was analysed for standard lexical word categories. The transcribed poems were prepared for analysis in appropriate formats and analysed using the LIWC 2007 software program (Pennebaker, Booth and Francis, 2007). This computational linguistic tool indicates the frequency of words and words stems in relation to linguistic, psychological and content categories. During this stage of analysis only the linguistic categories of percentage of function words, pronouns (personal pronouns, 1st person singular/plural, 2nd person, 3rd person singular/plural, and impersonal pronouns), articles, common verbs, auxiliary verb tenses (past, present and future), adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, negations and quantifiers were used.
4. *Lexical Frequency Profile*: Using the Range software program, a Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP) (Laufer & Nation, 1995; Laufer, 2005) was calculated. The Range program conducts a lexical text analysis in which the words of the collected poems in the corpus were divided into four different categories of word frequencies levels. The program compares the word and word stems in relation to three 1,000 word and word stem lists. The three word lists consist of the most 3,000 frequent words in English. The first word list consists of the 1,000 most frequent words, the second list consists of the next 1,000 most frequent words and the third list consists of the next three words. The program's output provides the percentage of words from the whole corpus that is found in each of the 3 word frequency lists and also specifies a fourth list of words not found in any of the three frequency lists. As specified by Nation (2001), the 2,000 word mark is considered to be the dividing line between high and low frequency vocabulary. Typically, these 2,000 words constitute 81.3% of the total vocabulary of a written text in English.

5. *Poetic Features*: The whole corpus of 844 poems was analysed for the poetic features of the second language written poetry. A category system based on the features of poetic texts was developed. The category system addressed the basic poetic micro-features of sound patterns (rhyme, consonance and assonance), imagery (visual, tactile, olfactory, auditory, gustatory and kinesthetic) and figurative speech (metaphor and simile). A simple category system using accepted literary definitions was used for each of these categories. Two independent readers using this category system read the 844 poems. After reading 20% of the poems, an inter-rater agreement score was calculated. The readers agreed on 91% of the items. A meeting was held between the readers to assure comparative results and disagreements in rating were discussed. Following this meeting, the full set of poems was reanalyzed. The statistical analysis was a simple percentage of all poems in which a specific item appeared. In other words, if a poem had only one metaphor, it still counted as a poem that used figurative language. The internal density of category usage in a single poem was not calculated. Accordingly the output from this analysis was the number and percentage of poems in which a specific category of micro-poetic features was found.
6. *Thematic Organization*: The corpus was analysed for characteristic patterns of macro-level thematic organization. As a first stage in this analysis the poems were read and analysed using patterns of thematic organization identified in the conventional description of poetry. The initial coding system was used by two independent readers on the whole corpus. Inter-rater agreement using this system was relatively low at 77%. Upon analysis the problem was found to be overlap between categories of thematic organization. Accordingly a reduced system of thematic organization of categories was used. This system consisted of *narrative* organization (focus on the presentations of a sequence of events with a character and some reference to chronological order), *descriptive* organization (focus on images and details without a narrative context) and *analytical* organization (focus the development of an idea rather than an event). The poems were reanalyzed and inter-rater agreement calculated. For this second reading, inter-rater agreement was 89%. Disagreements in analysis were resolved through discussion. The outcome of this analysis is the definition of the percentage of poems that follow a specific thematic pattern of organization.
7. *Lexical Content Analysis*: The corpus was subjected to the Frequency software program which produces a ranked list of all the word types in the corpus, the frequency of occurrence and cumulative percentage. This frequency list was visually analysed for the high frequency content words. High frequency was defined as usage above 50 times. Using the Concordance software program,

each of these identified high frequency content words were analysed in relation to their immediate verbal context. The list of high frequency words in conjunction with the concordance of usage provide a description of the high frequency contents and concerns of this corpus of poems.

8. *Expressed Emotion Analysis*: The 844 poems were analysed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) 2007 software program (Pennebaker, Booth and Francis, 2007). This computational linguistic tool counts the frequency of words and words stems in relation to specific content categories. One of the content areas consists of affective processes that includes positive (love, joy) and negative emotions (anxiety, anger and sadness). The LIWC has been used to analyze the presence of emotion in both poetry and other textual settings (Stirman & Pennebaker, 2001). The output from this program consists of the percentage of words from different affective categories. To make these findings meaningful, outputs were compared to baseline data line from Pennebaker, Chung, Ireland, Gonzales and Booth (2007).

3.5 Results

In relation to text size and length, Table 3.2 shows the average poem is relatively short, consisting of an average of 52.73 words organized into an average of 10.38 lines made up of an average of 5.05 words per line. The standard deviation for average word length and lines per poem suggests that there is some diversity in relation to the size of a poem. However, even within this range, poems are short: 1 stanza, 9 lines, 48 words and 4 words per line are the most frequent.

A linguistic description of the corpus was conducted using the LIWC2007 software program. Table 3.3 presents the results of the analysis of the percentages of words in the total corpus of second language poetry for standard linguistic categories. As can be seen in Table 3.3, a range of standard linguistic categories is represented in the L2 poetry corpus. Several of the linguistic categories are of interest in defining the characteristics of this corpus. Firstly, as can be seen in Table 3.3, 1st person pronouns are the most frequent category of pronouns. This

Table 3.2. Average, Standard Deviation and Mode for Text Size

Statistic	Words per Poem	Lines per Poem	Stanzas per Poem	Words per Line
Average	52.73	10.38	2.38	5.051
Standard Deviation	23.72	3.38	1.61	1.40
Mode	48	9	1	4

Table 3.3. Percentage of Words from Total Word Count According to Linguistic Category and for L2 Poetry Writing

Linguistic Category	Percentage of Total Words in L2 Poetry Corpus
Total function words	47.10
Total pronouns	15.01
Personal pronouns	12.17
1st person singular	7.73
1st person plural	0.87
2nd person	2.00
3rd person singular	1.17
3rd pers plural	0.40
Impersonal pronouns	2.84
Articles	6.68
Common verbs a	10.57
Auxiliary verbs	5.53
Past tense a	2.83
Present tense a	6.55
Future tense a	0.48
Adverbs	3.36
Prepositions	11.00
Conjunctions	3.89
Negations	1.15
Quantifiers	1.61

suggests that the poetry is written mainly from a personal perspective and we can assume that this usage of first person results from the presentation of a personal perspective on the thoughts, feelings or ideas presented in the poem. In relation to tense, present tense is used more than either past or future tenses. The future tense represents only present 0.48% of the total number of words and is used to a limited extent. In addition, this corpus has a limited number of conjunctions, negations and quantifiers. This might be expected, as this is a corpus of poems and not academic argumentative writing. The low frequencies of conjunctions, negations and quantifiers suggest that the L2 poetry writing corpus is characterized by a direct descriptive style without extensive meta-discursive qualification or argumentation. The overall analysis of the linguistic category data suggests a specific style of writing that is personal, direct and descriptive.

To further extend the characterization of this corpus of written poetry a Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP) was calculated using the Range software program

Table 3.4. Word Frequency Band and Percentage of L2 Poetry Writing Corpus Coverage

Word Frequency Band	Number of Words	Cumulative Coverage (%) of Whole Corpus	Individual Band Coverage (%)
1st 1000	41249	71.33	71.33
2nd 1000	7360	84.06	12.73
3rd 1000	3596	90.28	6.22
not in the lists	5622	100	9.72
Total	57827	–	–

(Laufer & Nation, 1995; Laufer, 2005). The Range program compares the total corpus in relation to baseword lists organized according to frequency of usage. Table 3.4 presents the word counts and percentage of coverage in relation to three frequency levels of words. As can be seen in Table 3.4, 71.33% of the words used in the whole corpus of L2 poetry were found in the 1,000 most frequent words in the English language list. 84.06% of the words in the L2 poetry writing corpus consisted of the 2,000 most frequent words in English. Laufer and Nation (1999) specify that the 2,000 word mark can be used to differentiate high and low frequency words. Further, as reported by Laufer and Nation (1999), comparisons to the Brown corpus (Francis and Kucera, 1982), which contains a range of text types and registers, the first 2,000 words usually covers 79.7% of the text. The finding that 84.06% of the current L2 poetry corpus falls within the first 2,000 most frequent words, suggests that high frequency vocabulary is being used in the writing of these L2 poems. This perhaps is not surprising as these are second language poets; the characterization of this corpus of poetry is that it is comprised of highly frequent words. In relation to the words not in the 3,000 most frequent words lists, a consideration of the word frequency outputs revealed that 880 words (1.52%) were in the poet's first language and consisted of names of people, places, foods, festivals and objects from specific countries. Thus overall, the vocabulary level of this poetry can be characterized as simple and well within the range of advanced L2 writers.

So far the analysis has addressed the linguistic features of the corpus of second language poetry. The current analysis addresses the literary characteristics of this corpus of poems. Specifically, an analysis was conducted to assess the presence and frequency of usage of different micro-features of written poetry. Table 3.5 summarizes the number and percentage of poems in which a specific category of micro-poetic features were found. As can be seen in Table 3.5, the second language poets who produced this corpus of poetry used a wide range of poetic features in writing their poetry. Of all the micro-poetic features measured, imagery was the most frequently used appearing in 78.9% of all poems in the corpus. Within this category, visual imagery was by far the most prevalent category appearing in

Table 3.5. Frequency and Percentage of Poems that Included Poetic Features by Category

Poetic Feature	Poem Frequency	Percentage of Total
Sound Patterns	**624**	**73.93**
Rhyme	381	45.14
Consonance	263	31.16
Alliteration	358	42.41
Assonance	173	20.49
Imagery	**666**	**78.90**
Visual	551	65.28
Tactile	171	20.26
Olfactory	37	4.38
Auditory	189	22.39
Gustatory	65	7.70
Kinesthetic	74	8.76
Figurative Speech	**330**	**39.09**
Metaphor	254	30.09
Simile	131	15.52

65.28% of the poems in the corpus. Usage of sound patterns was also prevalent appearing in 73.93% of all poems. Within this category rhyme and alliteration were the most prevalent appearing in 45.14% and 42.41% percent of poems respectively. However, it should be noted that the use of both rhyme and other sound patterns was not consistent throughout the specific poems. Rather the usage of sound patterns seemed to be limited to one or two lines in each poem. Thus the use of rhyme for example did not organize the structure of the poem and did not form a rhyme pattern characteristic of known poetic forms in English such as the sonnet. Figurative speech was used in 39.09% of the total corpus. Within this category, metaphor was found to be used more frequently than simile. These findings demonstrate that these second language poets were aware of and used poetic features in their writing. As seen in the frequencies of usage, visual imagery, rhyme and alliteration were the most frequently used poetic features.

The analysis presented below deals with the thematic organization of the poems within this corpus. As described above, a category system consisting of *narrative* organization, *descriptive* organization and *analytical* organization was used in this analysis. Table 3.6 summarizes the frequencies occurrence of each of these categories of thematic organization. As can be seen in Table 3.6, the two categories of narrative and descriptive patterns of organization covered 98.3% of all the poems. An analytical pattern of organization that focused on the development of an idea was used to a very limited extent. The high frequency of narrative and

Table 3.6. Frequency of Occurrence for Patterns of Thematic Organization

Thematic Organization	Frequency of Poems	Percentage of Total Corpus
Narrative	387	45.8%
Descriptive	443	52.5%
Analytical	14	1.6%

descriptive patterns of organization suggests that this corpus of poetry was written to describe personal images and stories.

As reported above, a lexical content analysis of the whole corpus of 844 second language poems was conducted using the Frequency software program. The Frequency program ranks all the words in the corpus according to frequency of the occurrence. This list was analysed and all content words that had a frequency of above 50 were listed. As seen in Table 3.7, this analysis yielded 23 content words.

Table 3.7. High Frequency Words, Frequency of Usage and Example Uses from L2 Poetry Corpus

Word	Frequency of Usage	Example Contexts of Usage
Life	172	What's left of the essence of life?
		Pain is my life
		We celebrate a new cycle in my life
		The lesson of life, was good, I guess.
		My life is changing, I'm hesitating.
		You gave life to my life.
Love	172	The power of love?
		I will love you
		Symbols of her love
		Ordeal is my love.
		I love to hear her speak when she just wakes up.
		I'm the last who receive your love.
Eyes	143	But I can see her teasing eyes
		Eyes tearing like hell
		Your eyes like bottomless ocean.
		Whenever I see your sparkling brown eyes
		62 eyes looked at me in Spanish
		Overwhelming sadness swam out of my eyes
		Her eyes like guardian
		Tears welled up in my eyes
Day	123	First day of school in the USA

Word	Frequency of Usage	Example Contexts of Usage
		It was a dark day, in the beginning of September
		God helped us that day, we felt blessed ourselves
		Today is the day of celebration of Eid
		Last day of high school
Friend	120	Because you are my friend
		My friend fell in water; it was so cold as the death
		My first international friend, Kana
		And loose my best friend
		Angel friend
Heart	118	I heard my heart beat loudly
		My heart was like a burning coal
		I'm injured that you split my heart without feeling sorry
		Shortness of breath and my beating heart is all I can hear
		Volcano's heat in my heart
People	113	People in the street peeking at me. Never mind
		People who stand so close to me
		Another people, another culture
		People sometimes become really helpless
		there is inequality among people
		People stop at the junction
Mother	99	My mother has gone
		A tired Mother at a distanced watched
		Mother, I can see your worried face
		Mother with an angry face
		Mother burst out crying
Face	97	My face turned red
		Face twisted and looked like gray ash
		Tears of passion rolled down my face
		Her face is red and her voice shocks my ear drums
		Innocent smile hang on our face
Memories	93	Memories live on
		The smell of memories
		My childhood is filled with memories of you
		The people in college give me so many memories
		Past memories keep recalling day by day
Home	93	Miss my home country
		My head down, dreaming of going home soon
		It feels good to be back home

Word	Frequency of Usage	Example Contexts of Usage
		On my way home I cried!
		For me, with my family, every where is home.
Night	92	One night in Newark
		And walking in the moonlight night
		My last night here for you
		I stand at the beach in the middle of the night
		It is a cold snowy night
		I often see him sitting alone late in the dark night
Feel	74	It was the first time, I feel homesick
		I feel very low
		I feel breathing near my temple
		I can almost feel your breath
		I feel the thin line between love and hate
Sky	68	The sky becomes dark
		Bleeding trees and weeping sky
		Would sooth your soul, but in such a sky there is no depth
		Twigs and branches reach for the sky
		The sky is covered by the darkness
Mind	67	Heavy burden on my mind
		My mind became like a leaf in winter
		When I have deep scar in my mind
		You are lost to my mind, this reflection of me
		Snow white blank – my mind
Dream	66	We called ourselves dream weavers
		Coffee-poisoned dream
		Confined in the inner depths of my boundless dream realm
		My dream another new life
		American Dream
Moment	64	And turn into a darkness in the moment
		It's a painful moment
		Cuddling each other is the best moment
		The moment I touched down in Pittsburgh
		The happy moment we spend together
Smile	64	With a smile upon my face
		Her smile struck me like a lightning
		Your expression made me smile in my dream
		The students' eyes are cold, no regard, and no smile
		the heart with love, smile, and the smile with caressing
Way	63	"No matter which way, we're behind you."

Word	Frequency of Usage	Example Contexts of Usage
		The way of the Japanese
		All the way from the tropical island, Taiwan
		Once one door's open, one way could be passed through
		By the way, of course, do you know who I am?
Tears	62	When in tears I drown my weeping
		My tears could not help falling...
		Tears of passion rolled down my face
		I want you to wipe those tears out of your eyes
		Silence hiding tears
World	62	The world does not have limits
		The world was once black and white
		The hospital shows the cold world in the world
		I saw the rainbow world
		I'm the only myself in this world
Family	60	my family home
		It's been a while since I haven't thought of my family
		My family, my friends, everything in Taiwan
		My heart pounding when I saw my family
		Packing, meeting with my friend, talking with my family
Alone	59	I am alone in this land
		Left alone in the room
		Lone and alone
		Standing alone and waiting for her
		Thinking back of being alone
Cold	53	Lips become purple and cold
		Shy, cold, distant...
		cold cloudy morning
		Cool, cold, freeze, blizzard,
		I feel I am in a cave, a cold, dark cave

Using the Concordance software program, the 23 high frequency content words were analysed in relation to their immediate verbal context. Table 3.7 provides some indication of the way these words were used in their poetic context. The list of high frequency words is revealing in that several core themes and concerns seem to be repeated across writers and poems in this corpus. A lot of these words and their context deal with the issue of close relationships to *family*, *friends* and *home*. This sense of social closeness is expressed through the usage of the words *love*, *friend*, *mother* and *family*. In addition, as seen in the examples from the

concordance, there is a strong emotional component to this collection of poems. The expression of close relationships is often expressed in emotional terms. As seen in the examples from the concordance, the words *love*, *eyes*, *heart*, *mother*, *face*, *feel*, *smile*, *tears* and *cold* are parts of expressions of emotion. As seen in the examples from high frequency words in the concordance here is also a theme of self-reflection. This reflection on the meaning of life is seen in the usage of the words *life*, *day*, *people*, *memories*, *mind* and *way*. This collection of high frequency words and the examples of their usage suggests a direction for understanding the content of this corpus of poetry. The poetry seems to deal with personal relationships and memories in an emotional and self-reflective manner.

The final analysis conducted consisted of an analysis of the emotional content of this corpus using a computational linguistics approach. In order to analyze the emotional content of this corpus the LIWC2007 software program was used. As reported above this program compares word frequencies within the corpus to predefined categories of words. One of the categories found within the LIWC2007 program is that of Affective Processes. The analysis yields a frequency which represents the percentage of words from the total corpus that are on the list of affective words as predefined and validated by the software developers (Pennebaker, Chung, Ireland, Gonzales & Booth, 2007). The LIWC2007 has been successfully used in a series of studies exploring the presence of emotion within texts (Lightman, McCarthy, Duffy & McNamara, 2007; Pennebaker, 1997; Stirman & Pennebaker, 2001). Table 3.8 presents those affective processes frequencies for the L2 poetry corpus as well as the analysis of three additional baseline comparison groups published in Pennebaker, Chung, Ireland, Gonzales and Booth (2007). The baseline categories were compiled and analysed by the authors of the LIWC2007 program and are presented here only as a way of providing a baseline to help with the interpretation of the L2 poetry data. The LIWC2007 baselines relate to different genres of first language writing. The corpus for the emotional writing and controlled writing was generated by asking participants to "write either about deeply emotional topics (emotional writing) or about relatively trivial topics such as the plans for the day (control writing)" (Pennebaker, Chung, Ireland, Gonzales and Booth, 2007, p. 9). The third baseline consisted of a sample of 209 novels from 1700 till 2004 that the LIWC2007 team constructed a corpus from and calculated word frequencies for. A direct statistical comparison of these three baseline sets of frequency is inappropriate, both because the data was collected by other researchers and because it is a corpus of first language writing. However, it is presented here to allow some interpretation of the frequencies and what they may mean.

As can be seen in Table 3.8 the frequencies of the second language poetry column suggest that there is a significant amount of emotion laden word usage in the corpus. For overall affective processes, the corpus of L2 poetry was analysed to

Table 3.8. Percentage of Words from Total Word Count According to Affective Processes and for L2 Poetry Writing, Baseline Emotional Writing, Controlled Writing and Novels

Word Category	Percentage of Total Words in L2 Poetry Corpus	Baseline Comparison: Emotional Writing	Baseline Comparison: Controlled Writing	Baseline Comparison: Novels
Affective processes	7.17	6.02	2.57	4.89
Positive emotion	4.39	3.28	1.83	2.86
Negative emotion	2.76	2.67	0.71	1.98
Anxiety	0.54	0.68	0.21	0.44
Anger	0.50	0.66	0.14	0.55
Sadness	1.23	0.63	0.14	0.57

have a 7.17 percentage of total words that deal with emotion. This percentage was higher than any of the baseline measures including the corpus of texts written specifically with the purpose of eliciting emotional responses (Emotional Writing). The breakdown of the Affective category into its components reveals that for the corpus of L2 poetry there are more positive emotion words (4.39%) than negative emotion words (2.76%) and that both of these percentages are higher than the baseline comparisons. It is notable that within the negative emotion words, words designating sadness had the highest percentage (1.23%) and were more present than anger or anxiety as well as being higher than any of the baseline measures. The data from this analysis combined with the previous analysis of high frequency words and their context, demonstrate that the writers of this corpus of poetry were involved in expressing their emotions.

3.6 Discussion: Characterizing the second language poem

As stated in the introduction to this chapter there is only limited data that addresses second language learners and poetry. There is no systematic data on second language poetry writing. Against this backdrop of a dearth of research on second language poetry writing, the aim of the current chapter was to provide a global analysis of a corpus of second language poetry. The analysis presented above allows the characterization of second language poetry writing as represented in the present corpus. As seen in the data above the second language poem is a short text that uses simple, high frequency vocabulary. The average length of this text is 10 lines with an average of 5 words per line and consisting of 2 stanzas. 84.6% of the vocabulary used in the poems comes from the 2,000 most frequent words in

the English language. There is some usage of first language vocabulary but this is limited to 1.5% of the total word usage. The word length of the poems and the use of vocabulary suggest that poetry writing in this corpus is well within the capabilities of advanced second language learners.

The analysis of this corpus presented above suggests a very specific style for these short second language poems. The use of 1st person pronouns, limited usage of conjunctions, negations and quantifiers, the presence of imagery in 78.9% of all poems, presence of emotional word categories and the predominance of descriptive and narrative patterns of poem organization all suggest that this corpus of poetry involves the direct description of personal events and experiences. The analysis of high frequency words and their concordances further supports this characterization of this corpus of poems. The high frequency words suggest that the writers of these poems are exploring close personal relationships (with family and friends) and reflecting on their lives. It is important to note that the analysis of the high frequency words and their concordances and the analysis of emotional word categories both provide evidence of the presence and usage of emotional language. This result offers some support to previous findings from Kim (2004) that second language learners can be personally and emotionally involved in literature. As for the characterization of this corpus of second language poetry writing, it would seem that the style of writing is descriptive, that it deals with personal events and experiences and most importantly it addresses the emotionality of these described events and experiences.

This process of description and reflection in poetry is conducted using the characteristic micro-features of poetry. As evidenced in the analysis presented above, second language poetry writers are fully capable of using sound patterns, figurative language and imagery in their poetry writing. As referenced in the literature review presented above both Hanauer (2001b) and Fecteau (1999) raised questions concerning the ability of L2 learners in utilizing literary categories. The data presented here suggests that at least within the present corpus of second language poetry these advanced writers were capable and did indeed use poetic-literary categories to express and explore their personal experiences.

Taken together the features of a second language poem in this corpus would seem to consist of a short text compiled of high frequency vocabulary that describes personal experiences in a self reflective and emotional manner using the characteristic micro-features of poetry. The shortness of poem and easiness of the vocabulary does not inhibit the presence of poetic features, personally significant topics or the presence of expressed emotion.

3.7 Second language poetry and qualitative research

The analysis presented in this chapter moves us forward in that it provides a global description of the features of a second language poem within this corpus. The features presented so far suggest that a second language poem would be able to provide useful evidence on the individual perspective on particular events and experiences and that this perspective could include data on the emotional states of the writer. The analysis above also provides evidence that this body of poetry involves a process of self-reflection. Most importantly as seen in the analysis above this process of writing poetry is well within the capabilities of an advanced second language writer. At the end of the last chapter, I stated that the value of poetry writing as a research tool resulted from the ability of poems to convey personally meaningful, linguistically negotiated understanding of significant individual experiences. The analysis of the global features of the corpus of second language poems suggests that these poems could provide the type of evidence that would be relevant for research purposes.

CHAPTER 4

Poetic identity in a second language

Theoretical and methodological issues

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, textual and literary features of second language poetry were addressed and it was suggested that this genre of writing could provide the type of evidence that would be relevant for research purposes. The approach taken was to analyse a corpus of second language poems and to describe its broad characteristics. This analysis does answer the question of whether second language writers can indeed write poetry. However, to substantiate the claim that their texts can be a source of data for questions of interest to researchers in the humanities and social sciences, an additional type of evidence is required. As argued at the end of Chapter 2, the potential value of poetry writing as a research method lies in its ability to provide reflective and linguistically negotiated understandings of personally meaningful events. As explicated, the poem supposedly provides evidence on the poet-participant's understanding, interpretation and presentation of significant life experiences in a way which would allow readers` access and insight into the self-positioning of the writer. In other words, there is an assumption that personal poetic identities are expressed in written poetry. To explore the potential role of second language poetry writing as a research method, the question of poetic identity needs to be explicated. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to investigate the following questions: What is poetic identity? What are the ways in which these poetic identities are expressed? What are the ways in which these poetic identities can be analysed?

4.2 Second language identities

The concept of identity is difficult to define. Like voice in writing, it seems a self-evident aspect of communication and a central component of the communicative setting; but it poses significant problems when definitional and operational criteria are applied. Part of the problem resides in the fact that historically this concept has undergone a series of redefinitions. As specified by Benwell & Stokoe (2006) in

a historical overview, the concept of identity has moved from "a self fashioning, agentive, internal *project of the self*, through more recent understandings of *social and collective identity*, to postmodern accounts which treat identity as fluid, fragmentary, contingent and, crucially, *constructed in discourse*" (p. 17 italics in original). This historical movement manifests a shift from the conceptualization of identity as a stable fixed entity characterized by integrative unity to a multi-faceted construct performed in discourse.

Within the humanities some current positions are conceptualized on the theoretical basis that the concept of identity as an entity is situated and constructed in discourse. Researchers and theorists such as Gramsci (1971), Foucault (1972) and Bourdieu (1977) all, in their own ways, see identities as constituted within much broader social frames of reference. For example, Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus* is based on the idea of the internalization and normalization of external discursive positions that construct the *status quo* of social hierarchy and the appropriate ways of being associated with any given social identity. Foucault (1972) holds that the individual is seen as constructed by the specific discourses to which he is and has been exposed to. In these formulations identity as a discursive entity reflects and manifests the identity positions allowed and specified within the social discursive context. Identity is not personal but rather representational and present within discourse itself.

The critique of positions such as these is that when taken to an extreme social discourse becomes a form of determinism. The constitution of identity within social discourse limits individual agency to environmental influences determined through the frames of social discourse. A different way of understanding identity as discursive is to position it as performance in discourse (Butler, 1990). In this formulation, rather than being essential or an outcome of preexisting discourse, identity is rather produced in interaction and through discourse. It is an active process that is present in the on-going production of discourse. This approach opens new avenues for understanding agency and critical interaction within social discourse. Narrative approaches to identity argue that the narratives we tell construct our identities (Denzin, 2000) and that these narratives are characterized by particular choices on what to highlight and specify in any given telling (Georgakopoulou, 2002). In this formulation, identity as narrative is authorial, tied to the context of performance and reflective of broader cultural, 'master' narratives. Agency exists in the option of negotiating, countering, and modifying social discursive positions in the actual performance of identity. This allows some critical agency for identity formation but does not deny the presence of structuring social discourse. As argued by May (2001), there is some agency to perform a range of potential identities in discourse; but this range is not unlimited as social

discursive structures are present. In his extended analysis of second language identities, Block (2007b) presents the following summary:

> "social scientists frame identities as socially constructed, self-conscious, on-going narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language. Identity work occurs in the company of others – either face-to-face or in an electronically mediated mode – with whom to varying degrees individuals share beliefs, values, activities and practices. Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of past, present and future. Individuals are often shaped by their sociohistories but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on. The entire process is conflictive as opposed to harmonious and individuals often feel ambivalent" (p. 27).

In this formulation, identity is an active discursive process influenced by social structures but not determined by them. The actual performance of identity in response to different historical and social contingencies constructs multiple and conflicting aspects of self.

Block (2007a) notes that the experience of learning a second language and in particular the process of migration leads to a "destabilization" of the individual's sense of identity as the accepted givens of the socio-cultural discourse of the home environment are questioned in the new environment. One way of exploring the types of identity present within the second language learning and migration experience is through the collection and analysis of narratives. As argued by Pavlenko (2001a and quoted in Block 2007a), personal narratives offer "unique and rich sources of information about the relationship between language and identity in second language socialization" (p. 167). As noted above, narratives allow an exploration of the ways in which individuals construct, emphasize, present and highlight specific aspects of their life histories exposing their own position in relation to events. Narratives are cultural artifacts that reflect both personal and cultural events and cross temporal lines by "bringing the past events (i.e., occurrences involving other people) into the present and for projecting the present into the future" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 171), thus allowing meaning to be made, observed and analysed. The writing (or speaking) of these language learner stories is part of the process of directly negotiating the way individuals understand the world they live in and provides insight into their first person positioning.

A series of specific types of identity have been proposed in order to explore second language identity. In a study of literary autobiographies, Pavlenko (2001b) states that "*identity* and *subject position* will be used to signify socially recognizable categories of membership which individuals occupy at different points in their lives" and that these identities and subject positions are "lived experiences of participation in specific communities, where meanings of particular positions,

narratives and categories must be worked out in practice" (p. 319). Taking a similar position, Block (2007b) notes that "identities are related to different traditionally demographic categories of identity" (p. 27). He specifies seven prevalent identity categories: ethnic (associated with a cultural group); racial (associated with socially constructed racial groups); national (associated with the nation state); migrant (related to ways of living in a new country); gender (related to the socially constructed understandings of male and female and sexual orientation); social class (related to different levels of economic status, education and occupation); and language (related to the usage of language). This list is not assumed to be exhaustive. In addition, these different options are not assumed to be discrete or exclusive but rather they function *in tandem* and are co-constructing. Thus each individual is a complex network of different co-constructing identities resulting from participatory lived experiences that allow and limit actions within the world.

A particularly useful theory for situating and explicating the concept of identity in writing has been offered by Ivanic (1997), who conceptualizes the issue of the discursive performance of identity within the context of structuring social discourse. She proposes that writer identity is constructed from four different levels or categories: autobiographic self, discoursal self, self as author and possibilities for self-hood in the socio-cultural and institutional context. The autobiographic self is "the identity people bring with them to any act of writing" (Ivanic, 1997, p. 24) and consists of the life-history, memories, events, ways of representing and being in the world. The autobiographic self is not considered a fixed, essentialist entity but rather a developing, changing entity responsive to context. The autobiographic self is responsible for producing the written discourse through which identity is manifest. A writer's discoursal self is "the impression – often multiple, sometimes contradictory – which they consciously or unconsciously convey of themselves in a particular written text" (Ivanic, 1997, p. 25). It is constructed in and through the written text itself. It is the textual information as presented in the written text that allows the discoursal self to be seen and interpreted. As such, the written text is a moment of identity performance and captures the nature of the writer's identity at the moment of writing. This discoursal self does not reflect an essentialist autobiographical self but rather is the manifestation and performance of identity of the autobiographical self at the time of writing. The self as author concerns the degree of authority that writers feel and present in relation to the writing that they have conducted. According to Ivanic (1997), "writers differ considerably in how far they claim authority as the source of the content of the text, and in how far they establish an authorial presence in their writing" (p. 26). As argued by Ivanic (1997), the self as author is related to both the autobiographic and discoursal self in that the writers` life history and way of presenting themselves in written text influence the degree of authoritativeness found in the writing.

The last category concerns the "prototypical possibilities of self-hood which are available to the writers in the social context of writing" (Ivanic, 1997, p. 27). Within any given context there are a range of possible identities that the writer can assume. These identities allow (and also prohibit) a range of subjective positions that can be taken by the writer. At any given time a writer may assume several different subject positions and express these positions through the written text. The four identities presented by Ivanic (1997) offer a frame through which the analysis of writer identity can be approached and analysed. The proposed framework foregrounds the discoursal self as the most evident manifestation of identity and differentiates this specific performance of identity from the autobiographical self thus allowing the exploration of positioning in a given act of writing. The positions taken within the text and manifest in the analysis of the discoursal self may reflect the options for self-hood present within social discourse and may allow differing degrees of a sense of ownership and authority.

4.3 Poetic identity

Having discussed the research on identity, in this section the notion of poetic identity will be developed. In simple terms, it is the identity (or identities) that can be found within a poetic text. In this sense, poetic identity is parallel to what Ivanic (1997) has termed discoursal self. The poem, as a written text, reflects the choices consciously or unconsciously made concerning the subject positions, community affiliations, and meaning making activities of self understanding, represented in written language. Poetic identity is the identity (or range of identities) that can be interpreted in the writing and reading of a poem. In this sense, the written poetic text forms the primary source of data for discussing and exploring poetic identity. As with Ivanic's (1997) elicitation of writer's identity, it is assumed that discoursal poetic identity reflects and is a moment of the performance of the writer's autobiographical self. This includes the life-history, memories, events, and ways of being in the world of the writer that are presented, situated and interpreted through the medium of the poetic text in an act of poetic identity performance. This activation and usage of the autobiographical self in the act of writing a poem produces the poetic identity interpretable in the specific poetic text. Thus, as with Ivanic's (1997) description of discoursal self, poetic identity consists of a specific textual performance of autobiographical self and is thus related to but different from the autobiographical self. Most importantly for our current discussion, the poetic self is seen as a reflective and linguistically negotiated interpretation of autobiographical information and experiences. The theoretical differentiation between poetic identity and autobiographical self is necessary for understanding the role of poetry writing

as a research method in that it situates every poem as an interpretive entity, a performance of identity.

A core issue with discoursal identity is the genre of writing within which it is found. As discussed in previous chapters in this book, poetry as a genre has some special characteristics. Most importantly, the poem involves a reflective, linguistic negotiation of personal thoughts, feelings and experiences (Hanauer, 2004). As discussed previously, the imagistic, emotional and linguistic expression of this personal information is a process of discovery for the writer as much as for the reader. It is a writing process in which the text evolves until it reaches a state of expression and discovery that reveals to the writer and reader meanings within the described experiences themselves. As such, the poem presents a reflective, deliberative personal perspective on the events described rather than an immediate response. In this sense, poetic identity as manifest in the written poem is also a reflective and deliberative construction. Poetic identity is the result of deliberate choices concerning what to include and how to present the written poem. The fact that reflective and deliberate choices were made in the writing of the poem does not mean that every aspect of meaning in the poem is conscious. As seen in Chapter 2, the process of self discovery as a central feature of poetry writing demonstrates the way in which the written poem can reveal to the writer aspects of self that may be veiled from conscious thought.

A poem is not an academic essay. It does not present its meanings as a series of arguments or theoretical propositions but rather through mediated literary, linguistic description. The power of poetry is that it "situates the reader in the impossible situation of experiencing another's linguistically mediated experience" (Hanauer, 2003, p. 70) and the "core epistemological understanding of poetic discourse is that of unique, multileveled, experiential activation" (Hanauer, 2003, p. 77). What a poem does is to reconstruct through literary, linguistic mediation the remembered experience of the writer. Therefore, poetic identity is not only the discussion of identity; it is rather the experience of the writer's subject position expressed through the actual poetic description. This is the performance of identity recreated for the reader. To understand poetic identity means to enter into an interpretive reading process and explore the situated and expressed meaning of the poem and in particular the ways in which specific autobiographical events, experiences, thoughts and ways of being are presented and focused through the medium of the written poem. The poem utilizes sensory memory and recreates situations through the lens of the writer in an act of poetic identity performance. Thus the reader recreates the writer's perspective on the experience and constructed poetic identity at the point of writing.

One of the basic characteristics of a poem is the foregrounded nature of language in the written poem (Hanauer, 2001a, 1998b; van Peer 1986, 1990, 2007).

Poetry foregrounds language choices in both reading and writing, and thus creates an intrinsic link on the semantic-interpretive level as to the meaning potential of the text. As a basic principle, content and form cannot be easily differentiated in the written poetic text. In his philosophical development of the social function of poetry, Gordon (1996) argues that the defining quality of poetry is that it cannot be paraphrased without losing some aspect of meaning. Under the heading of aesthetic cognitivism, the function of poetry is to direct the reader's experiential understanding through the use of the artistic medium (Gordon, 1996). In this formulation, literary devices do not embellish the meaning of a poem but rather actually *direct* its meaning. For the analysis of poetic identity, this position has ramifications. As argued by Pavlenko (2007) in relation to autobiographic narratives when addressing a literary text, form and linguistic choice cannot be ignored and require specific attention in discussing assigned meanings to the text. Thus, poetic identity as an aspect of the poetic text is manifest through the linguistic choices, literary devices as well as autobiographical content and all these components need to be part of the analysis of poetic identity.

As with the performance of identity in other genre, poetic identity also addresses what Pavlenko (2001b) has described as "socially recognizable categories of membership" (p. 317). Thus while a poem may be an act of poetic identity and linguistically negotiate autobiographical experiences, thoughts and ways of being, it often does so by referencing and negotiating traditional categories of identity. Thus identity categories such as gender, social class, nationality, ethnic affiliation, race, migration, and language are involved in the exploration of the meaning of experiences and as a way of examining self-understanding. In this sense these options of category of membership provide accessible meaning construction schema for studying experience and thus appear within poetic writing. Poetic identity can utilize recognizable subject positions and community affiliations in the process of trying to explore and express personal experience. Using available identity options for constructing subjective positioning does not mean that these identities cannot be questioned. Reference to an identity position does not mean that this position is accepted; poetry can and often does question and confront identities. In fact the questioning of personal identity is often an impetus for actually writing poetry to explore the meaning of experiences and events. In this sense, the poetic identity, as a central aspect of poetry writing, is the working out of the subject position that most closely suits the understanding of the writer at the moment of writing. This working out of identity in relation to events, the construction of written, expressed and linguistically negotiated experiences from a particular subject position is to a large extent the point of writing poetry. It is the moment at which reflective self-understanding is communicated and offers evidence of a particular configuration

of the self that connects events, experiences and thoughts through the use of specific language and a focused way of seeing.

The overall theoretical position taken in this book towards the issue of poetic identity can be summarized by proposing that it:

1. is discoursal and can be interpreted through a reading of the written text.
2. involves a performance of autobiographical self; but is different from autobiographical self.
3. is a reflective, deliberative construction.
4. involves the reconstruction of the experience of the writer's subject position in relation to events, experiences, thoughts and feelings.
5. is an aspect of the poetic text that is manifest through linguistic choices, literary devices and autobiographical content.
6. utilizes and negotiates socially accepted subject positions such as gender, social class, nationality, ethnic affiliation, race, migration, and language.
7. may involve the representation of multiple identities and may include shades of and reference to additional options for identity.
8. is the result of a literary, self reflective process and as such manifest poetic identities reflect the ways in which the writer wishes to present their perspective and understanding of the world.
9. encompasses the events, dispositions, presented memories, ideas, experiences, thoughts and feelings of the autobiographical self presented and linguistically negotiated within the poetic text; it is the specific configuration of these elements of the poetic text.

4.4 Analysing poetic identity

In order to conduct an actual analysis of poetic identity, the theoretical discussion presented above needs to be transformed into a format that can direct an analytical procedure. The equation below defines it in a way that is useful as a guideline for analysis:

– *Poetic Identity = Participant's subject position on autobiographical events and experiences expressed through the focusing potential of literary language resulting from a specific physical and discursive context of writing.*

This definition positions three sources of information as central to the analysis of poetic identity: subject position (as presented through linguistic and literary choices), autobiographical knowledge, and physical and discursive context of writing. In the terms more commonly used for the analysis of written text, these three levels are the analysis of context, content, and stylistic choice. It is important to

note that for our present purposes, stylistic analysis of literary and linguistic choices is the point at which the subject position of the writer is expressed. In other words, from the writer's perspective autobiographical information is focused through stylistic choices constructing a particular poetic identity. From the reader's perspective, the analysis of the language and literacy devices found in the poem allows access into the participant's poetic identity. The three categories of analysis for the exploration of poetic identity can be defined as follows:

1. ***Analysis of Context of Writing***: The context of writing influences the formation and comprehension of the written text and accordingly knowledge of the context allows enhanced interpretation of the written text and its meanings. Context in writing involves both micro and macro levels. Micro-level context influences include the reason for writing, the community, workplace and educational environments of writing, the definition and understanding of the poetry writing task, the inter-personal communication surrounding this writing, the physical setting and other direct contextual influences on the writer. The macro-level includes the historical, ideological discursive setting within which the writer functions. This macro-level discursive context provides a set of parameters and resources that are utilized by writers in negotiating their understandings of the world. These resources include what Pavlenko (2001b) has defined as socially recognizable categories of membership (identity options) or what Ivanic (1997) defines as possibilities for self-hood in the sociocultural and institutional context. The micro and macro levels of context interact with each other creating the interplay of contextualizing forces. The macro level discursive context presents acceptable and expected identity options that are negotiated at a specific time, place and immediate environment of writing.
2. ***Content Analysis***: As described above, a poem involves the performance of autobiographical self and as such all the knowledge stored within the writer's autobiographical self is information that can be utilized. Thus, an analysis of poetic identity involves an investigation of the content presented within the poem concerning the events, dispositions, presented memories, ideas, experiences, thoughts and feelings of the autobiographical self. Content analysis in poetry is underpinned by the assumption that a process of careful and deliberate editing has taken place in the actual choice of what to present. Poems are often short texts that include only limited amounts of explicit information. Accordingly, if specific events, experiences, thoughts, feelings or ideas are presented, this results from a particular choice to use this limited amount of information to represent a much longer and more detailed experience. This is the principle of metonymy in which an attribute of something is used to stand for the thing itself. For this reason, the analysis of the content of a poem

consists of considering why this particular content was presented and what this choice would mean. This also directs a process of inference in which what has not been presented may be as important as what actually is. Poetic identity resides also in the choice of what to focus on and what to present in the poem. It is an editorial decision from within the much wider set of options that autobiographical memory affords.

3. ***Stylistic Analysis of Literary and Linguistic Choices***: A poem is a carefully written, edited and revised written text. In the construction of this text, careful consideration is directed at the specific linguistic and literary choices that are made. The poem is designed to carefully reflect and reconstruct the subject position of the writer in relation to autobiographical information. Accordingly, the analysis of the poetic identity is directed by the stylistic convention that the linguistic and literary choices of the poem are deliberate and designed to direct the reader to particular ways of seeing and understanding the phenomenon being described. Poetic identity is the decision concerning how to use linguistic and literary resources in order to focus and direct the reader's attention to particular ways of experiencing the described events. This approach closely follows Gordon's (1996) concept of aesthetic cognitivism that defines a cognitive, directive function for art in allowing its viewers to see the world through the artist's artistry.

These three categories of analysis are closely integrated within the poem itself and cannot be easily disentangled. The context provides a reason for writing and conceptual resources and parameters for the construction of identity; utilizing stored autobiographical information, the poet makes a series of choices as to what to present from the wealth of potential information; the poet makes stylistic decisions as what linguistic and literary choices will create a text that directs the reader to see, feel, and understand the described experiences from the poet's perspective. Each category of analysis by itself and all three together construct the poetic identity expressed in the written poetic text.

4.5 A case study

In this section, a specific case study of poetic identity will be presented as a way of exemplifying the analytical method proposed and to explicate the nature of poetic identity as it is manifest within actual second language poems. The case chosen relates to an issue of family life and involves the analysis of a whole book of poetry.

4.5.1 Exploring parental divorce

Mika Yoshida (pseudonym), a Japanese female student in her early twenties, wrote a book of poetry consisting of ten poems entitled "Family", dealing with the divorce of her parents when she was 17. She introduced her book of poetry with the following set of statements:

> "What is family? How many times did I think about it seriously? – None. I had never thought about my family seriously until I faced a big incident in my life. My parents got divorced when I was seventeen and mom left home. Since I believed we were the happiest family in the world and I was proud of being born a member of my family, I could not believe it. I was totally devastated".

As clearly expressed in these introductory words, Mika decided to write her book of poetry about this major incident. The context for writing this book of poetry was the ESL College Writing class described in Chapter 2 and 3. The course encouraged personal reflection on important incidents in participants' lives, detailed, multimodal recall, self-analysis and accurate and deliberate expression in poetic form of personal understandings. This book of poetry on this topic and in this form results from the context, experiences and directions of this writing class (see Appendix A for a full course outline).

In this case, the analysis of poetic identity involves explicating the poet's subject position in relation to the meaning of the experience of divorce, her relationship to each of the persons involved and her perception of self as expressed through her negotiation of discursive possibilities of self hood, specific choices of content and stylistic choices of linguistic and literary elements that direct her understanding. The specific choices of content made by the poet offer a way of introducing the central aspects of divorce that Mika focuses on. The content outline and order of poems in Mika's book of poetry are as follows:

1. *Divorce of Parents* – on the moment of her father signing the divorce papers.
2. *The Last Supper* – on the scene of the final dinner of the whole family on the day before her mother left the family home.
3. *The Morning Mom Left* – on the last morning before her mother left the house.
4. *Conflict* – on Mika's ambiguous feelings following the divorce.
5. *The Day After Divorce* – on Mika's feelings on being asked to choose whether to live with her mother or father.
6. *Housework* – on the roles that Mika took on in her father's house following her mother's leaving and her feelings towards these new roles.
7. *Mom's Boyfriend* – on meeting her mother's new boyfriend.
8. *Mom*? – on Mika's perception that her mother had changed from being just a mother into being a woman.

9. *The First and Last Letter from Dad* – on a letter written by her father and given to her on the day she moved away from home to go to university.
10. *Living Apart* – on Mika's feelings as she starts her life away from her family at university and in a new city.

As can be seen from this outline, the poems are organized as a historical progression with each poem marking a significant moment in Mika's understanding of her process of living through family divorce. This progression offers a series of developing and changing subject positions described in relation to specific moments of autobiographical information. She describes this process in the following way:

> *Divorce of Parents*
> It happened for a split second
> Cracked tie
> I was left behind
> And totally lost
>
> Dad finally signed the formal paper
> Mountains of frustration
> I was stunned
> Such a thin piece of paper
>
> Relationship was completely different
> From 1 minute before
> Such an automatic task
> Horrible

This poem clearly signifies a meaningful moment of change presented through the juxtaposition of the thinness of the paper, the automaticity of the task of writing, the minute of writing and the totality of the loss, the mountains of frustration, the cracked tie, and the complete change in the relationship. These juxtapositions are emphasized through the use of lining, stanza design and specific word choice. The concreteness of the final signing of the formal papers is understood by the speaker for what it is – a moment of complete upheaval. The speaker describes her state as being left behind, stunned and lost. This is a difficult situation. Her father's signing is centered in the poem, marks the final break from the past, and the need for the writer to adjust to a new way of seeing herself and her relationship to her family. Previous perceptions of herself, her life, and her family have now been questioned.

This theme of questioning who she is and how she should now relate to other members of her family is continued in her next poem – *The Last Supper* – which describes the final dinner of her whole family before her mother left home.

The Last Supper
I didn't know
Should I smile?
Should I cry?

Everyone knew tacitly

Well never sit around the table
Happy table
Continuous laughter
Usual arrangement of family

But I felt

Tense atmosphere
Not to break the conversation
Fear of silence
I felt awkward
Trying to look smiling

I can't remember the flavor of the last supper

This poem starts with the statements – "I didn't know/Should I smile?/Should I cry?" indicating the confusion felt by the speaker at this final family supper. Once again using lining, stanza structure and specific word choice, the poem juxtaposes the routine of eating supper together and the fact that this will be the last time that this happens. The ambiguity of the speaker's described feelings connects memories of the "usual arrangement of family" with its laughter and happiness with the "tense atmosphere" and "fear of silence" of the last supper. The speaker literally does not know what to do. She feels awkward and tries to "look smiling". The poem questions the normalcy of this final supper and all its inherent assumptions about identity positions. A central part of this supper is the unmentioned, tacit knowledge that the supper is not a normal one and that while everyone is playing their assigned role it is just that – an assigned role. This poem clearly marks a change in the speaker's subject position as she struggles with the critical moment of understanding that previous schema that directed her ways of being and action tied to unquestioned identity positions are now questioned and it is unclear how she should behave and feel. This questioning of identity and its related definitions of ways of being is continued in her next poem.

The Morning Mom Left
Cold morning
I slowly went downstairs

Is she sad?
Or upset?

She was still there

But she was like a stranger
She kept cooking

Facing a window sadly
She didn't turn around
Hiding tears

I felt
Her back told me something
About our past life
I couldn't blink
Increasing heartbeat
Kept my eyes on her
To print her on my mind

I whispered at the top of my voice

"Thank you....."

In this poem, the speaker explores her mother's feelings and her own relationship to her mother. As with the poem concerning the last supper, it juxtaposes the routine of finding her mother present and cooking in the kitchen and the knowledge that this will be the last time that this happens. This is a critical moment of change for the speaker, with the present moving quickly into the past. Facing this last moment of her mother's presence at home, the speaker tries to capture the past by looking intensely at her mother and making a "print on her mind". This is an attempt to overcome the fluidity of life changes experienced by the speaker. Importantly, the morning is described as "cold" and the speaker is looking at her mother's back. Her mother is described as "Facing a window sadly" and "Hiding tears". At first, the speaker cannot determine her mother's feelings and senses her as a stranger and distant. But once the speaker turns to her own feelings, her sense of closeness to her mother returns and her memories of past life with her mother are present. She ends the poem with the oxymoronic construction "I whispered at the top of my voice/Thank you...". This line reveals the complexity of the daughter-mother relationship at this moment. The strangeness of her mother and the emotional distance combined with the ordinariness of her cooking in the kitchen and fact that she will leave that morning, create a situation in which the speaker shouts silently offering thanks for the past. What does one feel at a moment like this? The poem shows the feelings of sadness and loss mixed with the desire to fix a memory of her mother, to hold on to the relationship between mother and daughter. It is a

moment of mixed emotions and recognition of the inevitability of the change to come. The final "thank you" that ends the poem is also a moment of parting.

The next two poems describe the speaker's sense of confusion over a lost world and explore the ramifications of this on her sense of identity. In the first one, she explores her own maturity and ability to face the new situation:

Conflict
I acted
As if nothing happened
As if I were an adult
Biting my lips
To hinder tears
I was neither a child
Nor adult

too little to accept
too little to sob

Here, the poet recognizes the ambiguity of her identity and the ramifications of this on her own self-perception. She wishes to cry but identifies this role with that of a child. She identifies an adult role as that of being able to accept the reality of her parents' divorce. She situates herself as between these two identity options wishing both but unable to fulfill either. Outwardly, she denies the internal ambiguity, exhibiting what she considers to be the ways of an adult, ignoring the divorce; but inwardly she actively questions her own maturity and feels all the sadness associated with the loss of family and mother that she has just undergone. She clearly recognizes her external presentation as a performance using the dual meanings of the word act as theatrical performance and as action.

The next poem further strengthens this sense of the ambiguity of her identity:

The Day After Divorce
Nothing changed in the world
But I was blind
Where am I heading for?
My life
Blind direction
Eyes staring at empty space
Full of anxiety
Who should I live with?
I just left it to nature

This poem is motivated by a particular decision that the poet needed to make – should she live with her mother or with her father? But the poem itself takes on wider meanings explicating the ramifications of changes to self-identity and personal situation following a divorce. The speaker states "where am I heading for" and expresses feelings of blindness and anxiety. She recognizes that the changes are internal and not external. The world has stayed the same; but she has lost the assurance of her future direction. Faced with the unknown and having no basis upon which to make a decision, she does not decide, leaving it to others (nature?) to work itself out for her. This poem situates the poet at a low point of indecision and fear of the future.

In the next poem, the ambiguity of self-positioning of the previous poem is replaced with anger over the imposition of her mother's role upon her by her father.

Housework
It made me depressed
I hated it
It took much time
Routine work
Boring sink

Waiting for dad to serve warm dinner
As if I were his wife
It was already prepared for him

"I'm coming home late tonight"
Dad called me

How many times did we repeat this?

This poem expresses the poet's emotional response to replacing her mother. She specifies two specific chores (cooking and cleaning) and states that she is acting as if she "were his wife". In this poem, the speaker recognizes that she has been assigned an identity that is not of her choosing and not of her liking. This is not accepted by her and involves a shift in the daughter-father relationship to a 'father-wife' relationship with all the inappropriate ramifications that this holds. The poem expresses the poet's anger over the whole situation and the lack of communication between her and her father. The last line of the poem focuses the reader's attention on the repetitive nature of the work, the lack of communication and the anger and disappointment in her father. There is an implicit accusation against the way her father is behaving and the way he is defining their relationship.

This exploration of male identities and roles is continued in the next poem:

Mom's Boyfriend
He is short
And skinny
Looks like a boy

My dad is tough
And tall
Looks strong

Can he care for my mom?

And protect her?

In this poem, the poet juxtaposes the physical characteristics of her mother's new boyfriend and her father. The connection between toughness, maleness and the ability to protect is based on a classic gender stereotype for men. To a certain extent this poem extends the disappointment concerning men in the previous poem. There is also a question here concerning the choice made by her mother concerning a male partner and what this could mean. Her mother's boyfriend seems to be very different from her father and once again brings her to question gender identity categories.

Her next poem brings together several themes used in previous poems. The poet returns to the last moments of her mother's leaving and to the last poem that dealt with the nature of the choice her mother has made for a new boyfriend and life.

Mom?
Domestic mom disappeared
That morning
I was lonely for her

After a while
She came back to me
Became a new woman
Vivid and fresh
I can't believe my eyes

She is smiling
Like a little girl
Next to her boyfriend

Is it my mom.....?

I am upset
At that scene
But get relieved
She is actually walking a new life
Full of happiness

Welcome back my beautiful woman.

In this poem, the speaker recognizes a change in her mother, who has taken on a new identity. The first and last words of the poem clearly designate the nature of the change that has occurred. From the sad back of her mother looking out of a window in an earlier poem, her mother is now a "new woman". The poet is upset but by the end of the poem recognizes that the change in her mother is a good thing and her mother's new life is full of happiness. Her new role as a "beautiful woman" is welcomed back. This poem marks a change in the mother/daughter relationship. Rather than a domestic mother who serves her daughter; the poet sees her in a new light. The change in relationship to her parents is carried through to the next poem, when the speaker addresses her relationship with her father.

The First and Last Letter from Dad
"I have never written to you"
The letter said ashamedly
We well know the loneliness of being left

"It was totally my fault."
Whose words?
Cast a question into darkness
My heart squeezed

How could I blame him?

Wandering around my mind
Coming and going
Hatred and impatience
Through mercy

Settled at our snug life
At last
He was just my dad
My only dad.

Here the poet revisits the role of father in the divorce and the nature of her relationship with him. The autobiographical memory presented concerns a letter that was given to the poet by her father on the day that she moved away from home and went to college. The poem describes her father's perspective on the divorce and his

self blame. As stated in the first few lines, her father feels loneliness, guilt, and shame. The poet first provides her father's position and questions her own position of blaming her father and her feelings of "hatred and impatience" towards him. The poem ends with the acceptance of the humanity of her father and his flaws. She understands that he is still her father and this final line is a moment of maturity in which the stereotypes of parenthood are replaced with the recognition of realities of her father as a person. This poem marks a change in her relationship and can be seen as a movement towards a more mature attitude. The final poem in this collection marks the moment of living apart from her parents.

Living Apart
I can do whatever I want
I can eat whatever I want
Don't have to wait for someone
Don't have to cook for someone
I can enjoy my time

But nobody welcomes me
When I come back home
I turn on the light
I eat by myself
I am the only person
At home

The poem that ends this book of poetry explores the feelings of living alone at university. The two stanzas of the poem represent two different positions: freedom of choice and being by oneself. The first stanza repeats the phrases of what can be done and what does not have to be done for another; the second stanza emphasizes the lack of a partner to welcome her home and the loneliness of this situation. The poem ends by marking her new status as an individual beyond the relationships with her parents that had so dominated previous poems. This is the final identity development within this set of poems.

As a book dealing with family divorce, several discursive identities are directly referenced and negotiated. Specifically, the discursive, social construction of the family, the nature of being a mother, a father and daughter, the accepted and expected roles of being a man and a woman and issues of identity related to age are being negotiated through this book of poetry. The collection can be seen as a history of developing subject positions designed to explore, understand and negotiate different ways of being in the world.

This book of poetry documents a process of self-development through a series of moments that are linguistically negotiated and focused. The specific linguistic

choices in each of these selected poetic moments create a form of explanatory narrative. For the presented self positioning and poetic identity, this book of poetry marks a history of change in which the writer moves from shock and confusion in relation to divorce to a position of parental acceptance, a more mature understanding of gender roles, and the ability to be alone.

4.6 Poetic identity and qualitative research

The discussion of poetic identity that appears in this chapter is crucial for the development of an understanding of how poetry writing functions as a research method. Poetic identity consists of the subject position, interpreted through the written poem, in relation to described events, experiences, thoughts and feelings from the autobiographical history of the writer. For qualitative research the interpreted poetic identity is primary data on the participant's constructed perspective on events. An analysis of poetic identity is the analysis of participant perspective, a principal reason for using qualitative research data. In this sense, the poetic identity as a central aspect of poetry writing is the working out of the subject position that most closely suits the understanding of the writer at the moment of writing. This working out of identity in relation to events, the construction of written, expressed and linguistically negotiated experiences from a particular subject position is to a large extent the point of writing poetry. It is the moment at which reflective, self understanding is communicated and offers evidence of a particular configuration of the self that connects events, experiences and thoughts with specific, linguistically negotiated, focused ways of seeing. This moment of personal expression allows the reader/researcher the option of understanding the participants' perspective, their ways of being in the world, the way they construct their own autobiographical histories, and self-understanding of their processes of development. An exploration of poetic identity provides data that is central to the questions at the heart of qualitative research.

CHAPTER 5

Philosophical and methodological guidelines

5.1 Introduction

In the last three chapters the characteristics of poetry writing were explored in relation to the process of poetry writing, the textual and literary features of second language poetry and the nature and analysis of poetic identity. The aim of this chapter is to offer a methodological and philosophical position on how poetry writing can be used as a research method. To this purpose, the studies that have been done so far with poetry writing as a research method will be reviewed and a proposal will be offered on how poetry writing can be used as a method for collecting data for questions within the humanities and the social sciences.

5.2 Poetry writing as a research method

In order to explore the existing knowledge on poetry writing as a research method an extensive search in the fields of education, psychology, sociology, medicine, nursing and linguistics was conducted. The focus was on published peer-reviewed, academic journal articles, book chapters and books. The search was not limited to any specific language but produced only materials published in English perhaps as a result of a linguistic bias in the search engines themselves. All in all, 66 sources were found consisting of 35 book chapters, one book and 30 journal articles. Poetry corners that appear in a range of journals were excluded as they did not offer explicit discussions of how poetry could be used as a research method. This relatively small production suggests that this direction for research is not frequently used or discussed. Poetry as a research method has been applied mainly in the fields of social work, nursing education, and sociology. More specifically, it has been used to explore nurse field and educational experiences, to understand personal and field experiences of social work and to explore psychological phenomena. In addition, it was used as a way of presenting data in an engaging manner within the field of sociology.

A detailed analysis of this literature reveals three main categories of usage: 1) to *represent and reinterpret existing data*; 2) to *collect data*; and 3) to *collect field notes*. Of these three approaches, the first one is the best known and most widely

referenced. This approach consists of taking existing verbal data and rewriting or rearranging it by means of poetic forms. The most prominent proponent of this approach and its cited originator is Laurel Richardson (1990), who has explored, employed and described it quite extensively in a series of publications (Richardson, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2003). As she retrospectively explains (Richardson, 1997), her method derives from epistemological and ontological concerns with the nature of knowledge in the field of sociology. She argues from a feminist-postmodern-interpretivist position that the rewriting of sociological interviews as poetry expose the "unexamined but foundational assumptions regarding the nature of 'theory,' 'data,' 'findings,' 'authority,' and 'authorship'" (Richardson, 1997, p. 233). In this sense, the poetic rewriting of sociological interviews is a critical action with the intention of raising awareness of the artificiality and intervention of all forms of rewriting interviews including the unmarked, widely accepted prose rewriting of interview data and findings in academic fields. In her words, "framing the 'findings' as though they were independent of the method in which they were produced is falsifying, although a standard claims-making procedure" (p. 233). To her, interview data results from a dialogic interaction and should be kept as such.

However, Richardson's usage and justification of poetic representation of data goes beyond the poststructuralist argument and into the need of recognizing the constitutive functions of literacy. She also provides a series of arguments dealing with the value of conducting this poetic rewriting of data for research purposes. Richardson (2003a) argues that the rewriting of interview data "can deepen the researcher's attachment to the interviewee and help the researcher see through preconceptions and biases" (p. 191). In addition, the rearrangement of the interviewee data "offers the researcher the possibility of exploring other unexamined assumptions of interview representation" and thus facilitates "alternative expressions of people's lives" (Richardson, 2003a, pp. 191–192). Finally, as held by Richardson (1997), the poetic rearrangement of findings has "a greater likelihood of engaging readers in reflective analyses of their own interpretive labors of the researcher's interpretive labors of the speaker's interpretive labors" (p. 233). Thus for her, the poetic rearrangement of interview data has a role in data analysis and presentation. As an analysis procedure and mode of presentation, the poetic rewriting of findings provides the option of insight and emotional engagement with the lived experience of the interviewee for both the researcher and the audience of academic research. The poem that results from this rewriting of interview data has the status of a co-interpretive production by the participant and the researcher and is a more open interpretive entity than the prose presentation of findings. Richardson (1997) states that this poetic representation of findings is "positioned as joint, prismatic, open and partial" (p. 233).

Richardson (1997) proposes two forms of poetic rearrangement: *narrative poetry* and *lyric poetry*. The first one presents the interview data in the form of a story in the participants' own words, which utilizes the poetic "conventions of line breaks, spaces between lines and between stanzas and sections" and relies on "poetic devices such as repetition, off-rhyme, meter, and pauses to convey her narrative" (Richardson, 1997, p. 233). The narrative poem uses the words of the interviewee but interprets them through the construction of a poetic representation. The aim is to capture the "essence" of the narrative and to present it in a format that is both interpretive, insightful and emotionally engaging for the reader, researcher and research audience. This is a form of dramatic storytelling within the tradition of oral narrative poetry. The presentation of interviewee data as *lyric poetry* also utilizes the conventions of poetic presentation, but the aim of each poem is to present a single "emotionally and morally charged experience" (Richardson, 1997, p. 236) and not a whole life story. This position is close to Hanauer's (2003) understanding that poetry presents a linguistically negotiated moment of unique human experience. Richardson (1997) claims that lyric poems "concretize emotions, feelings and moods – the most private kind of feelings – in order to recreate an experience in another person" (p. 237). As such, a collection of lyric poems captures lived moments of experience and may imply a narrative but is not an explicated, coherent narrative structure. In fact, a collection of lyric poems rewritten from interview data could be sequenced into several different narratives and may imply a series of meta-narrative constructs as well (Richardson, 1997). It is important to note that lived experience is a collection of moments that may or may not be integrated into a coherent narrative. There is the possibility that for many people, their memories consist of a collection of specific moments and not an explicated unified narrative. As argued by Richardson (1997), this would imply that the lyric poem is the closest form of writing that captures and represents actual lived experience of self.

Richardson is not alone in using poetic rearrangements of collected data; several other researchers have built upon a similar set of assumptions concerning the value of poetically rearranging elicited interview data. Langer and Furman (2004) conducted a study of a Native American woman exploring her bi-racial identity and experiences of assimilation that utilized what they term as research and interpretive poems. The research poem is very similar to Richardson's (1997) presentation of the narrative poem. As described by Langer and Furman (2004), the research poem was created from the words of the participant as part of an interview process. The research poem emerged by creating "breaks" in the collected oral narrative while being attentive to "keeping discrete units of meaning together", the "sound of the newly forming poem" and the "accuracy and emotional integrity of the presentation" (p. 4). As argued by Langer and Furman (2004), the benefits of

this approach were a "more powerful presentation of data" and the enhancement of the "emotional intensity and the poignancy of the respondent's comments" (p. 5). Langer and Furman's (2004) article also involved the usage of what they term an interpretive poem. Following the creation of the research poem from the rearrangement of the oral data, both authors wrote new poems as a response to the research poem. The aim of the interpretive poems was to "utilize poetic device to create an evocative and moving document which allows for the subjective response of the researchers" (p. 6). These interpretive poems allowed the researchers to express their own impressions and emotional interactions during and as a response to the collected interview data.

Exploring sexuality, relationship and identity, Leavy (2009), Poindexter (2002) and Faulkner (2006) all present data that result from the poetic rearrangement of interviews. Leavy (2009) collected data on sexual identity and body image from college females and males but for her poetic rearrangement focused on a group of 18 female participants who self identified as bisexual, heterosexual and homosexual. Her approach consisted of a full categorical analysis of the interview data followed by an editorial process involving highlighting specific sections of the original interview, selection of specific words and phrases of the interviewee and careful crafting and weaving of the chosen elements into a poem that was emotional and represented "very personal experiences" (p. 81). Poindexter (2002) explored the emotional difficulties of an African American heterosexual couple after the news that one of them had been infected with the HIV virus. She turned to poetry as a result of her concern that she "would not be able to sufficiently give voice to the respondent's stories and not be able to translate their experiences in a way that would be useful and meaningful to readers" (2002, p. 707). In creating her research poetry, Poindexter first coded her interview data, then "copied phrases, sentences or paragraphs that seemed to highlight the unique personality or perspective of the respondent" (2002, p. 708), transferred them into a new document and arranged them into stanzas. This process of poetry creation used the interviewee's words but was also based on the "gut feeling" and "literary hunches" of the researcher. Faulkner (2006) used the poetic rearrangement and rewriting of interview data to explore lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer (LGBTQ) Jewish American identity. Her approach involved the poetic rearrangement of interview data but was done in a collaborative manner which allowed participants to revise final poetic transcripts in accordance with their understandings.

Additional instances of poetic transcription of interview data include Finley's (2003) recording and performance of conversations with homeless street youths, Glesne's (1997) transcription of interview data with an elderly Puerto Rican researcher and educator and Ohlen's (2003) poetic transcription of interviewee data of an elderly woman diagnosed with cancer. As seen in the review presented here,

this poetic approach to interview data is based on the principle that poetry is a good representational vehicle for presenting concise, focused, emotion-laden understandings of human experience. The method employed by the different researchers has three basic elements: 1) collection of data through an interview process; 2) constructing a poem from the exact words of the interviewee; and 3) using knowledge of poetic conventions and devices to construct poems that capture the essence of the interview in a condensed, emotional text that engages both the researcher and the research audience. The final poetic text is designed to be both a poem and an expression of research data.

A different usage of poetry writing as a research method consists of using it as a *form of data collection*. In this case, poetry is not formed out of the words of interview data but rather is the original format of the data itself. As seen in previous chapters, it involves a process of self discovery and insight into past experiences. The prevalent use of poetry as a method of data collection builds upon this process of self discovery and utilizes poetry within the framework of auto-ethnographic research. In other words, poetry writing is used as part of a research project that explores the understandings and experiences of the researcher. As argued by Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo & Kulkarni (2007) auto-ethnographic poetry writing for qualitative researchers helps the poet/researcher to "develop new insights" and can be an important part of the qualitative researchers' "constant process of self reflection as a means of exposing their biases" (p. 304). For psychologically demanding therapeutic and clinical fields such as social work, psychology, nursing and medical practice, auto-ethnographic poetry writing has the value of helping the clinician/researcher/poet "reflect concisely and accurately what they see, hear, think and feel while they grapple with the demand to listen to their clients' needs and concerns" as well as to help them to "develop empathy and understanding of their clients" (Furman, Lietz, and Langer, 2006). In addition to the value of enhanced self understanding by the researcher, the written poetry can also serve as research data for other readers offering insights into the experiences and understandings of these researchers in a range of settings. As stated by Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006), this auto-ethnographic poetry is "qualitative data" and "an exploration of the lived experience of the research subject/participant" (p. 4). Thus, auto-ethnographic poetry writing serves the double purpose of enhancing self understanding of the researcher and providing insights for others in relation to the world phenomenon and lived experiences researched.

In the Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006) study, poetic auto-ethnography was used to explore Rich Furman's experiences in working as a volunteer with two abandoned psychiatrically and psychologically disabled children in Antiqua, Guatemala. The aim of the poetry writing was to "represent faithfully the salient affective and psychosocial issues that he encountered in his interactions with the

children" and "as a means for the author of exploring his perceptions and feelings about the complex, personal issues implicated in cross-cultural and international helping" (Furman, Lietz and Langer, 2006, p. 4). The poems were treated as qualitative data and analysed using emergent, grounding theory approaches to open and axial thematic coding. This process of coding was conducted in several cycles and was designed to "ensure accurate and adequate representation of the themes" (Furman, Lietz and Langer, 2006, p. 4) found in the original poetry. Having completed a thematic analysis, a new series of poems was written based on the analysed themes and utilizing different poetic forms including the American form of the original Japanese *tanka* and the *pantoum*, a French poetic form based on Malaysian poetry. The outcome was the construction of three poems dealing with the same thematic material – the original poem, a thematic *tanka* form and a thematic *pantoum* form as responses to the original poem. As argued by Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006) these poems exemplify Richardson's (1997, 2003b) feminist-postmodern-interpretivist position that the form of data presentation influences the ways in which data is understood and the meanings that are emphasized and extracted.

In a different poetry writing study, Furman (2007) explores his own understanding of existential themes that are relevant to his therapeutic practice. In this case, Furman utilized two different genres for his auto-ethnographic inquiry – poetry and narrative. Furman had a collection of poems that he had written about the issues of death, meaning, identity, and nothingness that examined his experiences as a therapist. His method in relation to these written poems was to write personal narrative reflections in response to his written poetry designed to "focus on the specific existential theme explored" in each poem and to contextualize "personal insights into broader cultural issues" (Furman, 2007, p. 3). The aim of this study was primarily for self-understanding and as part of the process of enhancing personal clinical practice.

Auto-ethnographic poetry writing as a research method has also been used within the field of nursing education. Holmes and Gregory (1998) argue that poetry writing should be part of the repertoire of literacy skills used by nurses as a "way in which nurses can reveal the perceptions in their work and how these new found perceptions can add depth and meaning to their practice" (p. 1194). Holmes and Gregory (1998) find the poetry writing experience important in that it allows "mundane daily events or complex experiences" to be "transformed into expressions with clarity, freshness and new significance" and thus allows new understandings to emerge and be stored over time. The poetic approach taken in this study consists of focusing on the emotive and explanatory power of the image. The image is considered to capture "deeply meaningful perceptive experiences (Holmes and Gregory, 1998, p. 1191) and as such is valuable to the practicing

nurse who is trying to reflect and understand the experiences she is exposed to in her professional life.

A different way of using poetry writing as a form of data collection is to combine the auto-ethnographic value of poetry writing as a process of enhanced self understanding with research questions concerning experiences that are of interest to the wider academic community. In other words, a researcher can initiate a poetry writing process that is designed to allow the participants involved personal insight through their poetry writing and at the same time utilize this written poetry as qualitative data that gives insight to the understanding and perspective of these participants by the researcher. The basic principle here is the development of a context and process that facilitates the writing of self reflective, auto-ethnographic poetry that is then used as data for qualitative research.

As mental health nurse educators, Kidd and Tusaie (2004) used the same process. In their study, writing a poem was integrated within the framework of an ongoing reflective journaling process. A single poem was requested on the last week of a course for trainee nurses conducting clinical practice in acute/chronic psychiatric units in hospitals. The instruction given to the students was that the poetry should "reflect either the voice of a client or the student's personal response to the mental health experience" (Kidd and Tusaie, 2004, p. 406). The submitted poems were treated as data and a thematic, qualitative analysis was conducted, which identified five core themes and one overriding meta-theme. The authors described the situation as one in which "students' initial beliefs were challenged and frequently altered" (Kidd and Tusaie, 2004, p. 406) through the process of clinical practice. As described by Kidd and Tusaie (2004), the poetry writing process "provided a rich and diverse medium for the expression of thoughts, feelings and knowledge attained" (p. 412) by mental health trainee nurses. As reported in this study, the experience was beneficial to the trainee nurses as well as to the teaching faculty in understanding the specific experiences of their students (and by extension other students like them). Similar usages of poetry within nursing education have been described by Olson (2001), Peck (2001) and Schuster (1994), all focusing on the ability of poetry to elicit auto-ethnographic understandings that assist trainee nurses in seeing their experiences and clients in new ways and allowing teaching faculty to understand the experiences of their students.

A different context which utilizes poetry as a data collection method and as a form of auto-ethnography was described by Bjorklund (1999). In this study, a poetry therapy group was initiated within an in-patient psychiatric ward to help patients explore and expand their understanding of their diagnostic identity. The poetry writing was part of the therapeutic process and was designed to help patients express and explore their identities, feelings and experiences in psychiatric hospitals. The poems were facilitated through an expressive arts process that

included the presentation of pictures, verbal expression of emotions, sketchpad drawing and poetry writing. The product of this process was a series of poems that touched upon shared commonalities among members of the poetry therapy group. The expressed themes were changes they felt in the way they were treated following diagnosis, the experience of not being listened to, the sense of violation at being hospitalized, and the desire to leave hospital and "live like everybody else" (Bjorklund, 2003, p. 214). While the aim was to help the participants to express and explore their own identities and feelings, the outcome of the presentation and analysis of this poetry is an enhanced understanding of the perspective and experiences of this group of patients. Thus, as with other uses of auto-ethnographic poetry writing, it serves a double aim of providing personal insight to the poet while providing other readers and researchers insight into the poet's perspective and understanding of their own experiences.

The third way of using poetry writing as a research method consists of using poetry writing as a method of *collecting field notes*. In two papers, Sherry and Schouten (2002) and Cahnmann (2003) propose collecting observations and field notes in the early stages of qualitative research. This proposal is based on the idea that poetry involves a sensitive, careful, image directed and emotionally-laden observation of the world and as such may provide the researcher with insight into their own understanding of experiences and observed phenomenon. As opposed to previously discussed propositions on the use of poetry as a research method, the assumption here is that poetry will directly serve the understanding of the researcher and may not be accessible to the research audience. Poetry writing in this context serves a mediatory role in allowing the researchers to further their own understanding of the phenomenon under observation. Sherry and Schouten (2002) describe this process as a form of reflective journal designed to "record personal reactions, thoughts, biases and observations that emerge in fieldwork" (p. 224). The type of poetry writing they utilize derives from "very specific sensory images" from "memory, objects and artifacts, ambient environment, photographs, commercial media, other texts, interpersonal interactions, and conversations" (p. 226). Cahnmann (2003) specifies that poetic field notes offer "researchers the possibility to write down images, metaphors, and overheard phrases" (p. 226). For both Cahnmann (2003) and Sherry and Schouten (2002), these poetic field notes are recorded in an on-going manner within a notebook. For Cahnmann (2003), the value of a poetic approach to field notes resides in the fact that poetry writing "requires the practice of noticing" and a "fresh way of seeing" (p. 32). As with other uses of poetry writing for research purposes, the aim of these poetic field notes is to "tap intuitions and explore unthought known" and to seek "better understanding" (Sherry and Schouten, 2002, p. 224). In a similar vein, Cahnmann (2003) sees this process as a way "to reimagine ways of understanding the familiar" (p. 32).

All three methods reviewed above utilize the special characteristics of poetry writing in order to enhance personal understanding, explore personal biases, generate emotional responses and engagement and demonstrate that poetry writing can be a useful genre for research purposes. This direction is developed in the next section as we explore the specific proposal for using poetry writing as a research method developed in this book.

5.3 Methodological guidelines

The approach to using poetry writing as a research method that is suitable for answering questions in the humanities and the social sciences builds upon the research that has already been done concerning poetry as a research method and the special characteristics of poetry writing presented in this book. In particular, my own interests concern second language learners and as such this section will develop an approach to using poetry writing as a research method that is directly attuned to this group. However, the basic principles and methodological aspects of this approach should be useful for a wide range of research projects that go beyond the specific population addressed here.

The approach to poetry writing as a research method developed in this book builds upon the concept of combining data collection with a process of self discovery. This is an inherently ethical approach to research in that participants gain value and insight into themselves as part of the process of data elicitation and they are not treated as an objectified information source. The development of self knowledge is a basic aspect of the process of data generation and is valued for the knowledge of participant perspective that it produces. This approach involves creating a writing context in which, through an extended, reflective, deliberative consideration of autobiographical information, a series of (lyric) poems capturing specific, significant moments of life are produced. Data collection is a facilitated writing process that involves extensive self consideration and analysis and careful writing and revision of personal, autobiographical memories. The writers are helped during this process and allowed time to really construct texts that reflect their understandings of past experiences at the time of writing. The poem as a source of data is deliberative and reflective and offers the qualitative researcher insight into the presented, thoughtful and crafted perspective of the writer on personal experiences, thoughts and feelings. The ability of poetry to capture and reconstruct the reader's impressions of moments of life with their embedded emotional and sensory perceptions offers the qualitative researcher a rich source of information with which to closely explore the writer's position and understanding while emotionally engaging with the experience itself. Data analysis is directed by

a concern for both the content and the stylistic aspects of the poem and is in accordance with the nature of the text as a poem. Stylistic analysis of the way artistic decisions direct the reader to certain foci, feelings, images and understandings is important in that the poem uses these textual features to construct its meaning and to reveal the writer's subjective positioning in relation to the experience, thought or feeling that is being presented.

As with any description of a method, several different traditional aspects of research need to be addressed, which consist of types of research questions that can be addressed (the why), methods of data collection and analysis (the how), the data that is elicited (the what), and ways of organizing and presenting data (the "what for" and "to whom"). In the sections below, each of these aspects is described in relation to the usage of poetry writing as a research method.

5.3.1 Personal and cultural qualitative research questions

Poetry writing is particularly suited for the exploration of research questions that address experiences with emotional content and where the issue under consideration includes understanding the specific ways in which something was experienced by the participant. Broadly speaking, it is useful for understanding the personal perspective of the writers in relation to their lived experiences. As defined by Maxwell (1996), this includes cognition, affect and intention. Poetry writing allows the exploration of questions that concern the influence of context on individual experiences and potentially through a series of poems the subjective experience of a life process (such as divorce as exemplified in Chapter 4). Thus, poetry writing can address a broad spectrum of core research concerns of qualitative research.

But poetry writing is not just another mode of collecting qualitative data. As explicated in this book, it has special characteristics. Central to these is the importance of personal discovery as part of the process. In a discussion of scientific inquiry and utilizing Zachos, Hick, Doanne, and Sargents' (2000) definitions, Hanauer, Hatfull and Jacobs-Sera (2009) differentiate between personal and cultural knowledge defining the former as a moment of personal discovery and the latter as a move towards the scientific community. In many cases of educational usage of inquiry processes, only personal knowledge is developed; in others, professional usage of inquiry processes only involves the cultural development of knowledge. The process of poetry writing as a research method relies on both as it is based on the development of personal knowledge to generate data that is valuable to the wider research community. In this sense, poetry writing as a research method integrates the aims of personal discovery with the development of scientific, culturally valuable knowledge. Therefore, it raises questions which are of both personal and cultural importance. There are many questions of this type

(see Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii for an extensive list), but what is common to all of them is that participants are motivated into understanding their own experiences, thoughts and feelings and that their perspective relates to experiences that are of interest to a wider research community. For example, understanding one's own experiences of migration is often personally significant as well as being of interest to researchers in fields of applied linguistics, sociology, psychology and education.

A final issue relates to the type of data that is actually elicited through poetry writing. A poem of the sort developed here (see Section 5.3.3 below) involves concise, image-driven and emotionally-laden language that is produced through a reflective process and cycles of revision. The poem is a deliberative, reflective and carefully crafted text. As such, research questions requiring immediate, intuitive responses or addressing explicit belief or opinion are not suited to this form of data. Poetry writing is a carefully worked out position that reflects personal and subjective ways of understanding that experience.

5.3.2 Facilitating poetry writing

It is a core assumption of the approach developed here that the participants do not need to have any prior experience in writing poetry and that the language of the poetry which they are using does not necessarily need to be their first language. However, it is an assumption of the approach developed here that the potential participants have literacy skills and advanced levels of second language acquisition. Therefore, the data collection process consists of the careful facilitation of poetry writing. The role of the researcher is to function as a writing instructor who promotes the writing of personally significant poetry. Thus data collection results from a supportive process that allows participants to develop written poetry. While there can be several different ways of constructing a context for poetry writing, three core stages are crucial for the type of data that is of use to poetry writing as a research project to emerge. These stages are as follows:

1. *Generating Personal Motivation for Self Exploration*: A starting point of any research project using poetry writing needs to be an explanation of the relevance of the project to the participant. The aim is that the participant be interested in the self exploration of their own lives (or perhaps specific aspects of their lives). It is an ethical imperative as well as a requirement for quality data that the poets be motivated to really understand and express as accurately as they can their own experiences. In one sense the motivation for participation in a project of this kind is always the promise of self discovery and self understanding (see Chapter 2).

2. *Constructing a Process of Autobiographical Exploration*: A central part of the process of facilitating poetry writing is directing a process of exploration of autobiographical memories. This process can be as simple as asking participants to close their eyes and think back about a particular period in their lives or a particular type of experience; or asking participants to bring in photographs and explore the experiences and memories of the people in the pictures. There are many methods of this sort, but what is crucial from the perspective of using autobiographical information for poetry writing is that the memory be relived and re-experienced by the participant in a multisensory manner. This requires using the facilities of the imagination to actually recreate in the mind of the participants the experience as they remember it. This emphasis on multisensory memory and internal reconstruction of lived experiences helps to avoid the rehearsed, ideological retelling of events. A focus on the actual experience in a multisensory manner makes the participant really address the experience itself rather than jumping to the rehearsed meaning of the event. Often the nature of self discovery is the movement beyond the rehearsed understanding of past events to the new understanding of things that have happened based on the reconstruction and re-seeing of the event and how it was experienced. In my own facilitation of autobiographical memory and poetry writing, I require participants to make a list of meaningful life experiences and then to try and relive each of the experiences that they have listed. This relived memory is then filtered into a focus on a central moment and feeling within this event. Extensive notes are written by the participant concerning this moment. Ultimately these notes and the relived memory itself are the source of the written poem.
3. *Poetic Expression of Autobiographical Memory:* Writing a poem is much easier than most inexperienced writers of poetry think it is. However, it does require some direction and writing experimentation and is a process of learning a new way of expressing personally held meanings. Central to this learning process is the concept that poetry is useful for the expression and reconstruction of multisensory experiences. As a simple guideline, I tell participants that poetry is about 'showing' the experience and not 'telling about' it; the former creates the experience for the reader, the later explains the experience but avoids actually describing it. I also explain that the forms of poetry such as graphic organization, sound patterns and figurative language are designed to direct readers in particular ways and that as poets they can use all or any of these methods to reconstruct their lived experiences. I direct them to explore any forms of poetry that they are culturally familiar with and to experiment with various different types of poetry writing. At various stages in this process, I ask them to read their poems to themselves and to others and to check if the poem

> accurately recreates the experience that they have in their memories. Multiple times in this process, I ask participants to close their eyes and relive the described experience and then look at their written poem and to evaluate if it is an accurate reconstruction of their feelings and understandings. Poems are rewritten, revised, edited, changed, and reorganized many times until the poet feels that it accurately recreates their sense, feeling and understanding of the experience they are describing. While the description provided here is rather technical, it is important to remember that the expression, evaluation and exploration of expressed memories in poetry is a process through which self discovery often takes place. By reconsidering, reliving in imagination and expressing in poetic form a reflective process of self insight is enacted. It is as if by reconsidering these memories through imagination and the attempt to understand them and direct the reader to see and experience what is relevant, the writer sees them from a fresh perspective. This renewal of memory and new understanding is the process of self discovery.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the processes of self discovery and permutation are central to the poetry writing process. There are many different ways of constructing writing contexts and writing processes such as these. As discussed in the literature review above, Bjorklund (1999) created an in-patient poetry therapy group and facilitated poetry writing through a variety of visual aids; Furman, Coyne and Junko Negi (2008) created poetry writing workshops for social work students involved in an overseas aid experience. What is shared by these projects and my own work is that the creation of poetry as a process of self reflection and discovery is facilitated through the development of a contextually appropriate writing context.

5.3.3 The (lyric) poem

The method described here requires a poetic text that can provide useful information for qualitative research. There are several characteristics that would seem central to fulfilling this purpose. The poem needs to result from a process of self exploration and careful consideration of the accuracy of poem to lived experience. It needs to address autobiographical information and find its source in personal multisensory and emotionally laden memories of lived experiences. In this sense, the text can utilize a wide range of linguistic and literary conventions to direct the reader to the feelings and meanings hidden within the experience itself. As seen in the analysis presented in Chapter Three, the poems written by second language learners were short, used high frequency vocabulary, had emotional content words, were written using first person pronouns and utilized a range of literary micro-features including extensive usage of imagery. In other words, this corpus

of poetry provided the type of text that is useful for the exploration of qualitative research questions.

In her differentiation between narrative and lyric poetry, Richardson (1997) offers one way of characterizing the types of poetry that are useful for qualitative research. The advantage of aiming for lyric poetry as a source of poetic data is that it does not require a coherent, unified narrative description but rather only the inference of a potential narrative (or series of narratives). The lyric poem offers the option of exploring situations in which life experiences are not fully coherent and well-integrated into narrative frames and allows flexibility in exploring personal lived experience.

In fact, a poem presents a carefully crafted and directed moment of reconstructed experience from the perspective of the writer. In other words, the written research poem should capture a moment of self understanding of past experience through the performance of poetic identity at the moment of writing. This performance of identity – the directed, subjective linguistically and literarily negotiated expression of personal experience – should involve emotional information as well as aspects of cognition and intent. It is the ability of the poem to recreate the experience with the sensory and emotional information that makes the poem a unique source of personal data that is both engaging and informative at the same time. The poetic text allows deeper understanding of the 'other' as it engages the reader on an emotional level in relation to the events portrayed. The written poem that manages to capture moments of life with the associated emotional and sensory feelings offers the qualitative researcher a rich source of information with which to closely explore the writer's position and understanding while emotionally engaging with the experience itself.

5.3.4 Analysis of poetry for qualitative research purposes

As discussed in Chapter 4, poetic identity is central to the qualitative research project as it is the point at which participant perspective is expressed. This implies the understanding of how the participant experienced the described events, what experiences construct the event itself and what feelings and cognitions are inherent in the experience. It can also include the understanding of how contextual factors influenced the participant and the process of life involved. A successful process of poetry writing and poetic identity analysis should therefore explicate the subjective position, emotional content and understanding of the participant. Analysis in this sense is in accordance with the guidelines explicated in Chapter 4 and focuses on explicating poetic identity.

For some poetic inquiry approaches there is a question concerning the desirability of any subsequent analysis. For Richardson (1997, 2003b) and Poindexter

(2002) the creation of poetry from collected interview data is already a process of analysis and a presentable outcome of research activity. In other words, the poem does not need any subsequent analysis. This is also the core position of an arts-based approach to research in which the entry into the reconstructed experience of the art work is the exposure to the outcomes of the inquiry process. For other researchers, such as Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006) and Kidd and Tusaie (2004), subsequent qualitative, thematic analysis is desirable. For the purposes developed here, the analysis of poetic identity is seen as a central aspect of conducting qualitative research. It is the point at which arts-based research becomes a qualitative study. However, in accordance with arts-based approaches, it is also important to present the poetry itself and the awareness that poetry can have (like other sorts of linguistic data) multiple potential meanings. This approach has the advantage of giving voice and presence to the original poet/research participant thus allowing the reader to engage emotionally with the writer. In addition, the presentation of the full poem with its analysis by the researcher allows the recipients of research to make their own decisions concerning the participant's perspective while still offering the investigator's comprehension of the participant's understandings.

5.3.5 Organizing and presenting poetic data

The presentation and organization of poetry in a study that utilizes poetry writing as a research method involves artistic as well as research criteria. The research criteria aim for a valid presentation of the poet's position. The artistic criteria relate to a consideration of the aesthetic and emotional effects of different combinations of poems. Different combinations of poems will change the ways in which phenomena in the world are understood through the poetic data. As argued by Richardson (1997, 2003b), data presentation is a rhetorical activity that has ramifications on the comprehension of the reader. One of the reasons that poetry data is used is to generate emotional, multisensory understandings of personal experiences. The order of poems and the contextual relationships between them will generate different responses in the audience. This is the same as when a poetry book is designed or a poetry reading performance is conducted in front of a live audience.

Several different ways of presenting and organizing poetry can be used: *individual moments of life*; *inferred narrative*; and *juxtaposed experience*. The first way of organizing poetry consists of positioning each poem as an individual case. The order of the poems presented in the research report is still important but the conceptual approach to the organization of the poetry is that each individual poem offers a unique situation and as such occupies its own conceptual space. To an extent every usage of lyric poetry assumes the individuality of the specific experience described. The second way of organizing poetry consists of narrative presentation.

While each lyric poem may involve a moment of life experience and understanding, a collection of several moments of life may infer and loosely construct a narrative of events. For example, Chapter 4 showed a series of poems dealing with family divorce constructed as a form of narrative development in which each poem marked a moment of change and understanding. Obviously different orders or choices of poems will generate different inferred narratives. The third way of presenting poetry as data consists of offering the reader several different viewpoints on the same phenomena. In this sense, poems may juxtapose through their close proximity and differences in subjective positioning. This third option aims to exemplify the diversity of positions in relation to the experience and understanding of world phenomena (as will be exemplified in the next chapter). The use of juxtaposed poems will construct a collage of the experience rather than a unified picture of reality.

5.4 Philosophical considerations

The current usage of poetry writing as a research method utilizes positions developed in both qualitative and arts-based research. The approach specified here integrates aspects of previous poetic inquiries and studies of poetry writing conducted and presented in this book. Specifically the approach can be described as building upon Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006) and Furman's (2007) concept of the value of poetry writing for auto-ethnographic purposes, Kidd and Tusaie (2004) and Bjorklund's (1999) concept of integrating auto-ethnographic poetry writing with data collection by other researchers, and Richardson's (1997, 2003a) concept of the centrality of lyric poetry in capturing moments of life. The approach developed here suggests that a writing context be constructed that facilitates auto-ethnographic poetry writing directed by the desire of the poets/participants to understand and explore their own lived experiences and that the poetry that results from this process be considered and analysed as qualitative and aesthetic data to answer specific questions within the realm of the social sciences and humanities. The specific contribution of the studies presented in this book consists of the definition of the process of poetry writing, the characterization of second language poetry writing and the explication of the analytical concept of poetic identity. These contributions explicate why and how poetry works in producing valuable poetic data, that advanced second language learners are fully capable of producing written poetry that is useful for qualitative research and ways in which written poetry can be analysed for qualitative research purposes.

There are, however, philosophical issues that still need to be addressed. As discussed by Richardson (1997), using poetry writing for research purposes raises questions concerning the representational aspects of research. Specifically, it questions

the common practice of translating verbal participant data into the format of academic prose. This convention of converting the verbatim text of the participants and producing another text which conforms to the conventions of academic prose writing has been normalized to such an extent that researchers do not feel the need to actually justify it (Mantzoukas, 2004). While reflectivity and explicit discussion of methodological decisions has been a hallmark of qualitative research over the last two decades, the explicit discussion within research reports themselves as to their choice of representational form has not been extensively explored or explicated.

Interestingly, the issue of the genre choice for representing data and research reflects a much deeper set of epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions. The normalization of verbatim data into the format of academic prose enacts a division between the researcher and the researched and thus gives the illusion of disembodied and objectified data. This happens even when selected verbatim quotes from participants are embedded within the research report. The transformation of participant data into other formats, such as a system of categories or the definition of contextual contingencies, involves the attempt to make a personal perspective palatable, relevant and seamless from a discursive perspective to a community of researchers. In an important discussion of aesthetic inquiry, Alexander (2003) points out that even qualitative research which aims at presenting, exploring, explicating and contextualizing participant understanding, does so by translating an "insider into an outsider perspective by means of cognitive processes" (p. 5). The use of academic genre conventions of writing contextualize and explicate the participant's position and transform a personal voice into a research position.

As described by Richardson (1997), her own translation of interview data into poetry was far less palatable for sociology researchers than the conventionalized translation of interview data into academic prose. Both, however, involved a translation of data but the genre of poetry raises different expectations than academic prose. The conventional expectations of poetry reading are that it will be polysemantic, difficult to understand and embedded with implicit meanings (Culler, 1975; Hanauer, 1998b). Poetry is subjective and personal. Academic prose, like all language texts, is also open to various interpretations but assumes the convention of trying to provide ease of access to its meanings. The form of academic prose assumes the voice of the disimpassioned observer exploring understanding. The usage of academic prose sends the message that meaning can be determined, defined, specified, explicated and disseminated. As Richardson (2003a) points out, presenting data as poetry sends the message that meaning is multiple, inferential, partial, constructed and personal.

To a certain extent it is these conventions of the genre of written poetry that make poetry writing as a research method seem so untenable. Poetry writing as a research method, even as explicated in this chapter, cannot fulfill the assumptions

concerning the importance of objectivity, the separation of knowledge and knower, the emphasis on method, the marginalization of affect, the restriction of investigation to a limited set of variables, replicability, prediction and the aim of constructing generalizations. Poetry writing is an arts-based and qualitative research methodology and as argued by Maxwell (2004) and Alexander (2003) the logic of quantitative and qualitative approaches is very different and needs to be understood as such for each to be purposefully employed.

Every research project, irrespective of the approach or method, aims to construct new knowledge that is trustworthy and of interest to a community of researchers. Broadly, all forms of qualitative research are concerned with "human understanding, interpretation, intersubjectivity, lived truth (i.e truth in human terms)" and "record phenomena in terms of participant understanding" (Ernest, 1997, p. 33). Qualitative research can provide a rich, contextualized description that allows insights into participants' understandings, emotions, intentions, interactions and the contexts that they live and function in. In relation to research aims, qualitative research aims to produce an understanding of a unique, contextualized case. The assumption is that the detailed and rich description of particular case "may serve as an exemplar of something more general" (Ernest, 1997, p. 34).

Using poetry writing as an auto-ethnographic research method and presenting written poetry as part of the data presentation process involves the integration of aesthetic inquiry and qualitative research. Specifically, aesthetic inquiry blurs the distinction between insider (*emic*) and outsider (*etic*) perspectives through the construction of a "virtual reality created nondiscursively by a whole thinking-feeling person using metaphoric language, symbolic behavior, or virtual shapes, sounds or movement" (Alexander, 2003, p. 5). Accordingly, in aesthetic inquiry emotion and cognition are integrated and the process of understanding the participant's perspective is the process of entering into the participant's aesthetic reconstruction of the world by the reader/listener. Gordon's (1996) concept of aesthetic cognitivism is crucial here in that art is positioned as a vehicle for directing cognition and understanding through artistic means. The outcome is the reconstruction and reliving of someone else's experience. As defined by Hanauer (2003) "in poetic writing, linguistic uniqueness embodies cognitive attention that activates associative potential meaning, emotional response, and compensatory sensual perception and thus creates an artistic experience for the participant, reader or observer" (p. 77). This experience is the reconstruction from participants' perspective of their understandings of their own experiences.

The process of eliciting auto-ethnographic poetry, presenting it and analysing it creates a situation in which both insider and outsider positions are offered for the reader. Ernest (1997) states that this type of description allows "a reader to understand the case through identification, empathy or a sense of entry into lived

reality" (p. 34). The meanings and insights that are constructed are by definition subjective, interpretive and multiple. As argued by Maxwell (2004), qualitative research as an approach values the interpretive and avoids a "unified, totalizing understanding" (p. 35) of phenomena. The view of the world that emerges from lyric, poetic data is one that is comprised of multiple, described, subjective moments of experience. This is a postmodern perspective that critiques the assumed neutrality of representation and the possibility of a unified, universal description of reality. Gubrium and Holstein (2003) explain that "social researchers adopting and adapting the postmodernist impulse for empirical aims have generally come to terms with reality by examining the content of lives and experiences" (p. 8). The locus of reality in a postmodern research context is situated in the exploration of the discursive construction of the world by individuals and groups of individuals and expressed through various forms of representation.

The outcome of the presentation of a series of lyric poems and their interpretation as the results of an inquiry is the construction of a collage of expressed realities. As in a collage, different perspectives are present that reconstruct moments of experience and ways of understanding these experiences. The emphasis is on the multiplicity of viewpoints at particular temporal moments. The analysis of each of these poems aims to explicate the poetic identity – the specific, linguistically and literarily negotiated emotional and cognitive understanding – expressed in each poem and in relation to autobiographical information. In this sense, understanding a phenomena means being exposed to, experiencing, and understanding the diversity of positions, historically present and potentially possible in relation to a studied phenomenon. The use of poetry allows access to emotional and cognitive understandings and provides an artistically directed, multisensory reconstruction of experience. Together, the poetry and its interpretation should create a rich, diverse, and insightful description of the phenomena being explored that counters broad generalizations and simplified presentations of lived experience.

How does one evaluate the quality of poetic inquiry? The concepts of accuracy, validity, and reliability are not suitable terms to explore qualitative data in general and poetic data in particular (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2004; Seale, 1999). In relation to aesthetic inquiry, both Alexander (2003) and Richardson (2003b) suggest using criteria drawn from both qualitative research in the social sciences and art criticism. Richardson (2003b) delineates a useful series of specific criteria that she uses in evaluating the quality of research papers submitted for publication. Richardson's (2003b) criteria are:

1. *Substantive Contribution*: "Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective?" (p. 522)

2. *Aesthetic Merit*: "Does the piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?" (p. 522)
3. *Reflexivity*: "How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Are there ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? Is there adequate self awareness and self exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold him- or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?" (p. 522)
4. *Impact*: "Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?" (p. 523)
5. *Expression of Reality*: "Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem "true" – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual or communal sense of the "real"?" (p. 523)

Together these criteria offer a way of evaluating the quality of a research publication that incorporates poetic data.

Ultimately, poetry writing can be used as a research method as long as it is understood that this form of data is useful in attaining the goal of understanding individual, subjective, literary and linguistically negotiated, emotionally laden descriptions of experience. There is a wide range of qualitative research questions that this approach can be suitable for. As described above, the auto-ethnographic value of the poetry writing as a research method, in addition to its potential to answer questions of interest to a community of researchers, makes it an ethical way to work with participants. What poetry can offer is the ability to present concise, focused, emotionally informed, image-directed descriptions of moments of life that can engage readers and generate empathy and understanding of the 'other' without the usual objectification and erasure of participants. Finally, it is important to note that poetry writing provides participants with a clear voice and presence within the research project. There is value in hearing individual voices and appreciating the diversity of lived experience.

CHAPTER 6

Exploring the study abroad experience

6.1 Introduction

Study Abroad
Before study abroad,
The color of image is
Yellow, Orange, Pink, Sky blue.

But in fact

The color changed into
Sorrow Gray, Dark Black, Regret Purple
Blood Red.

Nervous, Tough, Cry, Shock
I just remember these words.

The poem that opens this chapter was written by a Malaysian student studying abroad during an ESL College Writing class and in response to a request to carefully consider his life and write about meaningful life experiences. He chose to write about his experiences as a study abroad student. Through the use of the bright tones of yellow, orange, pink and sky blue, the future events and expectations of studying in an American university for a year seem positive, exciting and optimistic. As marked by the adversative "But in fact", the perception at the time of writing was very different from the original one. The initial colors are replaced with sorrow gray, dark black, regret purple and finally blood red, standing for particularly negative and progressively worse experiences and creating a contrast. A subtle detail is that the colors of the university where this student studied in are also gray, black and purple, which connects this description to the context of writing. In the final stanza of the poem, the poet describes his state of being. The adjectives *nervous* and *tough*, the verb *cry*, and the noun *shock* offer a negative emotional state. As specified in the last line of this poem, the whole of the poet's existence seems to be focused on the difficulties of the experience. In sum, from the poet's perspective at the time of writing studying abroad seems a very negative and emotionally draining experience.

In Chapter 5, an approach to using poetry writing as a research method was developed and described. The aim of this chapter is to use this method to answer the question – *How is the study abroad experience characterized through poetic data written by second language study abroad students?* The chapter does not aim to present a generalizable characterization. The approach taken here is to capture moments of this experience and to describe it through the prism of individual poets' presentation of their own perception. This way of describing reality presents a collage of experiences rather than a unified and collective view. The attempt is to present single moments of life and understanding and through these to explore lived experience. The assumption is that the understanding of human experiential phenomena means taking account of a diversity of positions. In this chapter, the aim is to identify and present what has been poetically described in relation to studying abroad and thus, perhaps, deepen our views of what the poets who both wrote about and underwent this experience see and feel.

6.2 Research on study abroad

Interestingly enough, spending up to a year in an educational institution that is in a country other than your home country is often presented within the promotional literature of various programs as a very positive experience in which cultural and linguistic learning is optimized. For example, the International Student Exchange Program website mentions the benefits obtained in the following terms: "ISEP students gain intercultural competence through integration into their host institution and host culture while exploring the international dimensions of their academic field" (ISEP). In a similar way, the International Studies Abroad website refers to its importance: "In the age of globalization, an intimate understanding of a foreign culture is both a valuable academic asset and an enriching personal experience" (ISA International Studies Abroad).

In a recent white paper from the Institute of International Education, an independent non-profit organization housed in the US and dedicated to enhancing international education, the growing need of understanding foreign cultures are echoed in the following words: "In a world of greater interconnectedness and global economic interdependence, study abroad has become increasingly important for U.S. students to attain international knowledge, cross-cultural communication skills, and intercultural competence" (Goodman, 2009, p. 4). Here, the programme is couched in concepts of cross-cultural interaction and the appreciation of foreign cultural understandings as an aspect of a widened self perception. These positions are supported to a certain extent through student motivations which include the

belief that language learning in a foreign context is qualitatively superior to any other type of language learning experience (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

This positive outlook is also presented in some of the academic literature. For example, Amuzie and Winke (2009) claim that there is agreement among teachers and learners "that one of the best ways to learn a foreign language is to study abroad" and that it "offers a different level and type of language input, opportunities for interaction, and exposure to target culture" (p. 366). As with other educational settings, applied linguistic research has looked at language learning outcomes for these students. Research has explored advances in the acquisition of phonology (Diaz-Campos, 2004; Simões, 1996), oral fluency (Freed, 1995; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004) and lexical and grammar development (Guntermann, 1995; Isabelli, 2004; Reagan, 1995), among other linguistic factors. The research has also documented a series of specific language related difficulties that students face. For example, as reported by Mulligan & Kirkpatrick (2000), study abroad students have problems following lectures in a second language and may not participate in classroom discussions (Tater, 2005). There can also be difficulties in relation to specific types of academic literacy tasks that result from differences in literacy experiences in home settings (Ridley, 2004; Spencer, 2003).

The positive outlook on study abroad outcomes, mainly proposed through promotional materials and in the early literature on the subject, is far from universally accepted. Kinginger and Farrel Whitworth (2005) point out that contextual factors such as individual differences, gender, language variety, and host country may have relevant influence on what is learnt in the experience. Individual differences and issues of gender and race have been considered intervening factors. In a well-known paper, Twombly (1995) documents American female study abroad students' responses to verbal male harassment (piropoing) in Costa Rica. She concludes that it was an "alienating experience in which gender played a major role" (p. 1). Polayni (1995) investigates the same problem in Russia. Talburt and Stewart (1999) take this one step further and discuss the interrelationship between gender and race and how this expressed itself in communicative interactions in Spain. In all these papers, gender relations within the broader cultural setting negatively influenced the perception and understanding of the study abroad experience.

In an investigation of conversational interactions of American students during a study abroad experience in France, Wilkins (1998) documented the difficulties of cross-cultural communication, challenging assumptions about the additional options for communicative interaction with native speakers. Specifically, participants in her study reported negative interactions with French speakers within the classroom and the home setting often preferring and needing their own home peer group as a source of support and understanding. Wilkins observed that "participants often viewed the immersion setting as a complex and frustrating environment" and

"cultural misunderstandings were a daily occurrence" (1998: p. 30), which led to negative stereotyping of the members of the host country. Psychological and cultural research has also revealed how stressful the experience is. This stress is tied to both academic achievement and functioning as well as cross-cultural interaction (Constantine, Okazaki, and Utsey, 2004; Hashim & Zhiliang, 2003; Ye, 2006).

As argued by Talburt and Stewart (1999), most research has "tended to generalize student experiences abroad, giving scant attention to the specificities that can shape their interactions and cultural learning" (p. 164). The current study is interested in study abroad experiences in the context of the American educational setting and focuses on how America is experienced by these students. Since the data used here consists of written poetry, the aim is to reconstruct emotional, multisensory moments of meaningful lived experiences during the study abroad experience.

6.3 Materials and method

The data for this study was collected over a 6 year period and consisted of a collection of poems written by second language writers during their study abroad experience at a public university in the state of Pennsylvania, USA. These poems were written by the same students described in earlier chapters and the data was obtained from the same ESL College Writing course in which students were directed to write poems on their life experiences and were free to choose the topic. It must be stressed that not all of them dealt with the subject of the current investigation.

The first stage was to collect those poems which came under the heading of study abroad experiences. While it could be argued that all the poetry was in fact written from the perspective of writers situated in a study abroad experience, a decision was made to define study abroad poetry in relation to the setting described. Thus poems that were set in the US that described and explored experiences within the educational framework of American university studies were considered to be explicitly about this topic and were included in the current analysis, resulting in a sub-corpus of 78 poems. Then, the poems were carefully read multiple times by the researcher, who took extensive notes on their literary and informational features. These notes became part of the process.

While rereading the sub-corpus and the researcher's annotations, there was also an attempt to organize the poems thematically according to the types of experience they focused on. A close consideration of the specific experience described in each poem revealed that several different themes occurred. While these types of experience did not cover every poem in the corpus, they did address the majority of them and seemed to capture the issues that the poets as a group were collectively exploring (see Section 6.5 below). During this stage, decisions were made as to which

poems to place under which thematic category – a difficult process as the core desire of the project was to collect as many as possible. Two main criteria were used for choice of presented poem: a) nature of the perspective; and b) aesthetic quality.

Following this, all the poems in a particular category were reread and carefully considered for their presented perspective and understanding of a particular experience. Some poems for both aesthetic and informational reasons really stood out as poetic statements and were included within the category. An attempt was made to address different perspectives on the same experience. While none of the poems in any of the categories were exactly the same, there were poems which had similar perspectives. The choice ultimately of which poems to include involved providing a range of perspectives on the category of experience. Finally, each poem in each of the categories was also carefully analysed for its subjective positioning. Content and linguistic and literary choices were observed. The criterion used here highlighted the specific perspective, emotional content and understanding of the experience.

6.4 Context

The overall enrollment in the university studied is 14,000 students, of which 93.1% are in-state residents and 15.6% are minority students within the American context. The remaining 4.7% are international students who go through an immersion program, reside in the university premises and have access to all services and courses. They enroll in those of their major interest and are designated two ESL writing courses and are helped by a language institute that offers specific services such as conversation groups and help with pronunciation. These ESL writing courses (101 College Writing and 202 Research Writing) are populated exclusively by second language learners. On the International Students Exchange Program website, the university is described as "a safe, friendly community within driving distance of many interesting places in the United States" and as a "welcoming atmosphere for international students who, when not studying, have easy access to major attractions in the mid-Atlantic region" (ISEP Pennsylvania). The university and its office of International Education offer a series of activities to help study abroad students, including an International Friendship Program that puts them in contact with local American families, a foreign music and film festival, an international coffee hour, a conversation club and an international education week. In addition, the university hosts a range of international student groups mainly organized according to national heritage and addressing the home countries of the international students who are on campus. At the time this text was being written, the university hosted 700 international students on the undergraduate and graduate levels from 65 different countries.

6.5 Results

This section is organized according to the seven types of experience encountered by the participants of the program. These are: self positioning and the emotional response to language; emotional responses to academic classrooms; contact with American students; negotiating American culture; and homesickness. In the subsections that follow, each of these thematic categories of types of experience is presented. Each subsection includes examples and analyses of poetic identity (see Chapter 4).

6.5.1 Self positioning and the emotional experience of language

The first poem selected to explicate this category was written by a female student from Taiwan and expresses the difficulties of using English as a second language:

Second Language
Discouraged
Disappointed
Disconcerted

It isn't as easy as I think
To make myself clear in
A second language

Eyes are staring
Waiting for
understanding
What am I trying to
express

Words are on the tip of
my tongue
My mouth keeps silent
While my head wants to
shout

Broken sentences
Poor pronunciation
I do my best

Faulty
Fatigued
Frustrated

I lose my energy
It's not getting better
Anymore

Give up?
No!
It's the last word I will
say

Challenge!
That's the reason why I
am here

Step by step
I will get it one day

This poem starts with three one-word rhyming lines presenting the speaker's sense of disappointment at her command of English as a second language. In the second stanza, she explains this feeling as the distance between her expectation to make herself understood and her lack of clarity in English. In her third stanza, she reconstructs moments of misunderstanding in which her lack of clarity leads to moments of awkward silence while discussion partners wait to understand her. Her embarrassment and discomfort are apparent in the way this scene is constructed with its emphasis on the "eyes staring" and the "waiting". The speaker is placed at the center of attention while others wait for her to speak. The next stanza further describes this situation. The words are on the tip of her tongue, while silence occupies the moments of waiting. Ironically perhaps, while she is silent, she actually wants to shout. Feelings of frustration are added to the speaker's embarrassment of not being understood and of being silent while knowing the words and what to say. In the fifth stanza she responds to these feelings of frustration and embarrassment by paradoxically both denigrating herself and absolving herself. She describes her English as consisting of "broken sentences" and "poor pronunciation," perhaps in the attempt to explain her experiences of not being understood. But she is also aware that she is trying hard. The sixth stanza returns to the format of the first one with the use of three one-word structures. At this point, she states her sense of frustration at her "faulty" English. The short three line stanza reinforces this sense of being flawed and disappointed, which is further explained in the next stanza, which stands as the lowest emotional low point. As stated in these lines, her language is not improving at the rate she had expected and perhaps not improving at all. The whole situation is emotionally draining to her.

The next stanza represents a point of emotional shift in the poem. The preceding stanzas with their description of language difficulties and emotional frustration

could lead to the situation of giving in; but in this stanza the speaker presents her defiance and unwillingness to succumb. She rejects the despair of slow language development as a reason to capitulate but rather redefines this as a "challenge" and explains her own motivation for coming on a study abroad experience in the first place. Wasn't the point of the whole trip to contend with exactly situations of language usage such as ones described in this poem? In her final stanza, the speaker comforts herself and tries to reduce her frustration by changing her initial expectation of an "easy" communication process with a slow, methodical development of language skills. This final position closes the poem on a positive note that enables the speaker to continue in the face of unexpected communication difficulties.

This poem presents a complex progression of feelings concerning actual language usage as a second language learner in a first language setting. The description focuses heavily on the emotions elicited in being a second language speaker. These emotions include embarrassment, frustration, disappointment and depression. Interestingly, the speaker has internalized a range of negative characterizations of her language abilities that she utilizes to describe her own language experience.

The emotional transformation in the poem can be seen as a coping mechanism designed to allow the speaker to position herself in a way that alleviates the frustration of everyday communication and allows time to learn and develop. This poem also represents a moment of recognition in relation to a mistaken self evaluation of her speaking ability and the potential difficulties of conducting a conversation in a first language setting. The ending presents a way of changing this perception; but it should be noted that the speaker takes full responsibility for creating smooth communication. Her assumption is that she should develop her pronunciation and "broken sentences" and not that her first language interlocutors should take a course to aid them in the comprehension of second language pronunciation. Her outlook is directed by the need for her to become more 'native-like' and her final coping strategy allows her the time to fulfill this directive.

The next two poems offer a more critical position on American English:

Untitled
I'm using the language, I don't know what I mean
I'm thinking with a five thousand year language
Translating them into a simple world language

I'm writing poems
It is me
If you know what I am talking about

This poem written by a female Chinese student explores the writer's sense of communicative insecurity. Both in the first and the last lines the speaker asks whether

she is understood: in the first line she states that she is not sure if she knows what she is saying and in the last line she questions whether the reader will understand her. These questions situate the usage of a second language as a tool of which she does not have control and thus the outcomes of comprehension are questionable. These lines express her core lack of trust and the sense of artificiality in second language communication. This is a subtle perception of second language usage that constantly raises the question of comprehension and disallows naturalized, unmarked and unattended communication.

An interesting aspect of this poem is the juxtaposition of a "five thousand year language" with a "simple world language". On one level, this juxtaposition describes the process of using a second language as perceived by the speaker. This process involves thinking in one language and speaking in another. On a different level, it contrasts the speaker's sense of the depth of her first language with the superficiality of her second. The word "simple" functions in these lines as a negative descriptor and critique of the nature of English while recognizing that English has, for her, the purpose of allowing interaction with the world. To a certain extent, this juxtaposition represents a contrast of competing ideologies that she has been exposed to and has internalized: the cultural value and richness of her native Chinese and the functionality of this "simplified" linguistic tool of world English. By specifying the heritage and value of Chinese, English is situated in a very different way than in the previous poem. By extrapolation from language to language user, this poet does not undervalue herself nor her language.

This same posture continues into the second stanza, where she recognizes her own presence within the text and expresses her sense of ownership over her writing. The last line assigns a degree of responsibility on the reader for the comprehension of her poetry and by extension second language usage. She questions whether she is understood in English but does not negate herself in this communicative equation. This is a much more equitable position to take than the previous poem, which placed all responsibility on the second language speaker. The last line follows the critique of English in the first stanza and positions the second language speaker of this poem in a much more central position than the one in the previous poem.

In the next poem, written by a female student from Taiwan, a sense of mistrust and insincerity in interactions with first language speakers is described: In this case, there is a shared responsibility for comprehension in relation to second language communication in which both speaker and listener have challenges to overcome.

A Foreigner
No!
Do not speak.
She is a foreigner.

Hush!
Just keep silent.

Leave!
Away from her.

All fake!
Say *Hi* and *Small Talk*.
Not sincere!
"How are we doing?"
"What's up?"

That's the foreigner's suspicion
If reliable or not,
"*You can come to me if you need help.*"
That is the alien's doubts
If true or not,
"*Well, it happens sometimes.*"
Speak up, Alien!
Speak out, Foreigner!
It's the *time.*

The title of this poem sets the initial tone. The concept of a foreigner is that of someone who does not belong to one's group, an outsider. It has the connotation of someone who is not to be trusted and who remains on the outer margins of society. The first three stanzas clearly express how it feels to be defined as such. These three initial stanzas describe the experience of being marginalized and distanced during human interaction. The italicized first words of each stanza – *No*, *Hush*, *Leave* – all with exclamation marks, describe what she imagines the interlocutors think. These are members of the "in-group" of first language, American students, who are quietly offensive. Their methods of functioning are to not speak, keep silent and move away from the second language, study abroad student. The irony of this situation is the backdrop of reasoning for coming on a study abroad experience in order to interact with first language speakers. From a personal and linguistic perspective, this is far from being the welcoming environment of the brochures. It is unclear from the poem whether this is overheard, reported speech or imaginative reconstruction. In any case, these first three stanzas position the second language user as an outsider who experiences the feeling of being rejected and marginalized.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker presents her emotional understandings of everyday verbal interactions on campus. The habit between students is to greet quite briefly and conduct limited small talk. To American students, this is a form

of politeness that recognizes the presence of another. To the speaker of this poem, it offers a promise and invitation to talk. Her desire is to respond seriously and fully to the invitation but she finds out very quickly that this is not an invitation or real interest in her. Her response is angry and she sees her American peers as being false and offering empty promises, which strengthens the feeling of distancing present in the first three stanzas. There is an obvious cultural component here of what acknowledging another entails and the nature of politeness in different societies.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker questions her own understanding of interactions with Americans. She presents a statement which at face value seems very positive. But her understanding and experiences presented in the first four stanzas play themselves out here as a suspicion that this invitation to help is not sincere. Can she trust the statements being made? She presents an interesting form of language problem; she understands the words, but cannot evaluate the truth value of what is being said. This is a problem that only happens in real world language usage and is never an aspect of classroom language learning. Her position as a cultural outsider makes the operative understanding of this invitation to help very difficult. In the last lines of this stanza, the speaker decides to act and speak even without definitive knowledge of whether the request to help is sincere or not. Her position is still self-defined as a foreigner and an alien; but she decides to take matters into her own hands. This final statement can be seen as a form of defiance in which the speaker becomes more active and vocal in response to her surroundings. It will be up to her to be vocal even if she is defined as a foreigner and part of an out-group.

Throughout this poem is the desire of the speaker to interact with first language, American students. She wishes to be invited to interact and asked to join. Her experiences, however, are that she is seen as a foreigner. Her understanding of everyday interactions have created a form of paranoid response. She questions the intent and truth of the people around her. But she also questions her own sense of her surroundings and in the end changes her stance from one of expecting passive acceptance to entering into a process of active, vocal interaction. Contrary to previous poems in this subsection, the speaker here describes first language users in directly negative terms. Her aim is not to become more like them but rather to express herself from the stance of being an alien.

The three poems in this subsection present three different subject positions in relation to communicative responsibility. In the first poem, a very particular poetic identity is constructed. The speaker situates herself as a flawed language user who needs to slowly improve through the emulation of first language speakers. She has internalized and expresses throughout the poem the inaccuracies of her language usage as compared to first language users and in interaction with

them. She has internalized the belief that they are the target and that she needs to improve her language skills. She positions herself as a project for language change and places all the responsibility for communication on her shoulders. In the second poem, the speaker has a much stronger sense of her own worth and the value of her first language. English is seen as a merely functional tool. The speaker has internalized two different ideologies concerning the languages she knows: Chinese valued for its rich cultural heritage and English for its usage in world communication. This positioning of English and Chinese has ramifications on the way first language English speakers are positioned. While the speaker may not feel secure in the content of her communication, she does take ownership over her language and sees herself as present within this language. She does not undervalue her own worth or see herself as flawed. She positions the first language speaker as sharing part of the communicative responsibility to understand what she has said and written. It is not only her responsibility as a second language learner but rather is a challenge for both first and second language users. The third poem expresses anger towards first language users and their ways of interacting with second language users. The former are described in negative terms and the speaker does not believe that she can ever join them as a member of an in-group. First language users are presented as offensive, distancing and fake. But rather than trying to emulate them, she wishes to be heard from a position of being an outsider. This is a belligerent stance that challenges the hegemonic assumptions of first language speakers.

The actual emotional language experiences presented in these poems explore the difficulties and emotional pressures of using a second language. This indicates that the study abroad context involves frustration, embarrassment, marginalization, misunderstanding, silence, depression, anger and being offended. The cultural and linguistic surroundings present constant emotional challenges that require the second language speaker to find ways of positioning herself in response. The types of response expressed in these poems include self definition as a project requiring linguistic improvement and change, a challenge to first language users to share communicative responsibility, anger at first language users and the decision to interject within first language contexts from the position of being a foreigner. As expressed in the first poem, the aim of study abroad is often the desire to use a second language in a first language setting and with first language users. As expressed through these three poems, first language users may have no interest in interacting, communicative abilities may not allow interaction, and communication is often characterized by misunderstandings and mistrust. The experience of using English in this specific study abroad experience is emotionally demanding and requires adjustment from the second language learner.

6.5.2 Emotional responses to academic classroom experiences

Entering a foreign classroom for the first time can also be a very difficult experience. The first impact is thus described by a male Mexican student:

> **First Day of School**
> First day of going to class
> First day school in America
>
> Afraid to get in
> Getting into a classroom
> Sitting there
>
> Feeling lonely
> Everyone staring at me
> I feel like I am in the dark
>
> Afraid to speak
> I could not make friends
> I feel insignificant

The first stanza sets the scene while the second one focuses on those very first moments of entering the classroom, an emotional challenge fraught with anxiety. The stanza ends with the speaker "sitting there". The graphic placement of this line exemplifies the situation of sitting alone and frightened. The next stanza further emphasizes the emotional aspects of this initial scene. The third stanza presents three distinct negative feelings: being lonely, feeling that everyone is looking at you and feeling confused and disorientated. The speaker specifies that he feels that everyone is staring at him. This is the experience of being an outsider and a stranger within a group. The stanza ends with the image of being "in the dark", which has connotations of a child scared at night in a state of anxiety. The first line of the fourth stanza returns to the sense of fear. This time it is related to speaking in the classroom. The situation described in the previous stanza concerning feeling that all eyes are upon you and that you are alone makes participation very difficult. When usage of a second language is required this becomes even more difficult. The poem ends with two statements that reflect the speaker's conclusions. Based on his emotional state and initial response to this classroom, the speaker states that he could not make friends. Both the lack of speaking and his sense of the emotional atmosphere of the class would make social interaction very difficult if not impossible. More importantly, the final state of the speaker and the final line of the poem make clear that the whole situation has influenced the speaker's sense of self esteem. The choice of the word *insignificant* relays the association of being small, lacking in power and of lowly status in this setting. Throughout this poem, the

emotions expressed make this initial classroom experience sound quite traumatic. This is far from a hospitable environment in which a study abroad student is welcomed and made to feel at home. Entry and survival in this classroom would seem to be a challenge on an emotional as well as academic level. The poet situates himself as an outsider in a strange and potentially hostile situation. This has direct ramifications on self esteem, participation in the classroom and social interaction beyond the classroom. While every new student must feel a degree of anxiety upon entering a new educational system, this particular description is overlaid with the sense of being a second language learner and in a study abroad experience. The speaker here seems acutely aware of his status as outsider. The other students in the classroom have implicitly conveyed a sense of the classroom social hierarchy upon him without even saying a word and he obviously has been pre-conditioned to accept their understanding of social structure. It is interesting to notice that no other students appear in this poem and none of their actions or speech are represented. The speaker's feelings, as reported, seem to result from non-verbal cues and internalized understanding of ideological value systems in relation to American campus social structures. The poem makes it clear that the speaker is entering into a human environment which characterizes him in particular ways. He responds to his social structure emotionally with anxiety and lowered self esteem.

The next poem, written by a female Taiwanese student, also explores the feelings of a second language learner in an American literature classroom with American students.

Leonard 211
She started to talk
I turned my head left...
Then it's his turn
I turned my head right...
And they were waiting
I tried to pay attention
One by one...

"Blah~ blah~ blah~"

On my chair I sat still
Pretending that I understood
Only to feel like being isolated
Anxious deep inside
In Leonard 211

Leonard 211 is the name and number of a classroom within the English Department. The first stanza describes an interactive, classroom discussion. It is not clear

who is speaking except that the speaker needs to turn her head. The use of the pronoun "she" signifies that it is another female student. The image continues with another student speaking. This time it is a male student. The image involves the speaker looking right and left, trying to listen to different students speaking in turn. The specification of looking right and then looking left recreates the tension of the situation and the way in which the speaker is trying to accommodate to the class. This tension is further enhanced with the specification that "they were waiting". Silence in a classroom when a question has been asked and a response is required is often a tense moment. The speaker in this poem uses the pronoun "they" that differentiates her from the other students and creates a sense that the whole class is waiting for her to speak. In the next line she further enhances the distance between herself and the rest of the class when she states that "I tried to pay attention". As seen in the last line of this stanza, the rest of the class "one by one" are speaking and participating. But the speaker is silent trying to understand what is going on. The use of "they" and "I" creates a breach between herself and the entire class. As with other poems presented in this section there is a sense of being different and an outsider to the group of students in the classroom.

Further explanation of the situation of this student is presented in the next section of the poem. At the center of the poem, graphically differentiated by itself, is the reconstruction of what she hears as a meaningless string of sounds. This class is constructed around verbal interaction with students and discussion of literary texts. However, the poet in this context cannot follow what is happening in the class. In the last stanza, in an attempt to at least save face, she sits still and "pretends" to understand what is going on. This attitude is interesting in that it is a response to the social rather than the academic situation. Instead of revealing her lack of understanding, she prefers to create the illusion that she is following the class. This response perhaps reflects the earlier feelings of being differentiated from other people in the class and thus not having the option of expressing her confusion and lack of comprehension. The next two lines make these feelings explicit. As she states, she feels "isolated" and "anxiety deep inside". The poem ends by juxtaposing the speaker's internal feelings (of anxiety and isolation) and the external world of the classroom. In this interactive, discussion-based literature classroom, this student plays the role of being attentive. This classroom situation raises questions about the educational experience of being a study abroad student. Exposure to English in this case does not seem to translate into the input of language but rather into anxiety and feelings of isolation. Interestingly, this does not result from negative actions taken by her classmates but rather from the nature of the educational experience itself. The use of discussion and student responses are pedagogical strategies used in literary education in this university and all students are expected to share and learn from each other's interpretations. As described

here the speaker cannot participate or follow the discussion and feels isolated, cut-off and anxious.

This distance between internal feelings and external presentation is central to the experience expressed in this poem. It describes a strategy of coping that ultimately, from an educational perspective, is very damaging and from a personal perspective enhances the sense of isolation and helplessness. The speaker does not address how other students or the instructor respond to her silence or if this is noticed or commented on at all. The classroom does not seem to be responding negatively to this student or aiming to isolate her and perhaps, if made aware, could have helped address her confusion. But the position taken by this student does not allow anyone to actually see what she is going through. Thus at the end of the poem, she is left alone with her anxieties unresolved.

Presenting in front of a class can also be quite a stressful situation, as described in the next poem:

> **First Blushing**
> Standing in front of a platform
> I was holding my paper
> Seated below are my friendly professor and classmates
> Generously giving me an encouraging smile
>
> Accidently closed the projector
> Black large screen swallowed my pride
> Ironically
>
> Sweat, wet chalk
> Left a dark stamp
> Embarrassingly
>
> I kept standing
> Though blushing
> It was that intense air colored my pale face
>
> My first time blushing
> And I hope it is the last time

This poem was written by a female Chinese student. It starts with a description of the setting. The speaker is about to give a presentation. She is the focus of the class as she is standing on a "platform" while the rest of the class and the instructor are sitting. She describes the classroom as a warm, supportive environment but there is a degree of tension in this scene in that the speaker is about to perform publically and present her work. This is difficult for any second language speaker. Suddenly, as described in the next stanza, she accidently closes the classroom projector creating a "black large screen" that "swallows her pride." The description of the screen as

black and large and an entity that 'swallows" is reminiscent of a black hole – an emptiness that engulfs everything else. In particular, this accident has influenced her perception of self value as she stands in front of the whole class. As with previous poems in this subsection, the classroom experience affects her sense of self-esteem. However, in this case it results from actions directly taken by the speaker herself. The word "ironically" that ends the stanza suggests the incongruity of the accidental event and reflects her perception of the irony of her doing this to herself.

In the next stanza the speaker describes her physical response to her accidental closing of the projector. As she waits for the projector with the black screen behind her, she begins to sweat, figuratively described as "wet chalk" that creates a "dark stamp." Her physical response has become very public through the marking on her clothes. This physical response is described as embarrassing, which is emphasized in the next stanza. The speaker reminds the reader that she is still standing on a platform in front of the whole class and that a mark of sweat has appeared on her clothes. As a response she begins to blush. This is described as "an intense air" that "colored her pale face". The use of tactile imagery of a hot wind and the sense of the change of color reconstruct the personal impression that everyone is looking at her face and that she is being humiliated. The word "intense" suggests that this is a very strong feeling and that she is deeply embarrassed by her actions and her physical response to them. The public aspect of being on a platform and being expected to perform enhances this sense of embarrassment. The poem ends with the wish to never experience again such public humiliation.

The speaker in this poem does not assign any blame to the class, instructor or students. Quite the opposite, her embarrassing moment is accidental and results from her own physical response. However, this is a difficult moment and seems to reflect her shyness. As with the previous poem in this subsection, public presentation of competence and the hiding of internal feelings is seen as important. The poem describes her feelings at the moment concerning her physical response. It is not really about the closing of the projector but rather that she was publically exposed as being under stress and blushing.

The three poems in this subsection share the emotional experience of being at the center of attention, of being the object of an evaluative gaze that classifies and judges. This experience is related to the sense of being 'other' within the framework of the educational setting. In the first poem in this subsection, the classroom environment is presented as hostile. The judgment of being isolated and assigned a lowly hierarchal social status results from the atmosphere in the classroom itself and the internalized understandings of the student. It does not result from actions taking place in the classroom or the actions of the student himself. In the second poem, linguistic and communicative difficulties cause the sense of isolation that this student experiences. The classroom does not seem to be in any way hostile but

rather unaware of the difficulties that she is facing. In the third poem, this sense of being the center of attention is the result of the educational situation of presenting her work and her own actions while accidentally turning off the projector. The classroom environment is positive, encouraging and supportive. Her sense of embarrassment results from her physical response to her actions and not from the way the class responds. This suggests a significant difference in the perception of the classroom atmosphere moving from hostility to empathy and support. However, for all three poems, the speakers seem acutely aware of being on a stage and carefully evaluated by peers. Inherent in these described experiences is a sense of the presence of a societal gaze which sets the speaker apart from others and judges every action and response. The presence of this gaze would seem to be part of the study abroad experience for these poets.

From an emotional perspective, all three poems suggest that being a second language learner in an American classroom causes anxiety and stress. In addition, all three poems present situations in which the self-esteem of the speaker is lowered. The intensity of the feelings is different between the poems and the situations described. In the first poem, the speaker reports actually being afraid as well as anxious. In the second poem, the speaker feels anxiety and in the last poem the speaker reports on embarrassment. Interestingly, none of them describe the experience of speaking in class. All three are silent and respond either physically or emotionally. The social pressures of the American classroom setting as well as the linguistic demands do not seem to be conducive to speaking in class. Once again the public aspect and the classroom atmosphere seem crucial here. The speakers seem very isolated and feel 'othered' in the classroom. The intensity of this feeling is more pronounced for the first two speakers than the third one. This sense of being a stranger has ramifications on the sense of self value. For the first speaker, entry into the classroom makes him feel "insignificant"; for the third speaker, her sweating and blushing involves a decrease in her sense of pride. For the second and third speaker, a significant aspect of their described classroom experience is the importance they place on outwardly appearing competent and part of the class, while hiding a very different set of feelings. This desire to hide the emotional and academic difficulties they face can be seen as both a feature of their cultural heritage and a response to the presence of an evaluative gaze within the classroom setting.

The academic experiences expressed in these three poems suggest that the educational experience of studying abroad demands quite extensive personal and emotional resources and involves challenges to personal self-esteem as well as feelings of isolation, anxiety and embarrassment. In particular, this experience requires the ability to withstand constantly feeling that you are being watched and judged. This is an unpleasant and stressful way of being positioned in a social setting. In addition, if participation and, in particular, speaking are not part of the

academic study abroad experience, this raises interesting questions about the academic value of this experience.

6.5.3 Experiencing American students

Meeting American students was also depicted as an issue of central relevance to study abroad students. A personal and cross-cultural critique is described in the following poem by a female student from Kenya:

> **A Different Culture**
> Jeeps
> Mercedes Benz
> Hummer
> All pulled over at the Grant Suites
>
> Young American adults
> All college students
> All over 18
> But like small kids they say
> Mommy do this, Daddy get that
>
> Their parents do it all for them
> The carts, they push
> The bags, they carry
> The suitcases, they carry
> As their adult children just stand and look
>
> So when will they ever grow up
> When will they learn to do things for themselves
> Drive themselves to school,
> Pull their own suitcases and carry their own bags
> When will they learn
> That maturity comes with no age but responsibility?

The poem starts by describing the arrival of expensive cars parking in front of a new dormitory building on campus. Each brand name has overtones of opulence and privilege and is given a separate line suggestive of the way they appear. In addition, this description has connotations of mobility and independence, the stereotypical and commercially promoted role of cars within the wider American framework. From a literal perspective, it reflects what happens on campus at the beginning of the academic year when students arrive.

The second stanza starts by describing the arriving college students. The word "adults" is emphasized through the graphic placement at the end of the line and

brings with it the idea of maturity, independence and responsibility. The continuation of the stanza presents an additional description that directly opposes the concept of being an adult. The students are compared to children who ask their parents to "do this" and "get that." They call their parents Mommy and Daddy, further emphasizing their child-like nature. In the third stanza the parents are described as being physically active while the students "just stand and look". Each of the three central lines of the stanza ends with a verb of action assigned to the parents. Ironically, in the last line of the stanza and in the description of the inaction of these students, the speaker calls them "adult children". The American students are legally and by age adults but they are presented here as totally dependent on their parents. In addition there seems to be an implicit criticism of the children not helping their parents. In the last stanza, the students are critiqued for being not only dependent but also immature and irresponsible. The poem ends with a list of items beyond the academic curriculum of a university they need to learn. The speaker emphasizes the need for these students to learn "how to do things for themselves" and take responsibility.

The speaker's perspective here is deeply critical of her peers. This is a judgmental gaze that finds them lacking in relation to her own sense of age-appropriate behavior and her own experience. The students portrayed in this poem do not seem desirable or suitable partners for social interaction and personal friendship. The gaze of the poet creates a distance between herself and the American students and evaluates her personal qualities as more appropriate. The last lines of the poem suggest that the American students could learn a lot from her own maturity and independence. Overall, the poem creates a hierarchy based on personal attributes that valorizes the speaker and devalues the observed American students.

In the next poem, a male Malaysian student provides a critical description of his American dormitory roommate:

Dorm
I have a roommate
Sleep late at 2am everyday
Eat cheeseburger everyday
Never turn off the TV

The one stanza poem presents three daily characteristics of his roommate: he goes to bed at 2 a.m., eats cheeseburgers and leaves the television on. These are mundane events but characterize the student as lazy, irresponsible and inconsiderate. The limited nature of the description which focuses on these daily actions suggests a wasted life with an avoidance of the real reason for being at a university – academic development. Academic issues such as learning, reading and writing are not part of this description of this student's life.

Perhaps there is also an implicit critique of the nature of privilege. This student has the option of being in university and developing as an individual and member of society and instead lies in bed with the television on. As with the previous poem in this subsection, the speaker's gaze is both evaluative and critical. While this is not stated explicitly, the description of mundane everyday events suggests that these actions are problematic from the speaker's perspective. The lifestyles, aims, actions and understandings of the speaker and his roommate do not seem to match.

Further criticism is found in the following poem:

American Style
Go out of your circle
Have a look at the colorful world
Do not tell me "not really" every time
When I ask "are you interested in anything from the outside world?"
Do not tell me the farest you will go is IUP
Go out of your circle
Find interests in contacting with the outside world
Do you know it just makes you a coward?

This female Chinese poet explores the differences between local and global understandings of the world and directly critiques the local, monocultural perspective of American students. Her tone is angry and she uses reported speech to describe a series of conversations between herself and American students on campus. To her understanding, American students are culturally limited, disinterested and ethnocentric. In contrast, the poem positions the writer as having a much wider perspective on the world. She knows the "colorful world" whereas the symbol of an enclosing circle stands for the insular nature of the American students. The poem also references a form of nihilistic, self-interested, and local perspective of some students. They only know America and have no desire to explore beyond their locality.

The poem starts with the imperative "Go out of your circle" and continues with a series of additional orders on what to do and what not to do. The use of the imperative together with the comparison of global versus local perspectives creates a hierarchy in which the poet has the higher position. The poem ends with an insult in the form of a question. The lack of interest and local monoculturalism of the Americans is described as cowardly suggesting that this is rather the reaction to being afraid of the world. The linguistic structure of the poem attributes power to the speaker. She is the one who orders the American students to look beyond the American university setting and who insults them at the end of the poem. The American students here are passive and reluctant, which angers the speaker.

As with previous poems in this section, the speaker's gaze is evaluative and critical. In this case, however, the poet manages to express her anger and attempts to engage with American students, although the outcome does not seem very positive. Still, American students here are not hostile or offensive. They are merely bored and unmotivated. For the poet, who has travelled across the world to be in an American university, this lack of interest is quite a problem. American students do not seem to understand the world and there is not much hope that they will arrive at any sort of global perspective. One of the ironies of this situation is that the speaker of this poem is the one who could alleviate the isolation and monoculturalism of these American students. But their lack of interest will not allow this to happen. These two opposing perspectives indicate there will never be a mutual basis for communication, which challenges the assumptions that study abroad programs promote cross-cultural interaction.

The next poem, written by a male Taiwanese student, describes the experience of going to a party with Americans.

Party
Noisy and crowded around me
Blind and deaf
I can't see my finger or hear the voice of mine
Cause the smoggy and loud music
I am disorientated here
Which by-and-by black doth take away
Dark seals up all in rest
Suddenly
Drink up, a voice less loud
Through its joy and enthusiastic
My hearts beating each to each
Tequila! Whiskey!
After drinking, people become crazy and amorous
Everyone lead
the life of a king
Without any gap
Within the effect of alcohol
Boys girls dancing and talking without embarrassment
But after more than ten toss
Headache, I feel dizzy
Skin drummed in my brain
I cannot breathe and think anymore
Just like the spoondrift beat my heart

I feel dry and burning in my body
I couldn't stand anymore
Exhausted, I dragged to leave
It took all my energy
And swear not to get drunk again
Maybe! I wish

The poem starts with an image of the being "blind and deaf" as a result of the noise and darkness of the crowded room. The music is described as "smoggy" perhaps suggesting the presence of cigarette smoke. The speaker becomes "disorientated" in the dark. Within this confusing setting, he "suddenly" hears an enthusiastic and joyful voice urging him to drink. This suggests that the speaker is not self motivated but rather conforms to the social setting. The experience seems to be one of an initiation into binge drinking and the effects of alcohol are described. As observed by the speaker, alcohol makes people "crazy and amorous." This situation is not described in negative terms but rather the speaker tells us that "everyone lead the life of a king" and that "Boys girls dancing and talking without embarrassment". These descriptions suggest that alcohol seems to facilitate interaction. It seems to help overcome inhibitions concerning meeting girls. In line 18, however, the use of "But" triggers a red light. After having drunk ten "tosses" of whiskey and tequila, he complains of a headache, of feeling dizzy and dry and of experiencing burning in his body. He is exhausted and cannot stand up. He ends the poem by swearing "not to get drunk again"; but he immediately qualifies this promise with the word "maybe" and "I wish," suggesting that he knows he will end up getting drunk again.

This description focuses on the attractions of a hedonistic life style, one in which physical responses to excessive drinking do not seem to be a real deterrent. There is an implication here that he feels the social pressure of drinking and getting drunk. He is socially coerced to behave in a certain way to conform to his surroundings. This description illustrates the stereotype of the American college social experience of freedom, music and excessive drinking. As opposed to the previous poems in this subsection, the speaker does not see his American peers critically or negatively. He tries to integrate by participating in forms of behavior which include being irresponsible. The irony is that the poet sees this attitude as one that should not be pursued but he knows he will have to repeat it if he wants to integrate.

The poems in this subsection present an unflattering description of American students. They are immature, dependent, irresponsible, lazy, monocultural, corrupt and self indulgent. The first three poems are characterized by the presence of a critical, evaluative gaze which devalues the American peers through their

perceived personal flaws. This same perspective positions the study abroad speakers on a higher level. This perception necessarily makes cross-cultural interaction difficult and undesirable. The different outlooks on life and understandings of personal values are too distanced to allow for communication. Study abroad speakers define themselves as more mature, responsible, independent, interested and multicultural than their American peers, which raises questions concerning the possibility of cultural learning and interaction on campus. The poem on drinking does indicate a possible path for cultural meeting but it is based on the participation in what the student sees as a corrupting experience. The suggestion is that to be close to the American students one has to follow the hedonistic guidelines of social behavior.

6.5.4 Negotiating American culture

Some of the poems in the collection focused on the experience of trying to communicate with American students. The following by a female Chinese student is one of them:

> **Cold and Warm**
> I can feel your warm
> Covering my cold heart
> You do all you can to kiss the sunshine
> While I do everything to avoid from the sun
> You think everything is just for fun
> While I want to ask can you be serious someday?
> I hide the cold heart inside while saying "enjoy the sunshine!"
> You just said "indeed..."

The poem presents a series of internal thoughts and external statements in the attempt for interaction. The title "Cold and Warm" reflects the difference between the speaker (cold) and the American student (warm). This opposition remains throughout the poem through the usage of the personal pronouns "I" and "you", indicating opposing subjectivities. In the central lines of the poem, the conjunction "while" once again marks the difference between the speaker and her American partner. These linguistic choices create a structure intended to explore differences between the poet and the person she is addressing. The poem starts with a figurative reaching out of the speaker to her American partner, who is described as warm and trying to do all she can to "kiss the sunshine". In contrast, the speaker sees herself as cold and doing everything to avoid this sunshine. However, the American student is also described as taking everything lightly. The speaker internally wants to ask the American student if

she can change. But this question is not verbalized. She "hides" her cold heart and her question, preferring to just say "enjoy the sunshine" and get an innocuous reply ("indeed"). As a result, the poem, which had started with the attempt to reach out to an American student, ends with an empty exchange of pleasantries.

From the perspective of the speaker, it is clear that she and the American student come from very different cultural positions and have very different outlooks on life. The first lines of the poem suggest that the speaker can perceive the warmth of the American student but she also criticizes this student for her lack of seriousness. At the same time, the speaker does not seem to like her own coldness and perhaps would wish to be warmer and have more fun; but she does value her ability to be serious. In the reported interaction, none of the internal deliberations of the speaker are verbalized. The experience of this failed cultural negotiation consists of silence on the part of the study abroad student and the internal reflection of their unsurmountable differences.

This poem describes a very common form of everyday cultural negotiation, where the poet opts to conform to the guidelines of social discourse. It is interesting that the meeting is not hostile in anyway. The irony is that the tension only takes place internally. The gulf between the participants of the discourse is not crossed. This is actually a one-sided cultural negotiation which takes place in the speaker's mind. In negotiating this cultural event, the speaker ultimately opted for American interactional politeness – the exchange of a "feel good" statement – and the placing of the interaction on a superficial level.

Another poem which reflects on interacting with another cultural setting was written by a female student from Ghana:

Accepting America
How can I blend into this new world
and still have my cultural values intact
how can I call someone
old enough to be my Dad
by his first name
this is disrespectful
how can I talk to an elderly person
as if I am talking to a friend
this is an abomination
how do I go against my church values
and accept everyone's preference
this is also an abomination
why should I think more of myself

rather than my family
this is selfishness
my family and friends will say
I am now behaving
like our colonial masters
What do I do?

The poem is constructed as a series of questions in response to observed phenomena. It starts with the speaker asking how she can "blend" into this "new world" and at the same time keep her "cultural values intact." This question presents a sense of a conflict between new world values and her heritage cultural values. The use of the word "blend" is relevant, as it suggests the possibility to combine two distinct entities into one. The speaker wishes to construct a cultural sense of self that combines her cultural values within the new world but has experienced the conflicted nature of the meeting of these two cultures. The first two questions deal with the issue of respect for elders. As presented by the speaker, Americans feel comfortable in calling older people by their first names and treating them as friends. For the speaker this seems a case of disrespect. She describes it as an "abomination", which reflects her strong disapproval. The issue of how to address an elder is for the speaker a core tenet of social structure. Crossing boundaries is to her a very serious issue.

The next two questions deal with the relationship of self to wider social structures. The speaker asks how she can accept the presence of belief systems and associated behaviors that go against her own inherited religious values. Once again she uses the word "abomination" to describe the depth of her feelings concerning the clash with her accepted values. This is a moral issue and raises questions about the ethical integrity of the culture she is being exposed to. The speaker then addresses the relationship between self and family. Her sense of American culture is one that promotes the importance of self. This contradicts her cultural heritage of first considering the family and not oneself. Following these issues, the speaker states that her family and friends will see such behavior as one of the "colonial masters". This is an important connection that sees the particular set of values that focus on the self and selfishness as a trait of an enemy of her home culture. She is aware that her acceptance of these cultural values and outlooks can distance her from her own family and friends and turn her into a 'cultural monster'. By raising the spectre of colonialism and relating this to a particular set of observed values and behaviors, the speaker once again expresses how offensive this belief system and behaviors are to her. This is not a minor conflict but rather addresses the core aspects of internalized beliefs and ways of acting in the world. The poem ends with the question of "what do I do" that focuses on the ways she should behave and act.

The speaker's position in this poem involves several layers of conflict. On the explicit level of the poem, the posed questions reveal particular conflicts between her accepted values and those that she is observing in the new culture. However, if the poem were just about the rejection of the observed values and reinforcement of hers, there would not actually be any conflict. But this speaker wishes to "blend" these two worlds and as suggested in the last lines may indeed have begun to act in ways that are "selfish". This causes her to feel that she may be seen by her friends and family as behaving in a profoundly immoral and offensive way. Throughout the poem, the speaker explores the way to relate to others and it is on this level that the conflict is most intense. Her last question – What do I do? – asks how she should act and how she should resolve the conflicts in cultural values that she is experiencing. The poem does not provide any answers.

In this poem, cultural negotiation involves experiencing internal conflict over cultural beliefs and ways of behaving. It shows the speaker questioning the culture she is exposed to but also trying to approach it and integrate two different sets of cultural values. At the point of writing, the speaker is culturally closer to her set of heritage values and is concerned about how she will be seen by her family and friends. She does not completely reject the cultural environment she is in. But this raises questions about how she will be seen and how she will be evaluated. This is a case in which the cultural negotiation cannot be just an additive as for the speaker the two cultures are contradictory.

Romantic relationships were also raised by the study abroad students. Here is one written by a female Chinese:

American
You said to me
"It's America, it's not China,
Ella you got me, you got me"

You know how it feels
You know how it hurts
Chinese guys do not do what you do

You fucking jerk
Just caring about yourself
Stop texting me
You fucking jerk

A central aspect of the poem is the difference in the way each of the parties in the relationship behaves. The difference is presented by both the speaker and through the reported speech of the American student as a conflict based on cultural understanding. The poem starts with a statement from the American student that tries to

simultaneously express a feeling of emotional closeness and recognition of cultural difference. The statement "It's America, it's not China" seems to be an attempt to convince the speaker that she needs to conform to new social patterns of behavior and behave in a way that is expected by the American student. The student seems infatuated with her and expresses this as being "got." As seen in the second stanza, the speaker of this poem sees this relationship in a very different way. She has been hurt by this American student. She judges him in relation to the way Chinese "guys" would act and finds him lacking. The first and second stanzas involve the meeting of two different ways to approach cultural negotiation. In the first stanza the American student expects the speaker to change and assimilate American norms of behavior and interaction. The second stanza is based on the idea of understanding cultural difference and recognizing that cross-cultural interaction can be hurtful. In the third stanza, the speaker expresses her anger at the American student. She accuses him of being selfish. She also wants to stop the annoyance of his intrusive text messages. The poem ends with the repetition of an insult.

A romantic relationship by people from different countries involves close cultural negotiation. This poem explores a relationship that is one-sided. The theme of the selfishness and self-centeredness of the American student is prevalent through the three stanzas. The American student is infatuated with the speaker and expects her to accept his way of interacting with her. He is completely unaware that his behavior is offensive and hurtful. He insistently tries to contact the speaker even though she is not interested and has been hurt by his actions and words. This lack of understanding on the part of the American student causes the speaker to feel really angry with him and to resort to the use of offensive terms. Her dislike has a clear cultural aspect and results from the way actions and words are evaluated from a cultural perspective. The American student's complete lack of understanding of how romantic relationships are conducted in a different culture (and the idea that she should modify her own behavior accordingly) leads to his acting in ways that are deemed completely inappropriate by the speaker. She recognizes that he can compare American and Chinese patterns of behavior but does not want to change. She is shocked by his complete lack of appreciation of how his behavior can be experienced and is really angry at his persistence in pursuing her. This specific incident of failure in cultural negotiation is very personal and leads to feelings of anger.

Other poems in the data dealt with the negative outcomes of official, racial stereotyping, as the following one by a male Greek-Cypriot study abroad student:

Vagrants: My Family, My Brothers, My Friends
The fault maybe is on my untidy hair
Maybe even to the fact that I never shave
myself

Or even to my old leather jacket
All this makes me a vagrant
And drug user lover, searching a piece of your
bread; marijuana
Even if I never taste drugs, never taste your life.

Stuck on my door to hear
And smell like a dog
So to call me spooky and weird
However you said is your job
You serve the authorities
That's the reason to shop on me

Police visit me at midnight
But nothing, I was clean even if my hair was
still untidy
Checking everything and anything
But they forgot to check your nasty brain
You squealer, the centuries destroyer

And after, you saw me
You had already fed your prejudices
From a blind cigarette
And like an old pick-up you griped
"I had just done my job; I had to do it....."
For one hour the same phrase.

The poem describes an experience of being accused of being a drug user and having the police search his dormitory room and body in the middle of the night. This experience is obviously deeply traumatic and involves a situation in which cultural stereotypes are projected onto an innocent victim merely because of what the poet sees as his physical and cultural difference. The poem starts with the question that perhaps the speaker's physical appearance is the cause of being seen as a "vagrant" and a drug user. The choice of the word vagrant is interesting in that it specifies the legal offence of being homeless. This study abroad student is indeed homeless and may look different from other students on campus. The title of the poem suggests that he might even identify with this designation.

The second stanza introduces an unnamed character and a central theme of this poem – the role of prejudice in cultural negotiation. This character is a dormitory police informant who is described figuratively as an animal and form of voyeur. He is "stuck" to the door listening and smelling like a "dog". His prejudice leads to name calling, the activation of the local police force and the

assumption that his prejudiced and stereotypical understanding of others is legitimate. The speaker specifies that the informant made the claim that calling the police on him was his "job". There does not seem to be any recognition on the part of the informant that he is a racist and acted inappropriately. In the fourth stanza, the speaker directly addresses the paradox of the police search. They came at midnight to check his room for drugs; but they never bothered to check the quality of the original information. The informant is defined as a having a "nasty brain"; of being a "squealer" and a "destroyer". This collection of descriptors reverses the definition of who is the real criminal here. The speaker has done nothing wrong and is wrongly accused and harassed by the police merely because of his appearance. The real criminal is the original informant and his basic racism and prejudice against a person who comes from a different culture. The language the speaker uses suggests that he is angrier with the informant than with the police. The racism of the informant is the central causative agent in this poem.

In the final stanza the speaker describes a later meeting with the informant. A central image of this description consists of the informant feeding his prejudices on a "blind cigarette". The concept of feeding prejudice returns to earlier descriptions of the informant as a voyeur and a dog. This description is reminiscent of a troublemaker and scoundrel with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. The detail presented at the end of the poem – that the informant just keeps repeating the phrase that he was just doing his job – reinforces the sense of the inability of this person to understand the nature of his own prejudice. This phrase functions as a form of self-rationalization of his stereotypical projection upon the speaker. This last stanza reinforces the depiction of the deep-rooted nature of prejudice.

This poem presents a very difficult experience of cultural negotiation. The emphasis is on the inability of the American police and their dormitory attendant to understand cultural difference. The assumptions of the police and those of the dormitory informant are racist and based on stereotypes of what foreigners are like. In the case of this poem, if you come from a foreign country, you must be a drug dealer or some other form of criminal. The informant never contends with his own racism but rather just returns to his rationalization that acting on prejudice consists of doing his job. The speaker of this poem questions why the police did not check the reliability of the information. As stated in the poem, they checked everything except their own prejudice. The poem describes the experience of being stereotyped while a study abroad student and its very negative consequences.

The four poems presented in this subsection share the notion of the inability of members of the American society to appreciate or understand the presence of a different culture. Although the implications of this monocultural perspective are

very different in these four poems, in every case the Americans were unaware of their own cultural limitations and assumed that the study abroad students should accept the social norms of America. American cultural negotiation is characterized in these poems as being oblivious to the presence of people with different cultural understandings and the assumption that if someone visits the US they should immediately assume American norms and patterns of behavior. The consequences of this lack of cultural understanding are different in the four poems. In the first poem, the lack of cultural understanding does not allow communication to take place but is not more serious than a loss of a conversation. In the third poem, it causes a situation of acting inappropriately (from a cross-cultural perspective) and angers the speaker. In the fourth poem, ignorance and prejudice leads to false accusations and to involvement with the police. While the intensity of these experiences is very different, the underlying description that assigns monocultural assumptions to Americans within the study abroad experience in America is not.

Cultural negotiation as manifest in these poems consists of a reflective process where each of the speakers tries to understand the experience of being in a foreign culture. The reflection on cultural difference is presented as a difficult process without a real partner to discuss this negotiation with. For the speakers of the second, third and fourth poems presented in this subsection, this reflection causes conflict and a degree of anger. The speaker of the second poem explores the options of integrating two cultural positions but experiences the inherent conflict and questions as to what she should do. The speaker of the third poem is hurt in a cross-cultural relationship and feels anger towards her monocultural, would-be partner. The speaker of the fourth poem is the object of prejudice and responds with anger towards the police informant. The first two poems in this subsection consists of personal reflections in response to observation of cultural difference and the attempt to explain to oneself the meaning of these events; the last two poems show how the insensitivity and ignorance of the referenced members of American society directly hurts the study abroad students. In this latter case, cultural negotiation means contending with the ramifications of this ignorance. In all these poems, cultural negotiation is presented as a very serious and emotionally difficult aspect of study abroad. The main issue seems to be contending with living in a society that does not have an appreciation or understanding of cultural difference. In none of these poems was there a description of a two-sided, cross-cultural interaction. The Americans in these poems are presented as monocultural and inaccessible; the study abroad students choose to reflect alone and to avoid interaction. Multicultural assumptions concerning the study abroad experience were in this set of poems replaced with the need to contend with monoculturalism and its ramifications.

6.5.5 Homesickness

An additional aspect of the study abroad experience consisted of longing for family and home. The following poem expresses one male Russian student's feelings on this theme:

Hidden Tears
I'm holding a picture.
The door is locked.
My eyes are wet.
I remember that Sunday picnic
Here is my brother
Hugging my shoulder
Here is my mother
Holding my hand.
Tears are falling down my cheek
I miss my home.
I want to be there,
To see my family again,
To breathe fresh mountain air,
To dip my legs into the rough river,
To see my grandma cooking
And fall asleep in my tiny room.

The poem starts with the image of the speaker holding a photograph and crying in his locked dormitory room. The detail of locking the door and the title of the poem suggest that the speaker is embarrassed by his emotional response. Being male may make crying problematic for him or perhaps longing for home is felt to contradict the desire to be a study abroad student in a foreign country. It is clear that the poem presents a very private and emotional moment. The photograph is of a Sunday picnic with his family. Using tactile imagery the speaker specifies a close relationship to his brother and mother. In both cases, he focuses on touching. This memory of a close and loving family causes the speaker to cry. The last sections of the poem depict the things that he misses: the mountain air, the feel of the water in the river, his grandmother's cooking and sleeping in his room at home. The poem moves from the speaker's locked room in his dorm to his room at home where he feels safe.

This poem raises an interesting paradox of the study abroad experience. As with all nostalgic memories, this is an emotional experience that blends sadness (at loss) with the happiness of remembering. The experience of being abroad has made being at home a valued experience. This suggests that the study abroad

experience can generate an appreciation of what was left behind. In particular, the speaker focuses on very concrete images of things that he misses. Family closeness is central to his feelings of nostalgia but also food, air and landscape play a role. The speaker longs to be home once again. This multisensory sense of home activates memories that make the speaker cry. As in some of the previous poems in this chapter, the experience of being a study abroad student can be emotionally difficult and thus a vision of safety in a place that one knows, where one is loved, may be a valuable thing. The final sense of social and physical safety at home contrasts the feelings of disorientation and alienation of studying abroad.

Visions of home are also brought up in the following poem by a female Taiwanese student, who describes the experience of drinking a cup of Chrysanthemum tea:

> **A Warm Fire in my Heart**
> Dry Chrysanthemum blooms in the hot water,
> As beautiful as the natural Chrysanthemum,
> Like a little sun in the water
> It is like the sun warming my day back home.
>
> Thank my friend for giving me a little sun in my cup
> On this cold, cold day,
> In this foreign land.

This poem transforms the cup of tea into a vision of home. The chrysanthemum is a "little sun" in the tea cup which then moves to the sun on a warm day in her home country. The title of the poem connects the flower, the sun, the warmth of the tea and her emotional state. The second stanza of the poem situates the figurative image of the chrysanthemum tea within the context of a study abroad experience. The tea was prepared by a friend on a cold day in a foreign land. The act of giving her this culturally specific gift is an act of kindness and sign of emotional warmth. The speaker emphasizes the coldness and foreignness of the setting through the repetition of the word "cold" and the ending of the poem with the words "foreign land". The second stanza reciprocates the kindness of her friend by offering thanks.

Placing a chrysanthemum bloom in tea is a cultural practice for the speaker but in this poem it counters the coldness and foreignness of the study abroad experience and reconnects the speaker to positive feelings. The teacup literally and metaphorically warms her heart and reminds her of her connections. Against the cold and foreign background, the warm tea offers consolation and a reminder of the real emotional connections.

For both speakers of these poems, the presence of a personal and culturally valued artifacts activated feelings of homesickness. The experience involves the

interjection of memories and feelings relating to the home country within the experience of studying abroad. This experience involves situations that give rise to feelings of disorientation and alienation. Remembering home and exploring the sensory experiences of being at home allows the study abroad student the option of reconnecting to past experiences. An important aspect of the activation of memories of home is the experience of the multiple multisensory social and physical connections that memories of home provide for them.

6.6 A word of caution

The poetic data presented here reflects the concerns and understandings of study abroad students writing about their experiences. Each poem captures a particular moment defined as meaningful by a specific poet during the study abroad experience. As part of the analysis for the current chapter these moments of life were organized into five different types of experience. The corpus was generated in the same context and as such cannot be generalized to all American universities. However, the different perspectives of these study abroad students may find some resonance in other settings. Several poems refer to the rather disturbing experience of being the object of an evaluative gaze. In the poems that deal with second language usage and classroom experiences, the feeling that all eyes are upon you and that you are the center of attention produces embarrassment, marginalization, anxiety, fear and even anger. This sense of being singled out seems to reflect the experience of being foreign and using a second language. At the same time, several of the poems which dealt with cultural negotiation describe the experience of the study abroad student employing an evaluative gaze in relation to the local American students that they encountered. This perspective devalued the American students and involved an increase in self-esteem of the study abroad student. In addition, the overall experience of cultural interaction within this particular setting seems to be characterized by the necessity to function within a society defined by its monoculturalism. As reflected in several of the poems in this data set, the people they met seemed unaware of the need for cultural negotiation and the conflicts study abroad students undergo. The consequence of these three characterizations – being the object of an evaluative gaze, being the initiator of an evaluative gaze and experiencing the environment as monocultural – seems to be the silencing and the distancing on the part of the poets. They reflect on the surroundings they are in and recognize cultural difference, but do not share this realization. This emotional and psychological mindset does not seem conducive to verbal and cultural interaction with local American students and rather describes a series of subjective understandings that would direct an individual to avoid social interaction. The

sense of being alienated and at the same time devaluing local students may turn this form of cultural interaction into an undesirable situation where nostalgia for the home country sets in. Ironically, these experiences reflect what American study abroad students in foreign countries feel, when they too are alienated, misunderstood and collectively devalued residents of the host country (for example see Talburt and Stewart, 1999 or Wilkins, 1998). This raises the possibility that this way of being positioned and positioning may reflect a wider set of experiences as a foreigner in a foreign country.

What this method has shown is that when asked to write about meaningful life experiences, these poets chose moments that involved quite intense emotional situations. In relation to the study abroad experience these tended to be more negative than positive. It is very possible that a whole series of very positive life experiences did happen during these study abroad experiences that were just not written about. However, the aim here is not to generalize, but rather to point out that the experiences described in this poetry set do represent the way these students perceived moments of their life during the study abroad experience. Some of them are extremely challenging and offer insights into the difficulties of actually engaging in this sort of experience. In particular, the frustrations of using a second language, being the object of an evaluative gaze and interacting with Americans seem to demand extraordinary emotional effort. This data set more than anything else attempts to reconstruct some of these moments and perhaps offers the opportunity of understanding these experiences from the perspective of the student who underwent this study abroad experience.

CHAPTER 7

Philosophical grounding

7.1 Introduction

Over the centuries, the discussion of poetry and research has raised many contentious positions, some of which see art and science as antithetical. This chapter addresses more extensively some of these philosophical issues. While the aim is not to produce a comprehensive historical account of these arguments, it may be helpful to explicate further the philosophical underpinnings of this book so as to justify the relationship of poetry and research. The approach taken here is to explicate and interact with the core objections to poetry as scientific knowledge and then discuss the broader issue of the integration of literary texts and research methods.

7.2 Poetry as knowledge

As discussed in Chapter One, the objection to poetry as a form of knowledge has deep historical roots in the Western world. Geuss (2003) argues this issue precedes Plato and asks whether poetry can provide a "self-validating, correct representation of the real world" (p. 1). As reconstructed by Geuss (2003), Plato's argument is that poets "cannot provide an adequate account" of their artistic activity and as such cannot construct a "correct representation of the real world". Plato's argument rests on his well-known division between imitation and true existence. Poetry, as mimesis, is triply removed from truth; it is an imitation of a specific manifestation of an abstracted ideal truth. Thus, the poet deals in illusion and distances man from reality. Furthermore, as argued in *The Republic*, poetry deals with the baser aspects of human beings, encourages immorality, and stimulates the passions. This is why Plato claims poetry is a form of dangerous "entertainment" (p. 2) and cannot be considered as a form of knowledge.

Objections to this position on poetry have come from many corners spanning a historical period from Aristotle within the Greek context to Nelson Goodman (1968) and Gordon Graham (1996) in our own times. Plato's position is presented here because it raises some core dichotomies that capture the issues that surround the proposition that poetry can be a form of scientific knowledge.

Consider, for example, a contemporary attempt to demark the boundaries of science in education and distance the humanities. Shavelson and Towne (2002) have argued against the idea that humanist (arts-based) research can produce scientific knowledge. Their position is that humanist research is concerned with the individual case and the complexity of lived experience; as such, it is not replicable or generalizable to other cases and situations. They specify that "replication means the ability to repeat an investigation in more than one setting (from one laboratory to another or from one field site to a similar field site) and reach similar conclusions" (p. 70) and that scientific knowledge should strive for "a stable encapsulation of "facts" that generalizes beyond the particular" (p. 75). While using a different terminology and designed to forward the idea of empirical research (as opposed to Plato's argument for the centrality of philosophy), the claim is still that poetry (or any other art form) cannot produce a true, abstracted representation of reality and as such is not useful in constructing knowledge.

From the opposite direction, researchers in the humanities have objected to the use of empirical methods in relation to literary texts. In his criticism of stylistics, Stanley Fish (1980) claimed that empirical methods had nothing to offer as the study of literature was contextual and directed by interpretive communities. On a deeper cultural level, as analysed by Van Peer, Hakemulder and Zyngier (2007) the central argument of the humanities against empirical methods is that the explication of meaning belongs to the humanities and is not accessible to research methods from the social sciences. This creates a distinction, summarized through the hermeneutic work of the 19th century philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey between *explaining* – the search for causal connections within the Natural Sciences – and *understanding* – the unraveling of personal meaning within the humanities (Van Peer, Hakemulder and Zyngier, 2007). This distinction, while refuted through many examples of empirical studies of meaning construction in the fields of cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, sociology and education, is still presented as a way of distancing empirical methods from the humanities.

Looking at these objections to poetry as research in more theoretical terms, several core dichotomies emerge. These can be summarized in the four problems listed below:

1. *True Representation*: Scientific knowledge provides a true representation of the real world; poetry offers a fictional and contrived construction and as such cannot be true knowledge.
2. *Detachability*: Scientific knowledge provides true propositions that are detachable from their mode of representation (or stated another way can be represented in a variety of ways); poetry unites form and meaning in a unique linguistic construct that is not detachable.

3. *Universality*: Scientific knowledge consists of universal, general truths; poetry presents particular, individual instances.
4. *Emotionality*: Scientific knowledge is cognitive and rational; poetry is emotive.

The most commonly used strategy refuting the proposition that art cannot truly represent the world is to raise the issue of postmodern skepticism concerning the nature of truth, the empirical method, the predominance of logic and the neutrality of representation. For example, in a postmodern argument Richardson (1997) raises "the doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authoritative knowledge. Truth claims are suspected of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural and political struggles" (p. 232). This introduces what Constas (1998) calls the political dimension of research and negates the assumption that one form of research extracts itself from the socio-political and historical context of its own construction. According to this position, the proposition that logical argumentation is primary for knowledge and that truth is constructed through its implementation is in itself a political argument that creates a self serving hierarchy of power. The problem with this position, as eloquently stated by Alexander (2003), is that Richardson's (1997) own argument is dependent on the prioritizing of skepticism as the primary discourse. Thus, if postmodern skepticism is correct then skepticism itself cannot be prioritized.

A different aspect of the postmodern critique of empirical research is that all scientific knowledge is ultimately produced in language. Since language is an imperfect and inherently polysemantic tool for the dissemination of information, the idea that knowledge expressed in language represents a true, unified, coherent, objective and neutral representation of a real world is highly problematic. According to this viewpoint, all linguistic productions of knowledge (and all productions of knowledge are ultimately linguistic) are ways of representing and constructing the world rather than true reflections of the world. As argued by Richardson (1997) the use of conventional prose style, academic writing hides the "technical mechanisms" and processes of representation but "they are not eradicated" (p. 232). In other words, language with all its problems of communication and representation is always a part of knowledge and as such all knowledge is suspect and a form of representational manipulation and rhetoric.

The postmodern critique of logic and empiricism counters the "knowledge as the true representation of the real world argument" by reconstructing the world as a linguistic entity and thus equalizing the problematicity of any form of world construction whether it is poetry or a scientific research article. However, in a discussion of the parameters of philosophical interpretation, Rescher (2001) points out that there is flaw in the postmodern argument. As summarized by Rescher

(2001), postmodernism's claims against the primacy of any particular understanding are based on three basic propositions: 1) *Omnitextuality* – any interpretation of a text will itself be yet another text; 2) *Plasticity* – every text is polysemantic and as such has multiple interpretation; and 3) *Equivalency* – no interpretation has a hierarchical status above any other as all interpretation have equal merit. Rescher (2001) argues that while propositions 1 and 2 are evidently true, the third proposition is problematic in that it does not take into account the role of textual evidence. While an infinite number of interpretations might be possible, not all interpretations are equally grounded in a plausible reading of presented evidence. Consequently, some interpretations are more evidence-based than others and provide a clearer argument for the understanding of the phenomenon being described.

This position introduces the ideas of justified knowledge and explicit argumentation into the discussion of what counts or does not count as knowledge. A basic aspect of epistemology is the proposition that what counts as knowledge is grounded in evidential justification (Williams, 2001). There is a responsibility on the person who proposes an interpretation to base it on adequate and clearly presented evidence. The truth- value of a statement rests on the evaluation of the quality of the evidence and the way it has been interpreted. Both the evidence and the interpretation need to be accessible to the consumer of this knowledge. For this reason, the approach presented in this book considers the presentation and analysis of auto-ethnographic poetry as central to the usage of poetry writing as a research method. The elicited poetry is positioned as a form of data that requires subsequent interpretation. Using poetry writing as data requires clearly delineated and explicated procedures of data collection and interpretation. Readers must be in an informed position to evaluate the quality and accuracy of conclusions made. These procedures transform poetry writing into a form of justifiable knowledge.

Furthermore, it is important to clearly specify the core validity of poetic data. As described and exemplified in the previous chapters, poetry is useful for eliciting succinct, emotion-laden understandings of self experience. As such, poetry touches upon the ways individuals construct their own personal understandings of the world. The object of inquiry for poetry, as represented in the types of research question that this method explores, is the subjective and linguistically negotiated construction of meaning by a writer of her/his own experience. Is auto-ethnographic poetry valid data for this object of inquiry? Since the object of inquiry and the method of representation are identical, the answer would seem to be yes. Poetry can be a true representation of the real world if the 'world' that is being presented is one of individual understanding of experience. If the data source is valid and the analysis evidence-based and explicitly described, the result should be justifiable knowledge. Poetry writing, as developed here, would seem to meet this criterion.

This issue does, however, bring us to the second objection – the problem of detachable knowledge. The objection to poetry as a form of knowledge is that it cannot be paraphrased without a loss of meaning. Underpinning this idea is the assumption of disembodied knowledge which assumes a division between the knower and the known. The linguistic representation of knowledge is not, in itself, supposed to be significant but rather just the content that it embodies. The conventional understanding of this type of writing is directed by a principle of replication in which it is assumed that "the style is a mode of transport that safely carries a distinct meaning that can be (and is) divorced from the transporting agent" (Hanauer 2003, p. 73).

Critiques of this understanding of the representation of knowledge have come from rhetorical analyses of scientific prose. Specifically, as seen in the works of Bazerman (1988) and Myers (1990), rhetoric plays a central role in the way scientific publications are written and scientific knowledge is presented. Knowledge, even scientific knowledge, in these very close analyses of written scientific texts is tied to the ways it is written, the context of writing and the specific people who are doing the writing. This repeats to a certain extent Richardson's is (1997, 2003b) proposal that academic literacy utilizes a normalized genre of writing that hides its own constructive and interpretive actions. Furthermore, as supported by the framework of qualitative research and sociological critiques of some formulations of positivist epistemology, the researcher is never divorced from the knowledge that s/he creates. Political viewpoints such as those of Constas (1998) situate research and researchers within historical, socio-political contexts. Theoretical and historical descriptions of the sociology of science, such as Latour and Woolgar's (1986) description of the workings of a laboratory situate the researcher in her/his context as central to the production of scientific knowledge. Accordingly, the idea of knowledge detached from the mode of written representation and the researcher is actually only the illusion of detachable knowledge that has been normalized through the accepted conventions of specific ways of writing.

However, in the case of poetry as knowledge a subsequent argument needs to be made in relation to this objection. As argued by Gordon (1996) the unity of form and content in poetry is crucial for understanding the way in which poetry creates knowledge. It is through the specific linguistic and literary choices made by the poet that the autobiographical experience is reconstructed for the reader. The use of artistic form is directive. As such, appreciation and analysis of this form produces the knowledge of the described experience and thought. Not only does the principle of uniqueness in poetry not disqualify poetry as valid data, as held by Gordon (1996), it is actually crucial for the understanding of the way in which written poetry can become knowledge. As described in this book, the analysis of the linguistic and literary choices made by the poet in describing her/his own

constructions of experience are key to an understanding of the expressed subjective positioning. On the one hand, the presentation of the participant's poetry to the reader allows the entry into and reconstruction of the participant's experience; on the other hand, it is a tool through which the participant's understanding of this experience can be analysed. In both these senses, the unity of form and content is beneficial for the positioning of poetry as knowledge.

The third objection to poetry as knowledge is the problem of universality. The argument is that poetry focuses on the individual, particular and unique and as such is not generalizable to other contexts. This argument has been directed against all forms of qualitative research (see for example, Shavelson and Towne 2002) and is based on a restricted understanding of the concept of causality. These empirical positions see causality as limited to the analysis of repeated regularity between specific (manipulated) inputs and outputs and the specification of a statistical description of the relationship between variables. This implies that causality cannot be established through the study of individual cases. In response, qualitative researchers redefine causality by focusing on the causal mechanisms that produce particular results (Maxwell, 2004). Causal explanations can result from a detailed observation of specific events and as such provide crucial information for interpreting the relationship between variables. The meanings, beliefs, values and intentions of participants in a study are a significant aspect of establishing how the causal mechanism operates in relation to human phenomenon (Maxwell, 2004).

Specifically in relation to the role of art as knowledge, Gordon (1996) states that "art can be valued for its illumination of human experience" and that literature "could be interpreted as providing insight and illumination on the themes of human nature and the human condition" (p. 61). What qualitative, arts-based research can do is provide rich, detailed and personalized understandings of specific lived experienced that may be able to provide some insight into other contexts. Also it should be remembered that in many situations understanding the particular case is important in itself with or without the transition to an exemplar. Even in medicine, where the stakes on reliable and valid knowledge are high, single case studies are a common research practice used to explore a range of conditions.

The final objection that needs to be addressed is the idea that knowledge is purely cognitive and devoid of emotional content. In its extreme form this argument is construed as the core division between art and the sciences with the former expressing emotion and the latter as cognition. In this dichotomy, art and emotions are relegated to a secondary role of fleeting diversion and entertainment and science and cognition are elevated to the central role of constructing knowledge. But this argument rests on the assumption that emotion and cognition do not interact with the human, thinking system. Psychological and philosophical research has posited that emotion and cognition are integrated and influence one another

(Roseman, 1984, 2001; Scherer, 2001; Solomon 1977, 1993). For example, in Roseman (1984), external stimuli are appraised according to five different aspects (motivational state, situational state, probability, power and agency) in order to determine what emotion will be elicited in any given situation. While we can agree or disagree with this specific theory, the idea that emotion and cognition interact in human thinking is an occurrence that all of us know and experience consistently. In exploring personal subjective experience emotion plays a central role in defining the orientation and outcome in human psychic states of an experience. In other words, avoidance of emotion in the description of participant's perspective may mean to misunderstand the experience from the participant's perspective. Accordingly, a research method such as poetry writing, which allows the expression of emotional content in the reconstruction of subjective experience, provides knowledge of that experience.

At a basic level, the core of all the objections raised against poetry as a form of knowledge resides in a particular understanding of the concept of scientific knowledge. In a well- known discussion of types of writing inquiry, Emig (1982) points out that all research is directed by what he terms a "governing gaze" (p. 65). He further specifies two basic types of gaze – the positivistic and phenomenological. The difference between these two types resides in the "width" and "focus" of the gaze. The phenomenological gaze acknowledges the contextualization of phenomenon within specific fields of action; the positivistic gaze wishes to focus on the phenomenon a-contextually in order to construct generalizable statements. Furthermore, the phenomenological gaze examines the world as experienced by the participant, which means "to describe the nature of that world for the perceiver" (Emig, 1982, p. 67). This focus on participant understanding creates a situation in which it is accepted that there are many ways of understanding a phenomenon. The positivistic gaze desires to establish a "one-to-one correspondence" between a "phenomenon and the interpretation of that phenomenon" (Emig, 1982, p. 67). The argument that poetry can be seen as a form of knowledge is constructed on the basis of a phenomenological gaze in relation to research.

The core defense of poetry as a form of knowledge consists of a consideration of the object of inquiry that poetry as a research method wishes to construct knowledge about. This object of inquiry, as discussed throughout this book, is the individual, subjective, emotional, linguistically- negotiated understanding of personal experience. The central question is whether understandings of this object of inquiry can be elicited through the usage of poetry writing. Poetry writing can produce a deliberative account of the writer's autobiographical experience that involves multisensory, emotional information that reconstructs for the reader the experience of the writer. The written poem offers the opportunity to enter into another's experience and, once analysed, understand that experience through the

directive processes of the poetic medium. As such, poetry writing as a research method has the possibility of enhancing, deepening and/or extending what we know about the world and contribute to our ability to comprehend the diversity of experience in the world.

7.3 Empiricism and the literary text

The integration of research methods and literary texts has a disciplinary history. Since the late 1980s and under the heading of the *Empirical Study of Literature* researchers who cross the boundary between empirical research methods and literary texts have produced studies that utilize research methods from the psychological and social sciences. Most of them are constructed in relation to four areas – psychological, sociological, medium and application – as delineated by Schmidt (1989) in a foundational outlining of the field. Similarly, within the fields of *Pedagogical Stylistics*, *Education* and *Applied Linguistics,* studies of literary text processing and its relationship to language learning have been conducted using empirical methods. Furthermore, over the last 20 years, literary texts as part of a range of research projects have found their way into the field of psychology and sociology. Predominantly, the literary text that has managed to make this move is the story and narrative inquiry is currently a well-established method of conducting research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). Within these fields it is common to find literary texts and scientific research methods working together.

Accordingly, it is sad that the idea that a literary text can be the basis of a research method still meets opposition. Arguments over disciplinary boundaries with the adjacent restrictions on what can and cannot be considered research restrict the development of serious understandings of a range of phenomenon. The outcome is the imposition of artificially limiting restrictions on the ways in which research questions can be addressed and ultimately on the knowledge that is produced. This confines the way literary and cultural researchers understand their own field as well as limiting the option of using the special characteristics of literary texts to understand research questions in a wide range of educational, social and psychological fields.

The position developed in this book has been expressed by both empirical researchers of literature and qualitative researchers. Simply put, it is beneficial for researchers and disciplines to be aware and be able to use a wide range of research methodologies including those based on literary texts. For example, Van Peer, Hakemulder and Zyngier (2007) argue against monomethodology – the claim that there is only one way of conducting scientific inquiries – and see this as a dangerous position that can impair the development of appropriately researched

questions. From a qualitative perspective, Maxwell (2004) has argued that marginalizing qualitative methods is problematic as "it inhibits researchers from fully using the unique advantages of qualitative methods to strengthen their causal investigations" and "it damages the relationships between qualitative and quantitative researchers, making genuine collaboration more difficult" (p. 8). These researchers aim at widening and integrating (while recognizing the epistemological and ontological differences) a range of research methods so that the value of each method can be used to compliment the limitations of the others.

In her defense of poetry as a research method, Cahnmann-Taylor (2009) points out that "if poetry is to have a greater impact on research, those engaged in poetic practices need to share our processes and products with the entire research community, and the terms of its use must be clearly defined" (p. 16). In this book, I have tried to provide an informed approach to the usage of poetry writing as a research method that clearly explicates how and why this method works. This approach integrates art-based and qualitative ways of conducting research and addresses the under-theorized issues of data collection and analysis. I do not claim that this is the only way to conduct poetry writing as a research method. I do think, however, that this is one way it can be done and I have tried to provide as much evidence, research and argumentation as possible.

My position is that a range of research methodologies with different epistemological and ontological positions can and should be utilized in research. The over-reliance on one sort of research method runs the danger of not fully understanding the nature of the phenomenon explored. This is a classic argument for qualitative research that explores situated participant understandings of their context and processes and sees these as having the potential to elaborate and fine tune our knowledge of phenomenon. Poetry writing as described in this book can help fulfill this role and thus has a place as one option as a research method.

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APPENDIX A

The book of poetry assignment

Introduction to poetry writing

Lesson 1 – Understanding and Writing Poetry

Preparation for Lesson 1:

1. Go to Prof. Hanauer's webpage http://www.english.iup.edu/dhanauer/web/ and download and read before class the following academic article:
   Hanauer, D. (2003) Multicultural moments in Poetry: The importance of the unique. Canadian Modern Language Review, 60 (1), 27–54.
2. Think of a specific incident from your life that captures a moment of interaction that is significant to you. This moment might be an incident that you were a participant in or it might be something that you observed. Think carefully about the whole experience and try to really visualize and feel the experience. What was it like? What made it so significant? Did this experience provide you with any insights into your experience? Write out some notes describing this experience. Make a drawing or find pictures that relate to this experience. Bring these notes, drawings or pictures to class.

* *Instructor-led discussion of the nature of poetry and its relationship to finding out the meaning of life for each individual.*

* *Writing Poetry about Experiences – Classroom Workshop*

The aim of this workshop is to provide each student with the experience of writing a poem. The workshop scaffolds the process of thinking in poetic terms and then translating this into the form of a written poem. This workshop is conducted in pairs.

1. Choose yourself a working partner that you trust and enjoy talking to.
2. Try to explain to your partner the significant moment that you have chosen. Use the materials that you have brought with you (notes, pictures, drawings... etc) to enhance your explanation. Try to make your description as vivid and visual as possible. In particular, try to explain what makes this moment so significant to you as a person. In order to do this you might need to explain your feelings and emotional responses in relation to the incident or moment you have chosen.

3. With your partner try to decide what is the quintessential aspect of the significant moment of experience. Try to pinpoint the central feeling that accompanies this significant moment. Try to find a scene, object or action that summarizes the meaning of this event for you. Remember that in poetry one does not need to provide a whole scene, all the events, and all the participants in order for the poem to work. Poems tend to focus in on a specific aspect of the event and work through that in a multi-layered fashion. With your partner, experiment and write a poem about the event focusing on different aspects. Choose which seem to you to be the most powerful from an emotional point of view. Remember that a good poem provides its readers (audience) with an insight into the writer's understanding and feelings in relation to a specific experience. However, it does not have to be coherent from a narrative viewpoint.
4. Repeat stages 1 to 3 with your partner

Lesson 2 – Library and Internet Work on Poetry

During class time you will be going to the library in order to collect 5 different poems. Three of the poems should be from your home culture and relate to your own preferences in poetry. These poems do not have to be in English (but for class purposes you will need to translate them). The last two poems should be in English and should be poems that you like. The aim of this exercise is to provide the class with knowledge about poetry in your culture and to offer a wide range of possibilities for writing poetry. If you do not know about poetry in your culture, you will need to explore this through the library and internet. Of particular importance is to find poems with different styles and from different periods. Each of the five poems should be photocopied in five versions.

Defining and Presenting Poetry

Lesson 3 – Exploring the Genre of Poetry

Preparation for Lesson 3:

1. Prepare 5 photocopies of each of the poems you have collected (25 poems). You will need to bring your poems to class. Look at each of the poems and think about the features that are special about the poems you have chosen.

** Defining the Features of Poetry Workshop*

The aim of this workshop is to analyze the features of poetry and to provide students with a variety of different options for writing poems themselves. This workshop will be conducted in small groups of 4–5 students:

1. Each student will present the five poems that s/he has brought to class. Each participant should have a copy of the poem. Each of the poems will be read by the student to the other participants in the group.

2. Following the reading of the poem, the specific characteristics of the poem will be discussed. As a group you need to relate to the topics discussed in the poem, the ways of laying the poems out on the page, the types of language games used, and the types of vocabulary used.
3. One member of the group will make a list of features that characterize all the different poems discussed by the whole group. This list needs to be carefully written so that it can be used by the different members of the group.
4. Each group will present their understanding of the different ways in which a poem can be written. The discussion should include the specific range of features which can be used to write a poem.

Lesson 4 – Presenting Poetry

Preparation for 4:

1. Finish writing your poem about a significant moment (that you started in lesson 3). Your poem should try to focus in on a specific aspect of the event and provide an emotional experience for your audience. Do not try to tell a story but rather to present a moment in time that is meaningful to you. Try to make your audience sense what makes this an emotionally significant moment to you. Type your poem.
2. Prepare an exact copy of your poem on a large piece of paper as a poster. The paper should be large enough that people will be able to read it at a distance. Bring this to class.
3. Practice reading your poem out loud. Remember that it is very important to use your voice to express the feelings that you have incorporated in your poem. Your reading should enhance and highlight the insight that appears in the poem.

* *Classroom Workshop – Reading Multicultural Poetry*

The aim of the workshop is to provide you with the experience of presenting and speaking in class. Each student will read her/his poem to the other members of the class. Following each poem a brief discussion of the original experience and the way it is understood by the poet and other members of the class will take place.

Exploring Autobiographic Memories

Lesson 5 – Exploring My Experiences

Preparation for Lesson 6:

1. Think very carefully about your life. What are the most salient memories of your life that you have. Make notes in list form of your memories. You need to have at least 15 specific memories to share.
2. Please bring to class a big piece of paper and a series of colored markers, pens or pencils.

** Classroom Workshop – Exploring my life*

The aim of this workshop is to help you decide on the specific memories that will be turned into poems for your book of poetry. This workshop will be conducted in small groups of 4–5 students.

1. Each student will present the list of fifteen memories to the other members of the group. Each memory should be discussed and explained. It is important that the group discuss the importance for the presenter of each of the themes.
2. Each student will need to choose those memories that will direct the writing of the poems in the book of poetry. You will need to be able to explain why these memories are so important to you.
3. Every student in the class will present one or two of their significant memories to the class and explain why they are so important to her/him. Other members of the class should provide feedback and helpful comments to the writer.

** Classroom Workshop – Developing a set of poems through brainstorming and conceptual mapping*

The aim of this workshop is to help you develop a set of ideas that can be used to write your book of poetry. The workshop will deal with the strategies of brainstorming and conceptual mapping. Brainstorming is the process of generating as many ideas, thoughts, references and points of association as one can for a particular topic. Conceptual mapping involves visually exploring the relations between the ideas, thoughts, references and associations and trying to graphically represent this knowledge as a net of connecting ideas. Both of these strategies utilize your own personal knowledge about a specific topic or memory in order to explore the depth, extent, content and organization of your knowledge. This evaluation of your personal knowledge can later be used as a basis for writing your book of poetry.

1. Each member of the group will brainstorm the set of memories that you have chosen for your book of poetry. In your notebook write out as many ideas, thoughts, references and associations for the memory as you can. Don't stop to think about what you are writing and do not censor your thoughts. Write down whatever comes up. Do your best to write down as many items as you can. Your list should consist of at least 25 items. Don't worry if your list contains items that seem irrelevant. These items consist of your understandings and associations for the specific memories that you have.
2. Each member will present his/her memories to the group. In the center of a big piece of paper write the names of each of the memories that you have chosen to discuss. As a group really question the presenter about his memories. You need to be able to visualize the exact memory that he is presenting. The details that you elicit from the presenter must be written down on the paper

and linked to the memory. The idea is that the presenter will have a detailed conceptual map of the memories and the experiences that s/he has chosen.

Poetry Writing

Lesson 6 – First Draft and Thematic Organization

During this lesson you will be writing a series of poems and having individual meetings with your instructor. Class time will be dedicated to an in-class series of writing workshops. During these workshops you will be required to write 20–30 poems based on the memories that you have chosen. Remember to use both the conceptual maps that you have developed and the analysis of different types of poems in order to help you write your poems. Be creative and don't worry so much about things like grammar and spelling. The communicative content of the poem is what is really important.

As part of the process of writing poetry you will be reflective exploring your own experiences. Think about your significant memories, conceptual maps and notes and consider whether you can find any themes within your poetry. Think about the issues you are concerned with and the experiences you have had in your life. Try and decide on a theme for your book of poetry. Discuss your ideas with your peers and your instructor. It is important to find a theme that is truly meaningful to you and historically situated in your life experiences. This theme should allow you to explore your own experiences.

Evaluating Poetry

Lesson 7 – Criteria for Evaluation of Poetry

Preparation for Lesson 8:

1. Reread all the poems you have written. Bring 2 copies of each of the poems you have written to class
2. Find copies of the poems you found at the beginning of the semester. Bring copies of your own poems and the poems you found to class.

** Classroom Workshop – Criteria for Evaluating Poetry*

The aim of this workshop is to find criteria for evaluating poetry. These criteria can be used to help you write and improve the poems that you have written. This workshop will conducted in small groups of 4–5 students.

1. Look at the collection of poems brought by all the different members of the group. Decide which poems as a group you think are good. Try and decide what it is about the poems you like that make them "good poems" in your understanding. Try to describe the qualities of the poems that make them "good poems" in your minds.

2. As a group write up a list of criteria for evaluating poetry. Your list will be presented to the whole class and discussed.

** Classroom Workshop – Evaluating your Book of Poetry*

The aim of this workshop is to provide you with feedback on your poetry so that you can improve the poetry you are writing for the book of poetry. This workshop is conducted as pair work.

1. Choose a close friend that you feel comfortable with. This should be someone that you can talk to easily and will provide you with good feedback on your poetry.
2. Tell your partner about the theme of your book of poetry and give your partner a copy of all the poems you have written.
3. Read each of the poems to your partner. As a partner listen carefully to the poem and think what would improve the poem in your opinion. Provide your partner with ideas for ways of revising each of the poems.
4. Once you have heard all the poems, together think carefully about the whole book of poems. How do the whole series of poems work together? Remember that this is a book of poetry organized around a central theme. Think what the series of poems say about the central theme that has been developed in this book of poetry.

Redrafting and Finalizing your Book of Poetry

Lessons 8

During this week you will be rewriting your series of poems and having individual meetings with your instructor. Class time will be dedicated to an in-class series of writing workshops. During these workshops you will be required to carefully consider each of the poems that you have written and think about the book as a whole. It is very important that the book of poetry clearly express your thoughts and feelings on the memories you have chosen to discuss. In the individual meetings, your instructor will help you to make the book of poetry as expressive as is possible.

During this week you will also have to make decisions as to the format and aesthetic qualities of the final book of poetry. Examples of poetry books will be brought to class to help you imagine different ways of producing your book of poetry. You should already start to develop your final version of your poetry book.

Writing an Introduction for your Book of Poetry

During this lesson you will also write an introduction for you book of poetry. Your introduction should be about 3 pages long and should be written from a personal point of view. Your introduction should make the reader desire to continue to read the whole book of poetry and tell your reader what is important about each of the poems from your perspective.

Poetry Publishing and Presentation

Lesson 9

During this week you will present your finalized and published book of poetry to the class. Remember that you need to produce three versions of the book of poetry. The book must be properly typed, organized, bound and presented. The work must be professionally presented. Each student will choose three poems that s/he wishes to read to the class. Each student will introduce the theme of their book of poetry and then read in front of the class three of the poems that they think best represent their work. Other students in the class will provide positive feedback on the book of poems.

APPENDIX B

Transcription conventions

(.) – A hearable pause

(2.0) – Length of a pause or gap in seconds

Underline – Underlining marks speaker's emphasis

((laughs)) Double brackets designate the transcriber's comments

. – A full stop designates a stopping intonation

Adapted from Speer (2005)

Name index

Subject index

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