

# L2 postgraduate students' task representations and emergent academic identities in evidence-based argumentative essay writing

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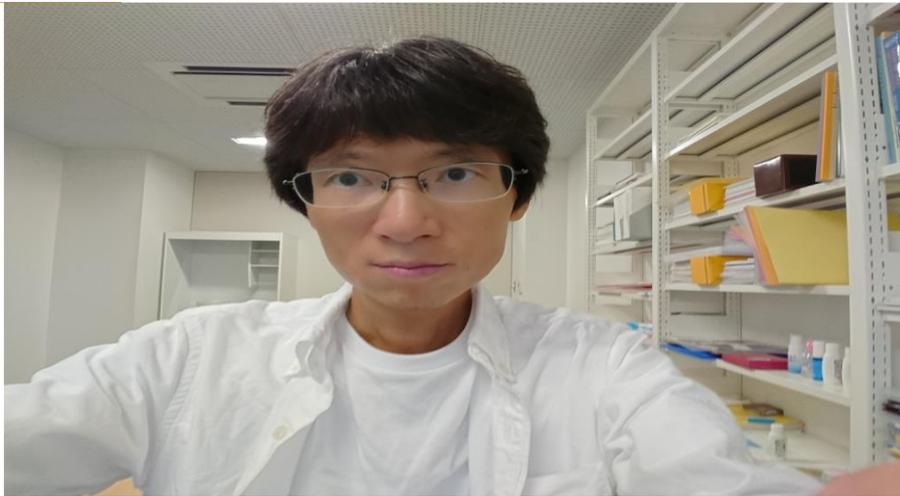
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**Presenter: Takeshi KAMIJO/professor at  
Ritsumeikan University(Japan)**

The study presented today was conducted at a UK  
university when I was a visiting scholar from  
September 2017 to March 2018.

**September 2017**

**December 2018**



The outline of today's presentation

**(1) Definitions of key terms,**

**(2) Literature review**

**(3) Research questions**

**(4) Methods** (Contexts, participants, and data collection and analysis)

**(5) Results and discussion**

(Learner 1's extracts and Learner 2's extracts),

**(6) Conclusion and implications**

**References**

**Appendix**

# **Definitions of key terms, Literature review and Research questions**

## Argumentative essays: definition

Argumentative essay writing requires L2 learners to:

- (a) select sources and **critically review the literature**,
  - (b) **develop a position** in an academic debate, and
  - (c) **present an argument** in a congruent manner,
- transforming the existing body of knowledge

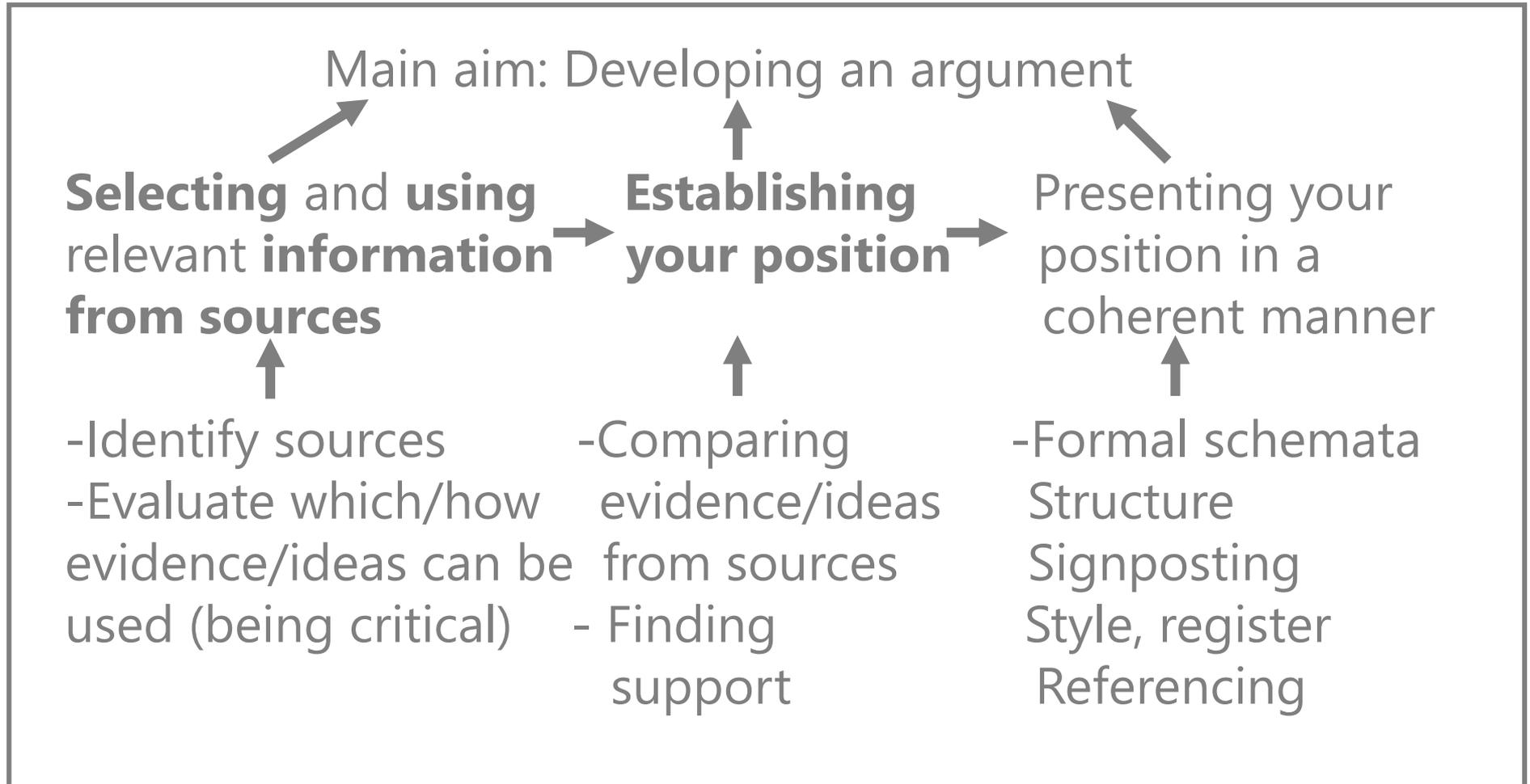
(Wingate, 2012)

In this respect, Ryshina-Pankova claims that,

'...what makes academic argumentation special is that it requires one to **argue for one's position by explicitly engaging with other perspectives on the issue voiced in the past** ... as evidence or counter-evidence for one's own line of thinking' (2014, p. 283)

# Argumentative essays: definition

- Wingate (2012) suggests the framework of writing argumentative essays in higher education:



## **Task representation: definition**

Task representations in academic argumentation can be regarded as learners' metacognition including:

- 1 **Audience awareness** (researchers' debate),
- 2 Understanding about **the purposes** of argumentation
- 3 **Critical literature review and argumentation**
- 4 Use of **writing practices and strategies** (e.g., citing, referencing, metacognitive strategies)

(Carey, et al., 1989; Carey & Flower, 1989; Flower, 1987)

Many studies have investigated **L2 students' audience awareness and writing strategies** (citing, referencing, metacognitive strategies) based on **the genre-based analysis** on student written texts.

## **Literature review – two strands of studies**

- Many previous studies of L2 postgraduate students' task representations in evidence-based argumentative essays which focused on **L2 learners' perceptions about their audience and the use of writing practice.**
- Some researchers have investigated **L2 master's student text borrowing, citing, and referencing** by interviews (Harwood & Petric, 2012; Jomaa & Biddin, 2019; Petric & Harwood, 2013; Petric, 2012; Shi, 2011, 2012a, 2012b).
- Other researchers have examined **L2 postgraduate learners' representations of audience, and writing strategies** (Cabrejas-Penuelas, 2008; Negretti, 2017).

## Research questions

- The researcher investigated the selected two successful L2 postgraduate students in the MA TESOL course in a UK university, with the following two research questions.

**RQ1: What were the two L2 postgraduate students' characteristics of task representations** in their critical reading and argumentation?

**RQ2: How did the two L2 postgraduate students conduct critical review of the selected literature** for effective argument construction?

## **Methods (Context, Participants, and Data collection and analysis)**

## Classroom context and participants

### - MA TESOL/Education University, UK

One of the core modules in autumn semester 'Second Language Learning Principles'

### - Participants

**Two learners out of six were successful**, as they received the distinction-level(70-80) grade. Accordingly, they were **selected for detail analysis**.

**Learner 1** Female, from China, ten-year teaching experience (no previous study-abroad experience)

**Learner 2** Female, from China, ten-year teaching experience (no previous study-abroad experience)

## MA Module assignment

### - Themes of the MA Module assignments

For learner 1, the assignment required discussion of how theories of second language learning affect the way she taught. **She selected a theme about 'written corrective feedback'.**

For learner 2, the assignment was to decide **her position** on the theme about **whether child's educational intelligence should be measured or not.** She ultimately decided to argue for not measuring child's educational intelligence.

## Data collection

- Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews twice, one in the beginning the MA module in early November and the other after submitting the assignment in late February and early March.
- In the first interview, the researcher asked the learners about **their education through the MA module and their perceptions about academic reading.**
- In the second interview the researcher asked the learners about **planning and reading processes of the selected review articles for constructing assignment arguments** and reflections on learning.

## Data analysis / thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using the following phases of coding analysis was applied.

### (a) Familiarising yourself with your data

The researcher interviewed six L2 learners and the **two successful learners were selected.**

### (b) Generating initial codes

The researcher generated **initial codes**, as he analysed the learners' data through open coding.

### (c) Searching for themes, reviewing and defining them

After conducting **second and third cycles of coding**, the researcher reviewed the data.

## **Results and discussion**

## Results and discussion

The two successful L2 Learners' data are provided in this section. Four key themes emerged:

- (a) **Raising awareness** about critical reading and writing
- (b) **Planning source selection** and argumentation
- (c) **Reading their selected review articles**
- (d) **Evaluating the previous studies as evidence** for argument construction

### Learner1

Extracts 1(Interview 1), 2(Interview 2), 3(Interview 2) and 4(Interview 2)

### Learner2

Extracts 1(Interview 1), 2(Interview 2), 3(Interview 2) and 4(Interview 2)

**Awareness, Planning and Critically evaluating  
sources for developing an argument / Learner 1**

## Extract 1: Learner 1, Interview 1

RE: What are **important goals of the course** and the approach of teaching and learning?

LN1: Actually, before I came, **our lecturer in China didn't mention critical reading or critical writing much.**

However, when I came to the UK, I was always hearing **the word critical.** [...] now that **I am in a UK university,** every time I read, I read not only to get information, but **every time I read, I need to ask myself questions and to consider my academic writing.**

## Extract 2: Learner 1, Interview 2

RE: There is a reading stage for writing an assignment, what kind of goals or activities are required?

LN 1: [...] once I decide on my topic, I try to Google it or I try to find key words for my topic and try to find out the related research articles or maybe review articles and also books and chapters to **support all the ideas for my writing** [...] there must be **a kind of argument** or position. In other words, **I need to speak out in my writing**, so I need to write in a wider range to **support my argument**.

### Extract 3: Learner 1, Interview 2

Learner 1 provided a summary of the review article:

**First**, he made a distinction between L2 learning and L2 acquisition, [...] we can say **theoretical perspectives** on the potential of written corrective feedback and **he used different theories**. [...] **For the next part, he summarised the research** on the language learning potential of written corrective feedback and there is **a lot of research** and also there is **one table**. You can see that from 1991 and then until 2012, so there are **a lot of research** about this topic. **Next**, he discussed some questions. [...] **He used some research** he mentioned before, **to support his idea**.

## Extract 4: Learner 1, Interview 2

RE: How did you critically evaluate the literature (in the selected review article)?

LN1: I mean, for my point, **I strongly recommend a review article** and if we really need to do some, for example, **critical literature review**, [---] **there are many arguments, there are many positions we can use.** And when I was reading this kind of review article, I will think about "Is it right?" or "Is it wrong?," and "Am I for the author?" or "Am I against him?." That helps me question, **make a lot of questions.** So, I think that is **a kind of critical thinking.**

**Awareness, Planning and Critically evaluating  
sources for creating an argument / Learner 2**

## Extract 5: Learner 2, Interview 1

RE: What do you think of the learning goals of the MA programme?

LN2: [...] I think **our program director** mentioned several times in MA in UK at least, you are supposed to learn to **read critically, write and think critically** [...] when reading these things, **I need to use what I read for supporting my own opinion** or I should say **drawbacks, or those things that are not so perfect**, try to find out these things when we are reading.

## Extract 6: Learner 2, Interview 2

RE: Did you have the kind of an argument at the beginning stage of your reading and writing?

L2: When I was writing my assignment – actually, **I firstly have to say I have two different sides. One is like, okay, I insist that intelligence can be measured,** and then it is kind of fixed... and then during the reading **I find some other voice.** And then I start another part, that is cannot be measured. So, it is based on one aspect first. And then with the reading go further, and **I find another voice** that could -- **come up to support my opinion.**

## Extract 7: Learner 2, Interview 2

Learner 2 provided a summary of the review article: This article mainly, **firstly** it is about **different researchers' opinions** about intelligence: what should be included when we talk about intelligence, what aspects and what variables should be included in intelligence. That's **the theory part** and, **then, further** talks about others, **like biological and genetic studies** in intelligence and **some racial differences, [...]** **In his opinion, nobody** can give **a very clear statement** about what intelligence is, how to measure it, and whether it can be measured or not.

## Extract 8: Learner 2, Interview 2

RE: How did you use this research review article?

LN2: Actually [among] different researchers, when they state the definitions of intelligence, **there is always a gap that they couldn't cover.** So, in my assignment, I need to show "Okay, right now, we can see **Researcher A said this, Researcher B said this, and Researcher C said blah-blah-blah.**" And then, each of these researchers, in their statements or theories, there is a part of the intelligence theme that they cannot cover. **So, I [try to] find all these gaps to see whether these gaps can be used for my argument.**

## Conclusions and implications

- (a) The two L2 learners had **explicit awareness about critical reading, planned** source use and arguments, and **critically read** the selected review articles.
- (b) The two L2 learners were aware of the **academic debate and constructed their academic arguments based on critical review of literature.**
- (c) **Their academic identities were facilitated through critical reading of the review articles.** The learners were guided to actively participate in academic debate.
- (d) The two L2 learners differed in **their schema and used different approaches for argument construction.**

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## Appendix A MA Module assignment

### - Grading criteria (argumentation and application of information)

Distinction level Points  
are clearly presented, terms are defined and **claims are thoroughly supported through careful argumentation and references to the literature**. The writer shows considerable ability to **evaluate theory and research from the literature and to relate these to professional experience** where relevant.

(Extracts from the MA Handbook, University in UK)

## **Appendix B MA Module assignment**

### **- Key source texts used for the MA Module assignments**

Learner 1's selected key source text was **a research review article: "A reflection on the language learning potential of written CF" (Bitchener, 2012).**

Learner 2's selected key source texts was **a research review article : "Intelligence" (Sternberg, 2012).**

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**Thank you!**