

**Authorial voice in master's dissertations in education**

**by**

**Junitha Naidoo**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS**

**in the Faculty of Education**

**at the**

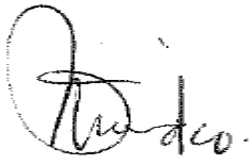
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

**Supervisor: Dr Lizette de Jager**

**December 2021**

## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree, Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



Junitha Naidoo

31 January 2022

# ETHICS CERTIFICATE



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

## RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

CLEARANCE NUMBER:

HU 19/11/01

DEGREE AND PROJECT

MEd

Authorial voice in master's dissertations in  
Education

INVESTIGATOR

Ms Junliha Naidoo

DEPARTMENT

Humanities

APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY

27 November 2019

DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

28 October 2021

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Funke Omidire



CC

Ms Thandi Mngomezulu

Dr LJ de Jager

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

## LANGUAGE EDITOR

MJ de Jager  
Translator and text editor

Cell: 083 455 3723

Address: 9 Tiger Road  
Monument Park  
0181  
PRETORIA

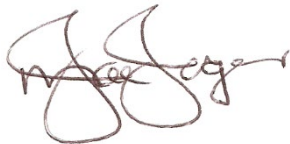
E-mail: [mjdjlang@gmail.com](mailto:mjdjlang@gmail.com)

### To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that I, MJ de Jager, edited the dissertation,

“Authorial voice in master’s dissertations in education”,  
By Junitha Naidoo.

The onus was on the authors to attend to all my suggested changes and queries. I do not take responsibility for any changes effected in the document after the fact.



MJ DE JAGER

17 December 2021

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

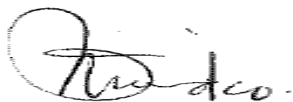


### Copyright declaration

I hereby certify that, where appropriate, I have obtained and attached hereto a written permission statement from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my thesis, dissertation, or project report ("the work"), allowing distribution as specified below. I certify that the version of the work I submitted is the same as that which was approved by my examiners and that all the changes to the document, as requested by the examiners, have been effected. I hereby assign, transfer and make over to the University my rights of copyright in the work to the extent that it has not already been effected in terms of a contract I entered into at registration. I understand that all rights with regard to copyright in the work vest in the University who has the right to reproduce, distribute and/or publish the work in any manner it may deem fit.

### Kopieregverklaring

Hiermee sertifiseer ek dat, waar toepaslik, die skriftelike toestemming verkry is van elke derdeparty wat die eienaar is van materiaal wat aan outeursreg onderhewig is en wat ingesluit is in my proefskrif, verhandeling of projekverslag ("die werk"), waardeur verspreiding op die wyse hieronder gemeld, ook toegelaat word. Ek sertifiseer dat die weergawe van die werk wat deur my ingedien is, dieselfde is as dié wat deur my eksaminatore goedgekeur is en dat alle veranderinge soos deur hulle versoek, aangebring is. Ek dra en maak hiermee my outeursregte in die werk aan die Universiteit oor insover dit nie reeds ingevolge 'n kontrak by registrasie deur my gedoen is nie. Ek begryp dat alle regte met betrekking tot outeursreg van die werk dus by die Universiteit berus en dat die Universiteit die reg voorbehou om na goeddunke die werk te reproduseer, versprei en/of publiseer.



31 January 2022

SIGNATURE/HANDTEKENING

DATE/DATUM

## DEDICATION

To Vaschel,

who walked the darkling plain with me and believed I would find my way,

*Gerich veleth nîn.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey in finding my voice was accomplished with the assistance and support of the following people:

- Prof. Lizette de Jager, my supervisor, for walking me along with her expert advice, encouragement, time and patience. Thank you!
- My dear friend and mentor, Poovie, without whose encouragement I could not have finished. Thank you for sharing and lightening my journey.
- My family, for their endless patience and constant encouragement during my search for my voice.
- My colleagues and friends, for their assistance, advice, motivation and patience throughout my voice journey!
- All the interview participants, for their invaluable sharing of their voice journeys.

## ABSTRACT

This research study is based on the proposition that all academic writing must contain authorial voice that represents writer identity. Through the lenses of socio-constructivism and the Academic Literacies Theory, I explored how master's writers expressed authorial voice in master's dissertations in the Faculty of Education at a South African institution of higher education. The research questions that guided this study were: 1. How do master's students understand the concept of authorial voice? 2. What strategies do students use to develop their own types of authorial voice? 3. What guidance is available to help students develop their authorial voice? The aim of this study was to provide theoretical insight into how master's students constructed voice in dissertation writing, a topic that has received little attention in scholarly research on academic writing at master's level. A qualitative case study, which involved 11 dissertations and their writers, was used to examine authorial voice. Ivanič and Camps' Voice Typology (2001) framework was applied to identify linguistic features that were used to construct authorial voice in the discussion section of the selected dissertations. Also, semi-structured interviews with four writers of the selected dissertations were thematically analysed to determine the participants' reflections on voice and academic writing. The research findings provide theoretical insight into the construction of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing and indicate that master's writers do create authorial voice in dissertation writing with the use of specific linguistic features. Additionally, they also reveal facets of the writers' dissertation writing journey, with specific emphasis on their understanding of authorial voice. The implications of this study include the importance of master's writers constructing credible authorial voices to gain membership to academic communities. Pedagogically, this study is important for all in the academic community who are engaged in teaching writing, such as supervisors, teachers of academic writing, students and academic writers. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be integrated into academic language teaching in pre-master's studies where students are presented with a range of choices available through good academic writing on including and strengthening authorial voice. For further scholarship,

I suggest that not only should voice be studied in a larger number of master's dissertations from more disciplines over a greater number of years, but also research on master's supervisors' and examiners' perceptions and experiences of authorial voice is recommended.

**Key terms:**

academic writing, authorial voice, critical thinking, master's dissertation, identity, linguistic features, text analysis

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| Abbreviation | Term                                            |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| EAL          | English as additional language                  |
| ESL          | English as second language                      |
| HEI          | Higher education institution                    |
| L1           | First language                                  |
| L2           | Second language                                 |
| PhD          | Doctoral degree                                 |
| TESOL        | Teaching English to speakers of other languages |

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                               |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Declaration.....                                              | i   |
| Ethics certificate.....                                       | ii  |
| Language editor .....                                         | iii |
| Declaration of originality .....                              | iv  |
| Dedication.....                                               | v   |
| Acknowledgements.....                                         | vi  |
| Abstract.....                                                 | vii |
| List of Abbreviations .....                                   | ix  |
| Table of Contents.....                                        | x   |
| List of Figures .....                                         | xiv |
| List of Tables .....                                          | xv  |
| Chapter 1: Introduction .....                                 | 1   |
| 1.1    Introduction.....                                      | 1   |
| 1.2    Problem statement.....                                 | 1   |
| 1.3    Background and context .....                           | 3   |
| 1.4    Focus and purpose .....                                | 7   |
| 1.4.1    Research objectives (RO) .....                       | 7   |
| 1.4.2    Research questions .....                             | 7   |
| 1.5    Overview of literature review .....                    | 7   |
| 1.5.1    Academic writing .....                               | 8   |
| 1.5.2    Authorial voice .....                                | 8   |
| 1.5.3    Textual features which indicate authorial voice..... | 10  |
| 1.5.4    Master’s dissertation writing .....                  | 11  |
| 1.5.5    Discussion section of dissertations .....            | 12  |
| 1.6    Theoretical framework .....                            | 13  |
| 1.7    Research methodology .....                             | 14  |
| 1.7.1    Research paradigm .....                              | 15  |
| 1.7.2    Research approach.....                               | 16  |
| 1.7.3    Research design .....                                | 17  |
| 1.8    Data collection .....                                  | 18  |
| 1.8.1    Sample.....                                          | 18  |
| 1.8.2    Documents for data analysis.....                     | 18  |
| 1.8.3    Semi-structured interviews.....                      | 19  |
| 1.8.4    Data analysis .....                                  | 19  |

|                                       |                                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1.9                                   | Trustworthiness .....                                 | 21 |
| 1.10                                  | Ethical clearance .....                               | 23 |
| 1.11                                  | Limitations of the study.....                         | 24 |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....    |                                                       | 33 |
| 2.1                                   | Introduction.....                                     | 33 |
| 2.2                                   | Academic writing in higher education.....             | 33 |
| 2.3                                   | Authorial voice .....                                 | 36 |
| 2.3.1                                 | Individual voice .....                                | 36 |
| 2.3.2                                 | Voice as social construct .....                       | 37 |
| 2.4                                   | Textual features which indicate authorial voice ..... | 40 |
| 2.5                                   | Master's dissertation writing .....                   | 41 |
| 2.6                                   | Discussion section of dissertations.....              | 43 |
| 2.7                                   | Voice theory .....                                    | 44 |
| 2.7.1                                 | Applying Ivanič and Camps' Voice Typology .....       | 46 |
| 2.8                                   | Theoretical framework .....                           | 47 |
| 2.9                                   | Conclusion.....                                       | 48 |
| CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ..... |                                                       | 52 |
| 3.1                                   | Introduction.....                                     | 52 |
| 3.2                                   | Research methodology .....                            | 53 |
| 3.2.1                                 | Research paradigm .....                               | 53 |
| 3.2.2                                 | Ontology.....                                         | 56 |
| 3.2.3                                 | Epistemology.....                                     | 56 |
| 3.3                                   | Research approach.....                                | 57 |
| 3.4                                   | Research design.....                                  | 59 |
| 3.4.1                                 | Case study .....                                      | 59 |
| 3.4.2                                 | Sampling.....                                         | 62 |
| 3.5                                   | Data collection .....                                 | 66 |
| 3.5.1                                 | Documents for data analysis.....                      | 67 |
| 3.5.2                                 | Semi-structured interviews.....                       | 68 |
| 3.6                                   | Data analysis.....                                    | 71 |
| 3.6.1                                 | Data organisation.....                                | 71 |
| 3.6.2                                 | Analysis .....                                        | 73 |
| 3.7                                   | Trustworthiness .....                                 | 78 |
| 3.7.1                                 | Credibility .....                                     | 78 |
| 3.7.2                                 | Transferability .....                                 | 79 |
| 3.7.3                                 | Dependability .....                                   | 79 |

|                                                |                                                                |     |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3.7.4                                          | Confirmability.....                                            | 79  |
| 3.8                                            | Crystallisation.....                                           | 80  |
| 3.9                                            | Ethical clearance .....                                        | 81  |
| 3.10                                           | Limitations of the study.....                                  | 82  |
| 3.11                                           | Conclusion.....                                                | 83  |
| CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....        |                                                                | 94  |
| 4.1                                            | Introduction.....                                              | 94  |
| 4.2                                            | Findings of text analysis .....                                | 94  |
| 4.2.1                                          | Ideational positioning .....                                   | 95  |
| 4.2.2                                          | Interpersonal positioning.....                                 | 103 |
| 4.2.3                                          | Textual positioning.....                                       | 105 |
| 4.3                                            | Discussion of findings from text analysis.....                 | 108 |
| 4.3.1                                          | Discussion of findings for ideational macro-function .....     | 108 |
| 4.3.2                                          | Discussion of findings for interpersonal macro-function.....   | 109 |
| 4.3.3                                          | Discussion of findings for textual macro-functions .....       | 111 |
| 4.4                                            | Findings of semi-structured interviews thematic analysis ..... | 112 |
| 4.4.1                                          | Your dissertation.....                                         | 112 |
| 4.4.2                                          | Academic community support.....                                | 115 |
| 4.4.3                                          | Academic writing .....                                         | 118 |
| 4.4.4                                          | Authorial voice .....                                          | 120 |
| 4.5                                            | Discussion of findings for semi-structured interviews.....     | 124 |
| 4.5.1                                          | Your dissertation.....                                         | 124 |
| 4.5.2                                          | Academic community support.....                                | 126 |
| 4.5.3                                          | Academic writing .....                                         | 128 |
| 4.5.4                                          | Authorial voice .....                                          | 132 |
| 4.6                                            | Synthesis of interpretations .....                             | 134 |
| 4.7                                            | Conclusion.....                                                | 137 |
| CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... |                                                                | 138 |
| 5.1                                            | Introduction.....                                              | 138 |
| 5.2                                            | Implications of findings .....                                 | 139 |
| 5.2.1                                          | Factors that aid voice development .....                       | 139 |
| 5.2.2                                          | Factors that hamper voice development.....                     | 139 |
| 5.3                                            | Significance of study.....                                     | 141 |
| 5.4                                            | Limitations .....                                              | 143 |
| 5.5                                            | Recommendations for further research .....                     | 144 |
| 5.6                                            | Conclusion.....                                                | 145 |

|                                                              |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 5.7 Reflections.....                                         | 145        |
| <b>LIST OF REFERENCES .....</b>                              | <b>147</b> |
| ADDENDA.....                                                 | 158        |
| Addendum A: Request for permission to conduct research ..... | 158        |
| Addendum B: Approval by Ethics Committee.....                | 160        |
| Addendum C: Letter of informed consent.....                  | 161        |
| Addendum D: Semi-structured interview schedule .....         | 163        |
| Addendum E: Data organisation for text analysis .....        | 165        |
| Addendum F: Initial coding for thematic analysis.....        | 166        |

## LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure     | Title                                                                    | Page |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Figure 2.1 | Writer identities in text (Ivanič, 1998)                                 | 38   |
| Figure 3.1 | Concept map for research design                                          | 73   |
| Figure 3.2 | A streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry              | 74   |
| Figure 3.3 | Themes and subthemes for thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews | 77   |
| Figure 4.1 | Levels of authorial presence (Tang & John, 1999, p. 29)                  | 110  |

## LIST OF TABLES

| Table     | Title                                                                          | Page |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Table 2.1 | Ivanič and Camps' Voice Typology                                               | 46   |
| Table 3.1 | Description of selected master's dissertations                                 | 65   |
| Table 3.2 | List of interview participants                                                 | 65   |
| Table 3.3 | Summary of research phases, sub-questions, objectives and data collection sets | 66   |
| Table 3.4 | Authorial voice types based on Ivanič & Camps' (2001) Voice Typology           | 76   |
| Table 4.1 | Ideational macro-function                                                      | 95   |
| Table 4.2 | Generic references                                                             | 98   |
| Table 4.3 | Interpersonal positioning                                                      | 103  |
| Table 4.4 | Textual positioning                                                            | 106  |
| Table 4.5 | Your dissertation                                                              | 113  |
| Table 4.6 | Academic community support                                                     | 115  |
| Table 4.7 | Academic writing                                                               | 118  |
| Table 4.8 | Authorial voice                                                                | 121  |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*“And I knew exactly what to do. But in a much more real sense, I had no idea what to do.”* (Lieberman & Blitz, 2009).

### 1.1 Introduction

Dissertation writing is a challenging endeavour at master’s level. It involves the integration of different areas of skills and knowledge: choice of a specific genre, content knowledge of the subject, rhetoric, academic writing skills, accurate research skills as well as logical reasoning to explain and support the writer’s position (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006). The writing of a master’s dissertation involves the fundamental skills of analysis, interpretation, and argumentation. For these reasons, this genre lends itself well to an analysis of authorial identity.

Centred on the proposition that it is essential to construct a suitable authorial voice for access to any academic community, I explored how students established their authorial voice in master’s dissertations by analysing the discussion sections of selected master’s dissertations and by conducting semi-structured interviews with the authors of these master’s dissertations. After an analysis of the interviews, I included some pedagogical implications for master’s dissertation writing, with suggestions for both students and supervisors on how master’s students could understand and acquire authorial voice.

### 1.2 Problem statement

When I began studying towards a master’s degree eighteen years after my second degree, I had to relearn not just how to be a student again, but also how to be a master’s student specifically. Although English is my home language, I was unsure about how to write academically correctly. After an intensive two-week programme on the rudiments of master’s post-graduate study and an intensive year-long writing foray into the mandatory postgraduate modules, the most bewildering but significant feedback I received was that I lacked an authorial voice. This lack in my writing seemingly prevented me from acquiring credibility, although the mechanics of academic writing were in place. Interestingly though, there was no mention made of and no guidance on authorial voice, critical voice or identity in writing, in the mandatory, two-week postgraduate programme at the beginning of my studies. In addition, with the exception of one academic supervisor, none of the other four experienced academic

supervisors raised the issue about authorial voice. For these reasons, my academic journey focussed on the nature of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing.

As a teacher and researcher, I am aware of the concepts of "critical" and "voice." However, as a novice researcher and student I believed that I did not have any academic authority to critique researched phenomena, and the writing of expert researchers and academics, which is what I understood having an authorial voice entailed. My inner critical voice constantly whispered to me that I ran the risk of seeming foolish should I express my perceptions about the work of published and eminent scholars.

I wondered if I was the only master's student who was struggling to understand and use an authorial voice. Interestingly, I discovered that many master's students did not quite understand the concept of authorial voice and could not recognise, explain or sometimes consciously create this complex construct. Worryingly, some master's supervisors may find this phenomenon challenging to explain and exemplify to their students. After having done research on authorial voice, I was convinced of how important it was for master's students to indicate their identity through authorial voice in dissertation writing. However, I was equally convinced that many master's students struggled with understanding and acquiring an authorial voice, although there may have been evidence of authorial voice in their master's dissertations.

Having an authorial voice indicates critical thinking and creativity; two important qualities that are paramount for successful, highly-skilled professionals, whom is what we expect master's students to become. Additionally, those master's students who decide to remain in academia are supposed to continue studying towards a doctoral degree. They may be the future academics tasked with mentoring and training future student cohorts for, among other goals, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to "be problem solvers, to be adaptable, and to be able to express themselves in both the written and spoken word" (Butler-Adam, 2018, p. 1). It seems that master's students are expected to acquire an authorial voice somewhat osmotically. Implicitly, the more one reads and writes academically, the better one acquires an authorial voice and the stronger it supposedly becomes. However, while theory promises that greater immersion in our disciplines should result in a stronger authorial voice, this is not necessarily true (Thesen, 2013), especially for master's students who may still be novices in their academic journey.

A master's student must join an academic community and become an expert in a field of study; for this reason, there must be a more scientific, academic approach to understanding and acquiring an authorial voice. According to Clark and Ivanič (2001), writers consciously make specific linguistic choices to belong to specific social groups; these choices constitute a type

of authorial voice. Consequently, readers who share the same socio-cultural context recognise these linguistic choices as authorial voice.

My lack of understanding of this elusive, complex phenomenon of authorial voice drove my interest in this topic because anecdotal evidence suggested that many master's students struggled with understanding and acquiring an authorial voice.

For this study, I examined authorial voice in master's dissertation writing based on the theoretical perspective of the Academic Literacy Studies that regard literacy as a social practice instead of an individual product (Lea & Street, 1998; Clark & Ivanič, 2001; Clark & Ivanič, 2013). The context for this study is significant in understanding that authorial voice is a necessary construct in master's dissertation writing.

### **1.3 Background and context**

There is a worldwide massification of graduate education that is the direct result of the growing demand for postgraduate education and highly-qualified graduates. Some of the factors that drive postgraduate education are research skill development and professional development. Furthermore, it is clear that employers, in general, want graduates who not only have technical skills, but who also have a “good ability to analyse and think through complexity, a useful level of English language skills, and a well-rounded ability to think independently and take initiative” (The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000, p. 85). One of the vital skills that all graduates need in the 21st century is knowledge reconfiguration (Gibbons, 1998; Andrews, 2015; Butler-Adam, 2018). Graduates, especially postgraduates, must not only be able to access knowledge and be experts in their respective fields, but they must also be able to adapt their knowledge and expertise, and market them. To be able to practise knowledge reconfiguration, graduates must be critical thinkers. Critical thinking may be exhibited through the development of authorial voice in postgraduate writing. The presence of authorial voice in postgraduate writing would indicate that the student is capable of synthesising information from various sources to present a firm argument. For these reasons, a strong authorial voice in master's dissertation writing is a necessary development.

South Africa's 2030 National Development Plan proposes that by 2030, there should be more than 100 doctoral graduates for every million of the South African population (South African Government, 2012). The number of doctoral graduates per year would have to grow from 1 879 per annum in 2012 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2016) to approximately 5 000 per annum in 2030. There is a general recognition that the South African higher

education system is suffering a low and slow output of postgraduates (Department of Higher Education, 2014) with a very high attrition rate (Van der Bank & Nkadimeng, 2014).

As a result, the Department of Higher Education and Training and other higher education institutions are actively encouraging students to pursue postgraduate education (Dell, 2010), and more importantly, to complete their postgraduate studies within the minimum number of years. While there has been a significant increase in the number of postgraduates in South Africa since 2000 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2016), there is a general consensus that one of the reasons for the low graduate throughput rate is that graduate students may encounter difficulties in conducting research and writing master's dissertations and PhD theses (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Vivian & Fourie, 2016).

It is a possibility that one of the causes of difficulty in master's dissertation writing may be due to the lack of development of academic writing skills. One of the reasons for the possible decline in the quality of postgraduate studies (Dell, 2010; Butler, 2011; Andrews, 2015) specifically in master's dissertation writing, is the problem that a substantial number of graduate students experience with academic writing (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Archer, 2010; Sibomana, 2016). Ivanič (1998, p. 33) observes that "[w]hen people enter what is for them a new social context such as higher education, they are likely to find that its discourses and practices support identities and practices which differ from those that they bring with them". This observation supports and extends the idea of master's students' sometimes bewildering experience of academic writing and, specifically, in understanding and using an authorial voice. Both L1 and L2 postgraduate students experience academic writing difficulties in varying degrees at word, sentence and paragraph levels in the following areas: spelling, lexical choice, punctuation, the use of appropriate and correct grammar, the development and sequencing of coherent and logical ideas, and the use of logical connectors for making transitions, among other writing challenges (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Butler, 2011, Andrews, 2015; Geng & Wharton, 2017). Consequently, these academic writing challenges tend to affect the postgraduate students' understanding and use of authorial voice in thesis and dissertation writing (Clark & Ivanič, 2001; Cameron, Nairn, & Higgins, 2009; Guinda & Hyland, 2012; Allison, 2018) because academic writing is not just a skill that is practised. Instead, it is a practice of literacy where writers consciously and critically think of their writing, and how it develops them as social subjects (Clark & Ivanič, 2001).

Globally, English has become the dominant language for the writing of dissertations and theses (Hyland, 2013), a practice which is also prevalent in South African public universities where English is the language of teaching and learning (Albertyn, Kapp, & Bitzer, 2008; Butler, 2011; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020). A growing number of South

African master's students are second language speakers of English, who experience several challenges with the academic writing required for dissertation writing (Albertyn, Kapp, & Bitzer, 2008; Archer, 2010; Butler, 2011; Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013; Thesen, 2013; Sibomana, 2016; Allison, 2018). Unsurprisingly, the quality of research and writing is impacted. According to Butler (2011), postgraduate students who have academic literacy problems take longer to finish their degrees; furthermore, their supervisors spend valuable time on editing and structuring their work, instead of concentrating on the content of their writing and helping students with more complex skills like understanding the research field and using an authorial voice.

Due to the pressure that South African higher education institutions (HEI) are experiencing to meet the increased NDP quota of postgraduates, they are driven to increase postgraduate research output for the benefit of larger government subsidies that incentivise research output. Also, every academic is expected to publish at least 1, 25 articles per year (Schulze, 2008) to improve research output. For these reasons, postgraduate students must be guided not only to generate more research that is of significance, but also to produce research of higher quality with the writer's "voice appearing in the text, that you take a stand on the literature having critically evaluated existing scholarly claims" (Jansen, 2011, p. 143). While the number of postgraduate students in the HEI system continues to grow, areas such as teaching methods, supervision capacity, assessment and academic critical reading and writing (Carrol, 2015) are impacted due to this influx. As a result, a more complex and necessary skill such as the use of an authorial voice to indicate desired critical thinking may be compromised (Vivian & Fourie, 2016). Cameron, Nairn and Higgins (2009, p. 269) state that novice academic writers struggle with both the technical skills of academic writing which "tend to be ignored, assumed, and/or learned by trial and error in the training to become an academic" as well as with the "challenging process of developing a sense of self as an academic writer". In South Africa, there is no formal period of training in academic writing and practice after the completion of an undergraduate degree through which students come to understand and practise academic writing skills, let alone acquire an authorial voice. While it may be argued that students are taught academic writing at the very beginning of their undergraduate study and possibly in an honours course before they become eligible to register for a master's degree, there is little evidence of how these courses actually prepare students to use the correct academic English and, more specifically, acquire an understanding and command of writing with authorial voice.

Additionally, it is possible that undergraduate degrees do not equip students for postgraduate success as creativity and critical thinking may be stifled due to an emphasis on linear thinking in undergraduate coursework (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Butler, 2011; Andrews, 2015). For this reason, it may be difficult for master's students to demonstrate independent, critical

and creative thinking (Cassim, 2011), which may be illustrated by authorial voice in master's dissertation writing.

The term “academic writing” describes the writing used by students and researchers in higher education institutions to engage in the practices of learning, assessment and knowledge-making. A large number of South African graduates who are second and third language speakers of English have to study and write their dissertations in academic English. Besides the help that they may need in the design of and research for their dissertations, they may also need help in writing their dissertations in academic English. The question that arises is: if master's students have difficulty in acquiring a basic proficiency in academic English, would it not be expected that the higher-order skills of expressing critical thinking and authorial voice in written English be considerably more difficult. The aim of postgraduate research and writing is to produce independent researchers who are skilled critical thinkers (Davies & Bartlett, 2015), at the heart of which is argumentation (Andrews, 2015) that marks the transition to an independent researcher. Argumentation may be evidenced through authorial voice in an academic text. If this voice is absent, there is no evidence that the student has mastered this aim.

Another challenge that students may face in creating an academic identity and developing their authorial voice is the impersonal writing style that many academic departments may demand (Hyland, 2002b). In order to show an objective opinion, student writers are taught to eradicate signs of themselves, the academic writers, in their academic writing in some academic English classes. However, any writing cannot be completely objective as the academic writer unknowingly brings understanding, experiences, personality and other voices to the writing, all which demonstrate authorial voice (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Elbow, 2007; Hyland, 2013).

Much of the literature on authorial voice is based on PhD writing. Little research on authorial voice has been done at master's dissertation writing level. If a master's student is supposed to show scholarship of academic learning, there should be considerable evidence of authorial voice, even though it is generally not a requirement for a master's dissertation to contain new knowledge. According to Swales and Feak (2012, p. 1), the success of a text is determined by the writer's identity as the writer needs a “credible image as a competent member of [their] chosen discipline”. For these reasons, it is necessary that academic writers be taught how to develop and use an authorial voice (Cadman, 1994; Ivanič, 1998; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2002a; Guinda & Hyland, 2012; Nelson & Castelló, 2012; Andrews, 2015; Canagarajah, 2015; Matsuda, 2015; Allison, 2018; Zhang & Zhan, 2020).

## 1.4 Focus and purpose

The emphasis in this study was on understanding how authorial voice was constructed in selected master's dissertations in education. With this study I not only provided insight into the construction of authorial voice in dissertation writing, but I also specifically explored how master's students constructed types of authorial voice in dissertation writing, a topic which has received little attention.

### 1.4.1 Research objectives (RO)

RO1: To explore master's students' understanding of authorial voice.

RO2: To determine some strategies that master's students used to indicate authorial voice in their dissertations.

RO3: To describe the guidance that master's students may have received in developing authorial voice in their dissertations.

### 1.4.2 Research questions

The research question (RQ) for this study was:

**How is authorial voice constructed in selected master's theses in education?**

This study was also directed by the following sub-research questions (SRQ):

SRQ1: How do master's students understand the concept of authorial voice?

SRQ2: What strategies do master's students use to develop their own types of authorial voice?

SRQ3: What guidance is available to help master's students develop their authorial voice?

## 1.5 Overview of literature review

This overview of the literature review consists of the following sections: an introduction, a discussion of academic writing for postgraduate study, an explanation of authorial voice, a discussion of some features that may indicate the presence of authorial voice in academic writing, an examination of dissertation writing at master's level, and an explanation of the discussion section of a master's dissertation.

### 1.5.1 Academic writing

The term “academic writing” refers to writing that is created in and for “the academy” (Nelson & Castelló, 2012, p. 33). Academic writing embraces the writing that academics produce in their academic communities in creating new knowledge, and the writing forms and conventions that students must learn and adopt to enter their disciplinary fields. The type of writing for students who want to join an academic fraternity may take the form of a dissertation, thesis, research article, etc., which is completed in fulfilment of a requirement of an academic institution or publication. According to Hyland (2013), an academic writer understands and recognises that a particular discourse is necessary in writing a text for any academic field in order to represent that field accurately. More relevantly, Irvin (2010, p. 8) states that “[a]cademic writing is always a form of evaluation that asks you to demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency with certain disciplinary skills in thinking, interpreting, and presenting”. Irvin (2010, p. 10) also describes academic writing as a “complex literary task” that has two significant characteristics. Firstly, it is the presentation of a logical argument that consists of strong evidence to justify the writer’s stance. Secondly, academic writing is the analytic interpretation of a perspective, where there is strong emphasis on the “how and why questions” instead of the “what questions”.

### 1.5.2 Authorial voice

Voice is an ancient and controversial concept. However, despite continued interest in and debate on voice in writing, and its expansive use to indicate “authors’ writing styles, authorship, language registers, rhetorical stance, written and spoken prosody, the self in the text, and scores of others” (Sperling & Appleman, 2011, p. 70), there is still no consensus on a standard definition of voice. However, according to Bakhtin in Clark and Ivanič (2001), voice which represents the writer’s culture and history is evident in any written text. While master’s dissertations may reflect evidence of authorial voice, research indicates that postgraduate writers find the concept of authorial voice challenging (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Andrews, 2015; Geng & Wharton, 2017; Allison, 2018). Consequently, it is necessary to learn whether master’s writers understand the concept of authorial voice in texts; whether they consciously create authorial voice by adopting and adapting certain academic linguistic devices; and, whether they have guidance on how to create authorial voice in their texts.

Traditionally, the term “having a voice” suggests, “having the authority to speak or wield influence” (Elbow, 2007). It was also Elbow (1981) who initially emphasised the concept of “individualised voice” with “[i]n your natural way of producing words there is sound, a texture, a rhythm – a voice – which is the main source of power in your writing”. However, the idea of

an individualistic voice has been debated and, consequently, the concept of voice has become more multifaceted over the last four decades. With the burgeoning of social constructivism, the emphasis on individual voice began to decline.

In 2001, voice was again popularised in a special publication of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* edited by Alan Hirvela and Diane Belcher (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001). Currently, the concept may indicate a multiplicity of voices as well as an authorial identity (Ivanič, 1998; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001). Ivanič's (2005) idea of writer identity and self-representation parallels the concept of authorial voice used by other researchers. She suggests that authorial voice is "the strength with which the writer comes over as the author of the text". According to Hyland (2002a), the manner in which writers evaluate and take a "stance" may be regarded as authorial presence; similarly, Bowden (1995) posits that an authorial voice is "style, persona and stance". Hirvela and Belcher's (2001) discussion of "situational voice" emphasises how writers may assume different voices for different writing contexts. For Bakhtin (1986, p. 88),

...any word exists in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an other's word which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and finally, as my word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression.

While the debate rages on about the different dimensions of voice, there is more consensus that voice has both individual and social dimensions, which is the basis of the argument in this study on authorial voice.

Research indicates that challenges in understanding and creating authorial voice are common to most English writers (Raimes & Zamel, 1997; Butler, 2011; Andrews, 2015; Allison, 2018). Many research studies on authorial voice have concentrated on students who are second language (L2) writers of English who, seemingly, lack and struggle to adopt an individualised voice in academic writing (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Atkinson, 1997; Wu & Rubin, 2000; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Butler, 2011; (Petrić, 2012; Geng & Wharton, 2017; Allison, 2018). Some researchers indicate that L2 writers may struggle with voice in writing because certain social practices in their culture inhibit their use of voice (Cadman, 1994; Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; ). However, while there is an assumption that L1 writers use voice effectively in writing, there is also evidence that first language English writers could have problems in acquiring and using authorial voice (Raimes & Zamel, 1997). Therefore, it seems that authorial voice is a challenging concept for most writers, irrespective of the degree of their command of English. Other researchers argue that academic writing is

not significantly affected by voice (Stapleton, 2002; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003). For these reasons, it is thought necessary that all master's students be taught how to develop and use an authorial voice (Cadman, 1994; Ivanič, 1998; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2002a; Guinda & Hyland, 2012; Allison, 2018).

According to Guerin (2012) and Bowden (1995), developing an authorial voice is a major challenge for postgraduate students. An authorial voice does not appear overnight – it develops over time after much reading and writing. The concept of authorial voice may be confusing for most postgraduate writers due to certain factors: there are different and various definitions of the concept; the student may experience a lack of academic writing skills for postgraduate study; there may be a lack of guidance about what authorial voice is; reading for and writing a master's dissertation in English, which is not the student's mother tongue; the authorial voice of postgraduate writers may be prescribed by their academic institutions and departments, among others.

### **1.5.3 Textual features which indicate authorial voice**

Authorial voice may be evident through language use in academic texts. The textual cues in the academic text allow the reader to infer authorial voice through the specific context and, consequently, a relationship is created between the writer and the reader (Nelson & Castelló, 2012). While a writer may consciously strive to create a certain type of authorial voice through specific language use and style, this voice can only be realised through the reader's perception. Tardy and Matsuda (2009) state that the inference of an authorial voice in a text is prompted by a negotiation between the writer and reader, which occurs differently for different readers. The audience, context and community must be considered so that the writer produces writing that is authorial and authentic.

Research indicates that definite textual features may indicate a lack or presence of authorial voice in advanced academic writing, where one of the main criteria for successfully completing a dissertation and joining the academic community is the demonstration of an obvious authorial voice (Olivier & Carstens, 2018). Some indications of a lack of authorial voice may be indicated by the use of plagiarism (Howard, 1995; Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006), patch writing (Howard, 1995), excessive use of direct quotations (Petrić, 2012) and a lack of critical thought and argument (Thompson, 2005).

On the other hand, the presence of authorial voice may be indicated through significant features in writing. A textual feature most associated with identifying authorial voice is the use of the first person (Ivanič, 1998; Hyland, 2002a). Hyland (1999) emphasises that the use of the first person indicates a visible author presence and stance; in this way, the reader accepts

the claims made in the text. According to Ivanič (1998), if there is no use of the first person, it seems as if the writer is not taking responsibility for the writing.

Another research study that examined the relationship between authorial voice and the quality of academic writing is that of Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003). Their study explored the association between the structures related to L1 voice and the quality of English second language (L2) academic writing by applying their widely used Voice Intensity Rating Scale to undergraduate L2 argumentative essays. This scale measures four components of authorial voice: assertiveness (the use of hedges and intensifiers); self-identification (the rate of first person pronoun use and active voice); repetition of the main idea; and authorial presence and independent thought. While their study offers empirical evidence on the significance of authorial voice in ESL academic writing, Helms-Park and Stapleton's (2003) scale has been challenged because it only represents voice as a personal construct (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). They did not establish a relationship between the author's voice and the quality of the text (Allison, 2018). However, the same voice intensity rating scale was applied by Zhao and Llosa (2008) and Matsuda and Tardy (2007) to both high- and low-rated ESL texts, where a significant relationship was apparent between high-quality writing and the intensity of voice.

Based on a social constructivist stance, authorial voice in academic writing is regarded as a personal representation as well as the writer's interaction with the reader.

#### **1.5.4 Master's dissertation writing**

In this study, I focused on the dissertation writing of master's students. In the South African university system, a master's degree may be studied after a student has acquired both an undergraduate degree and an honours degree with a +60% average. For the successful completion of a master's degree, a student who is guided by one or two supervisors must successfully write a complete dissertation for examination within two years.

A master's degree dissertation is a more advanced research study than an honours degree in which a student must indicate the qualities of technical proficiency; proof of academic research; the ability to identify, analyse and solve problems coherently and logically; and, a grasp of relevant theoretical matters. Without question, the levels of academic language skills, analysis, interpretation and logical reasoning are expected to be significantly more advanced than writing for an honours degree. In fact, it is expected that the master's student will present a similar level of academic writing and critical ability as that of the research material that must be read for the study. Although the master's dissertation is not required to be a contribution of unique ideas to the field of study (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014), as is the case for a doctoral study, it is a demonstration of critical thinking. Significantly, the

master's dissertation is a text that is produced within a specific discipline, in which the writer's application of the relevant field knowledge and disciplinary voice allows the writer membership to that discipline.

The guidelines on the requirements for master's degrees in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014), clearly indicate that the purpose of a master's degree is "to educate and train researchers who can contribute to the development of knowledge at an advanced level". A perusal of a few South African universities' postgraduate handbooks on postgraduate assessment criteria confirms that critical thinking is one of the key assessment criteria for master's theses: "has applied skills of critical analysis and evaluation to the results of the research"(University of Pretoria, 2012) and "shows evidence of critical and independent thought" (University of Cape Town, 2014). Significantly, the South African Qualifications Authority (2013, p. 75) states the following as part of the conditions for the successful achievement of a master's degree in South Africa:

Master's graduates must be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, design and critically appraise analytical writing, make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences, demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks  
...

It is evident that critical thinking in writing is key in a successful master's dissertation. One of the significant indicators of critical thinking in writing is the presence of an authorial voice as argued above.

### **1.5.5 Discussion section of dissertations**

The discussion section in a dissertation is considered the heart of the text and requires much thought and work. It is in this section of the dissertation that the interpretation and significance of the findings are presented. According to Basturkmen (2009), the expectations for an effective discussion section are that "outstanding work would be insightful and stimulating, place the work in context, draw out the study's importance, significance and implications and identify new questions or next steps". The writing of the discussion section of a dissertation may be regarded as a challenging task not only because of the merging of the literature review content, the methodology and the outcomes of the study (Basturkmen, 2009), but also because of the evaluation involved. Hunston and Thompson (2001) list three functions of evaluation as being, firstly, an expression of the writer's opinion that indicates the writer's

value system and community; secondly, a relationship between the writer and reader is created and maintained and, lastly, discourse can be arranged by evaluation. Evaluation requires critical thinking and argumentation, which may be regarded as the writer expressing identity through the use of an authorial voice.

Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) report that writers have several problems with the discussion section of the dissertation. Besides the difficulties experienced at sentence and paragraph levels, other significant difficulties include writers not being able to structure arguments consistently. Not only were writers unsure about the type of content that is needed in the discussion section, but they were also unsure about the intended audience. Additionally, it was found that postgraduate students struggle with the structure of arguments supported by evidence, and with the examination and analyses of models, concepts and research approaches. Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995) imply that it is through an authorial voice that students display critical thinking skills. As a result of there being a need for a significant use of authorial voice in the discussion section, this section was selected from the dissertations for the analysis of textual features that writers may use to indicate authorial voice, relative to their specific disciplines.

## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

This research study has drawn from the Academic Literacies Theory that evolved from New Literacies Studies (Street, 1984) over the past few decades, in response to a “deficit model” of student writing (Lillis & Scott, 2007). With the increase in culturally and linguistically diverse student numbers in HEIs, there is much debate on the lowering standards of higher education. Specifically, the reading and writing abilities of students in higher education symbolise these reduced standards. As a result, language and literacy only become focal areas when they are regarded as problems to be solved through remediation and additional support (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Archer, 2010; Butler, 2011). The emphasis of this study was on the investigation of authorial voice in master’s dissertation writing, where voice is regarded as a challenging concept for most students.

The Academic Literacies Theory has drawn on fields such as new literacy studies, linguistics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Significantly, for this study, the Academic Literacies Theory regards academic writing as a practice conducted within a specific community, rather than just the acquisition of specific cognitive skills that can be mechanically applied to any context (Lea & Street, 1998; Lea, 2004). According to Lea and Street (1998, p. 157), the Academic Literacies Framework is better able to accommodate the complex nature

of student writing, especially with regard to “issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within, diverse student writing practices across the university”.

The focus that the Academic Literacies Theory has placed on concepts like identity, power relations and knowledge construction in academic writing, has direct reference to the focus of this study where authorial voice is regarded not only as a personal construct, but also as a social process. The social nature of academic writing entails various kinds of collaboration such as the use and appropriation of research material that is customary in academic writing, co-authorship, writing supervision from advisors and assessor feedback (Nelson & Castelló, 2012). The Academic Literacies Theory does not regard student writing and learning as surface skills; instead, the Academic Literacies Theory regards student writing as encompassing several communicative practices that differ from one context to the other. The use of authorial voice is not only an individualistic practice (Elbow, 1981); it is a process and social practice that is determined by writers’ histories, motivation, purposes and opinions. It will vary according to situation, purpose and audience. For these reasons, the Academic Literacies Theory guided the data collection strategies for this research study and contributed towards answering the research question on how authorial voice was constructed in selected master’s dissertations in a specific department at a South African HEI.

## **1.7 Research methodology**

In this section, I focus on the research methodology that underpinned this study to achieve the research objective: to explore how master’s students understand and use authorial voice in dissertation writing. An interpretivist-constructivist research paradigm was chosen because the researcher’s interpretation of the phenomenon of authorial voice as reflected in the reality of master’s writers’ practice, perceptions and understanding of authorial voice was explored in this study. The research in this study explored the reality on authorial voice that was reflected in the subjective experiences, perceptions and understanding of the participants and the researcher.

The constructivist worldview focuses on interpreting and explaining reality within a social context (Creswell, 2009). This research study explored the reality indicated through the personal understanding, insights and observations of master’s writers as participants in the construct of authorial voice.

A qualitative approach, which focuses on the interpretation and description of the reality of participants in natural settings (Creswell, 2013), underpinned this study. Hence, an exploration

of authorial voice ensued through the understanding of the personal, subjective experiences of master's writers.

A single case study shaped the research design, as it was my intention to gain a nuanced, deep insight into master's dissertation writers' understanding and perceptions of authorial voice during a limited period.

### **1.7.1 Research paradigm**

It is necessary and valuable to position educational research within a paradigm. Mertens (2015, p. 2) states that the reason for research is "to understand, describe, predict or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower individuals". Social research becomes more worthwhile and scholarly if researchers understand and use worldviews or lenses to evaluate aspects such as being (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and ethics (axiology) in their studies (Bitzer, 2013). Babbie (2010) defines a paradigm as a "model or frame of reference through which to observe and understand" phenomena. Paradigms are useful when they inform how data are interpreted and how theoretical frameworks are constructed. However, according to Plowright (2011), paradigms should not determine or dictate research questions; instead, research questions should direct research.

With this social research study, I sought to understand the nature of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing and the writers' understanding and use of authorial voice; therefore, it is situated within an interpretive paradigm. Studies that are situated in an interpretive paradigm are usually inductive, and focus on investigating experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2013). Interpretivism is based on the premise that multiple realities exist; for this reason, interpretivist researchers must conduct their research in natural settings to achieve the most accurate understanding of the phenomena being explored. Explanatory research, which is a category of social research, provides a clarification of a social phenomenon (Walters, 2013). In this interpretive study, I endeavoured to examine the key phenomenon of the study, authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. The study did not and cannot determine a single ultimate truth about authorial voice, hence the choice of the interpretivist paradigm that allows for multiple realities and experiences of authorial voice. A significant factor of the interpretivist approach for this study was that reality could be accessed through social constructs such as language and shared meaning (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a), which is exactly the nature of a master's dissertation. This study was placed firmly within the interpretivist paradigm because socially-constructed knowledge would be gained from the investigation. Specifically, the interpretivist paradigm would allow a close interaction with the participants to understand how authorial voice was understood and used by the writers of selected master's dissertations.

A socio-constructivist lens was used to examine authorial voice in this study. Constructivism has its roots in cognitive and developmental psychology, which emphasises that meaning is derived from varied thinking about experiences. The main proponents of constructivism were Ernst von Glasersfeld, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. Constructivism promotes social and communication skills based on collaboration and exchange of ideas. The engagement between the researcher (the “would-be-knower”) and the participant (the “knower”) (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 131) forms the epistemology of constructivism. Learning occurs actively through experience and reflection; learning is not a passive, mechanical exercise. The student’s thinking is grounded in the perception of physical and social experiences, which is in accordance with the socio-constructivist approach to conducting research.

The theoretical perspective that emphasises writing as a social phenomenon is referred to as socio-constructivism. The 1970s to the 1990s was an important period in the evolution of authorial voice theory. The notion of voice emerged and influenced the models and practices of academic writing; consequently, the nature of writing began to be regarded as inherently social and interactive. Matsuda (2001, p. 401) defines voice as social constructivist because of “the use of discourse and non-discourse features that language users choose, deliberate or otherwise, from socially available yet ever changing repertoires”. Vygotsky’s socio-constructivist learning theories are significant for this study because the development and use of an authorial voice for master’s dissertation writing (the learning process for the writing process) is mediated through interaction with other students, supervisors, the institution, and research material, and based on the student’s context. Not only must a master’s student actively work towards constructing an authorial voice in the dissertation through engagement with these different parties, the student must also consciously construct an authorial voice which represents the link between existing knowledge and new knowledge.

The quality of the connection between the researcher and the phenomenon under study is the epistemology. With regard to an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher is directly involved with the phenomenon that is explored. Not only is the researcher’s relationship with the participants subjective, but the evidence from the participants is also subjective as they express their own opinions on the research phenomenon. Both the researcher and participants’ experiences are always foregrounded in a qualitative study.

### **1.7.2 Research approach**

I chose a qualitative research approach for this study because it is an exploration and understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2009), authorial voice in dissertation writing. According to Ivankova, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), the research questions are

general, with the focus being on understanding the participants' experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. A qualitative research approach is also suitable because it supports a comprehension and analysis of meaning as well as the intentions that underpin human interaction. It is through interpretation, a significant factor in qualitative research, that a deeper understanding of the use of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing is acquired.

The research questions that underpin the study demonstrate the need for inductive exploration, discovery and understanding that are the emphases of qualitative research. Through a qualitative research investigation, the exploration of the multiple realities of how master's students understand and create authorial voice in dissertation writing is allowed and the participants' realities can be shared and understood holistically (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kowal & O'Connell, 2013; Mertens, 2015).

A qualitative approach allowed authorial voice to be studied in a naturalistic setting. A study using qualitative (or non-numerical) data is concerned with non-statistical methods and small samples of participants who have most experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2009). In this study, a small, convenience sampling of documents and participants were made based on their belonging to a particular academic community, in this case, a selection of master's dissertations and the writers of the selected dissertations.

### **1.7.3 Research design**

A significant qualitative research design that assists in choosing applicable methods for data collection is a case study. Suitably for this interpretivist view, a case study design facilitates the understanding of how participants make meaning of the concept being examined (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b, p. 75). The case study design was appropriate for this qualitative study that provides a detailed account of a handful of cases. One of the significant strengths of the case study method, especially for data generation, is that many sources and techniques may be used, which include observations, field notes and interviews (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), the case study design may be suitable for the following situations: when "how" and "why" questions underpin the study; when the behaviour of the participants in the study cannot be manipulated; and, when the contextual conditions that are relevant to the phenomenon under study must also be examined for the study. Additionally, the case study design helps a researcher to gain a better understanding of the social issues under investigation. The case study approach is relevant to this study because there was close collaboration between the writers of the selected dissertations and me, where these participants shared their thoughts and feelings based on the interview questions about their perceptions and use of authorial voice. As a result, I was better able to understand the

participants' reality of their use and understanding of authorial voice. Another strength of the case study design is its use for understanding complex phenomena, as in the case of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. I chose a single, instrumental, bounded case study to understand the complex phenomenon of authorial voice in master's dissertations.

## **1.8 Data collection**

### **1.8.1 Sample**

The sampling for this study was both purposeful and convenient. Two samples, one of selected master's dissertations and the second of master's writers as interview participants, were purposefully selected based on particular traits for this study to "provide the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b, p. 79). Only master's dissertations were chosen for examination, as the purpose of the research study was the examination of authorial voice in the discussion section of master's dissertations. In addition, this was a convenience sample as I was a student in the specific academic department at an institution of higher education where the dissertations were easily accessed from the relevant HEI's repository.

### **1.8.2 Documents for data analysis**

Qualitative studies often use document analysis as data collection methods (Creswell, 2009). This data collection method is consistent with a case study research design. Documents are tangible materials in which facts or ideas have been recorded. The first sample set comprised of 11 master's dissertations that were selected from an academic department at an HEI based on the following inclusion criteria. Firstly, the master's dissertations were published in 2018 and 2019. These were the most recent dissertations in this department at the time of planning this study. Next, the dissertations were easily sourced from the repository of the HEI due to their availability in the public domain. Thirdly, these studies were published in English.

The specific academic department at the HEI had been chosen for a few reasons. Firstly, it belongs to the same field as this dissertation: education and language studies. Next, this study was done to fulfil the conditions for a master's dissertation in the specific academic department at an institution of higher education. In addition, this department produces dissertations from many fields, so it was likely that there would be differences in the use and understanding of authorial voice in the dissertations from different fields. Lastly, I did have some understanding of academic writing in this department, as I focused on language and education in my earlier degrees and work.

### **1.8.3 Semi-structured interviews**

The second sample set consisted of the writers of the selected dissertations who participated in semi-structured interviews. Although face-to-face interviews had been planned, the COVID-19 pandemic made personal contact impractical. As a result, four master's writers who agreed to be interviewed, engaged in online interviews, based on their availability.

The interview participants were selected based on the following criteria. Firstly, the participants had to be the writers of the selected dissertations. Secondly, the writers were invited to voluntarily participate in the interviews. An additional criterion was that the participant had to be able to respond to the interview questions in English.

In the initial communication with the potential interview participants, the following were provided: a clarification of the objective of the study, the length of time required from each participant, the benefits of the research, the researcher's and supervisor's contact details and an assurance of the confidentiality of all information received, including the fact that participation would remain voluntary and anonymous.

Semi-structured questions were used in hour-long interviews to obtain insight into the master's writers' use of authorial voice in their dissertation writing. This approach contributed towards a richer understanding of the participants' understanding and use of authorial voice from their perspective.

### **1.8.4 Data analysis**

For this process, the collected data were summarised and examined in specific ways so that meanings, patterns and themes could be identified. The collected data were analysed by identifying words and phrases that were organised through themes and sub-themes (Ivankova, Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2007). For this study, data were constructed through the content analysis of the discussion chapters of the master's dissertations and the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

#### **1.8.4.1 Document analysis**

The discussion section of 11 selected dissertations were analysed for authorial voice. These written texts provided abundant data on the concept of authorial voice in dissertation writing. This section of the data analysis involved the application of a framework outlined by Ivanič and Camps (2001) for examining postgraduate writers' authorial voice in the discussion sections of the selected dissertations. Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology (cf. Table 2.1) was created for an analysis of the texts written by six South American graduates who were studying at British HEIs. Significantly, for this socio-constructive study, this broad

framework was based on authorial voice being both personal and social. Ivanič and Camps (2001, p. 21) maintain that this conception of voice includes context as well as authorial agency as “each individual ultimately exercises individual agency to take elements from different voice types and blend them into a unique, heterogeneous voice according to their own interests, motivations, allegiances, and preferences”. As a result, voice is present in some form in all writing and may even change throughout the text.

Ivanič and Camps (2001) posit that the stance that a writer establishes across three macro-functions enables the identification and description of voice. Firstly, voice identification and description may occur based on the writer’s specific thoughts and perspectives of the world, areas that are of particular interest and varied positions on subject matter (ideational). The ideational voice of the writer may be evident through noun phrases, syntax, and types of verbs, among other features. Secondly, voice can be determined in how the writer represents herself with varying levels of confidence (interpersonal), for example, through modality and person reference (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Lastly, voice is apparent through the various techniques that the writer uses to construct and create textual meaning (textual) through the length of noun-phrases, use of syntax, and the use of sentence connectors or linking devices (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Ivanič and Camps’ (2001) Voice Typology also provides groups for the description of a writer’s voice for the identification, definition, and interpretation of the types of authorial voice in a text. It is useful in that it is a convenient conceptualisation of types of academic voice that may help academic writers join a specific disciplinary community.

I applied Ivanič and Camps’ (2001) Voice Typology by identifying the linguistic choices made by the writers of the selected dissertations. Initially, I had planned to use ATLAS.ti, a computer software program, to manage the data, the coding, categorisation, and conceptualisation stages of the analysis. However, I achieved a greater engagement with and understanding of the data by manually working on the data analysis.

#### **1.8.4.2      *Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews***

The second stage of analysis involved a theme-based analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the selected dissertation writers. Creswell’s (2013) seven-step systematic data analysis approach was used to thematically analyse the data gathered from the interviews. The purpose of using interviews in a qualitative study is to observe the world through the eyes of the participants. As a result, rich data are gained that aid in the researcher’s understanding of the writers’ construction of knowledge and social reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). The semi-structured interviews that were conducted for this study helped to define the writers’ social and educational backgrounds, as well as to analyse how these factors may have influenced their dissertation writing and use of authorial voice.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007a), semi-structured interviews are used in research studies to corroborate the data that are gathered through another source. Specifically for this study, the data gathered from the interviews should complement the data gathered from the document analyses of the dissertations. I hoped to gain a deeper perspective of the participants' understanding and development of authorial voice in their discussion section of their dissertations. The selected dissertation writers' understanding of authorial voice was explored through a list of prepared semi-structured questions. A verbatim transcription of the interviews was completed. I read the transcripts of the interviews several times to identify general patterns that emerged. Thereafter, I identified and recorded linguistic structures, such as significant words and phrases, as well as themes and patterns to support my comprehension, analysis and interpretation of the writers' use and understanding of authorial voice (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Data analysed through thematic analysis were categorised in themes and sub-themes, making comparison and contrast possible. An advantage of thematic analysis is that the data can be reduced and simplified. Moreover, thematic analysis allows researchers to structure the qualitative data in a manner in which the research objectives can be accomplished. However, thematic analysis does allow human error, as there is the risk for researchers to misinterpret the data gathered. As a result, false and unreliable conclusions may be made. Measures on how trustworthiness was ensured in this study are addressed in the next section.

## 1.9 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a study is extremely important in any research. In qualitative research where data are interpreted based on the research questions, subjectivity may taint the data analysis. While it is necessary that a qualitative researcher becomes deeply immersed in research in a real-world setting (Patton, 2002), it must be demonstrated that the study is credible. In qualitative research "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2002, p. 14); it is, therefore, the researcher's ability and effort which determines the credibility of a qualitative study. My analysis of the data and subsequent conclusions were subject to the considerations associated with qualitative research. Creswell and Miller (2000) describe the trustworthiness of a study as being the degree of the researcher's accuracy in representing the participants' realities of the social phenomena that are being studied.

To maintain trustworthiness, the following measures recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability were kept in mind. Creswell and Miller (2000) state that the choice of procedures to ensure credibility in a study

is governed by two perspectives: the lens that the researcher chooses to validate the study and the researcher's paradigmatic assumptions. The lens used for this qualitative study is based on the views of the people who conduct, participate in, or read and review the study.

Another technique for controlling bias in a qualitative research study is crystallisation. This study was based on a constructivist paradigm, where the assumption is that knowledge, which is socially constructed, may change depending on the circumstances, resulting in several perceptions of one reality. Hence, crystallisation is necessary because it "provides us with a complex and deeper understanding of the phenomenon" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b, p. 81) and occurs when a researcher is deeply immersed in the data and reflects on the pertinent issues emanating from the data. For this practice, the researcher must offer supporting evidence drawn through various methods, such as documentation, interviews and observations (Merriam, 1998). For this study, a comprehensive literature review, document analysis as well as interviews were used as sources for the crystallisation of the data.

This study was based on a qualitative paradigm where it is assumed that reality is a social construction and that the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon under investigation are different versions of reality. It is important to confirm the accuracy of the representation of the participants' realities. For this reason, member checking was done (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Creswell & Miller, 2010) – an activity which actively involves participants in co-constructing knowledge through the research process, by requesting them to view, comment on, assess and verify the accuracy of the transcriptions after the data collection period. For example, the interview participants were urged to review whether the transcriptions of their interview were a correct representation of their personal experience of authorial voice. Nieuwenhuis (2007c) suggests that these checks be done formally and informally throughout the research study to enhance the credibility of the study.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), a study can be regarded as trustworthy if an audit trail is maintained. For this study, the audit trail comprised of the following procedures. Work in process was shared with two impartial peers, who were engaged in doctoral degrees in language studies and education, for reading and comment. In addition, my supervisor provided critical, objective feedback on all stages of the study. Additionally, the MEd Humanities Education cohort, which comprised of supervisors and postgraduate students, met on a monthly basis for academic support and discussion of individual research studies where critical appraisal was made. Lastly, a professional editor undertook a professional editing of the study and helped to identify any remaining lack of credibility in the study,

Finally, the quality of this study can be further enhanced by striving for a detailed and rich description and a clear presentation. Additionally, the recording of data was conducted meticulously. Nieuwenhuis (2007b) suggests that the researcher keeps anecdotal records consisting of short descriptions of the research process. More detailed, sequential running records of observations that focus on actions and the context, and a structured observation record of predetermined actions or behaviours based on the literature should also be kept. The credibility of this study was increased by my following these record-keeping suggestions.

## **1.10 Ethical clearance**

This study was guided by the prescribed ethical principles of the relevant HEI. The ethical clearance application for this study was made to both the Dean and Head of Department of the specific faculty before any data were gathered. Two important issues must be considered: the informed consent of the interview participants and the protection of the participants from any harm.

An application was submitted requesting permission to interview the writers of the dissertations, since there was no public access to the students' contact details. Once this permission was granted, an ethical clearance application was made for the research study to begin. After the ethical clearance was granted, the writers were contacted, informed about the nature of the study and invited to an interview.

The following guidelines ensured that the participants agreed to be involved in the research study voluntarily, that they understood the main idea of the study as well as the risks and requirements that were involved. The gains that the participants would experience from the study should be greater than any possible risk (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

First, participants were provided with detailed verbal and written information about the purpose of the research study. Next, the risks involved in the study, such as the use of personal time to engage in the interviews, were presented. The participants' names were never used throughout the study and they were only referred to by pseudonyms. The interview participants were notified that they could participate in the study of their own volition and they could leave the study at any point without any prejudice. It was particularly important to protect the human participants in this study by ensuring that all data collection and analysis remained confidential. Confidentiality throughout the data collection and analysis was of particular importance to protect the human participants in this research study. My contact details and those of the supervisor were shared with the participants. Each participant was invited to sign a letter of

informed consent to participate in the study. Lastly, participant names were removed from all identifiable texts and the data was securely stored throughout the research process.

### **1.11 Limitations of the study**

Each study has limitations. Some factors may prove to limit the study and application of the research data. Firstly, it is possible that the Hawthorne effect may influence the participants' responses to the interview (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007). According to McCambridge, Kypri and Elbourne (2014, p. 247), "research activities may influence participant cognitions, emotions, and behaviour". The participants' behaviour may alter due to their awareness of being studied. As a result, their responses to the semi-structured interview questions may be affected due to new thinking about the concept of authorial voice, and may in turn affect the findings of the study.

Also, it is possible that due to the data being drawn from a self-selected population from one specific department at one university site, the results of this study may not be generalised outside of this context and participants. Although the dissertations could be easily collected from the public space of the UP repository, I envisaged that it may be more difficult to contact the writers of the dissertations for the interviews. It may have been likely that some of the writers had moved on and changed addresses, thus considerably reducing the number of interview participants for the study. Also, I did not have access to the markers' original comments and feedback on the selected dissertations, which may indicate comment on authorial voice, evidenced through argumentation in the writing. Next, the document analysis was interpretive and may have been limited by my personal views. Additionally, the sample size was small due to the limited number of dissertations which could be selected from the specific department at the relevant HEI. Furthermore, this study only focused on master's dissertations from a specific department at a South African HEI. Dissertations from other departments, faculties and universities were not included in this study; therefore, the conclusion from this study may not be extrapolated to all other dissertations. Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2014) urge that the researcher must be aware of delimiters which must be monitored throughout the study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*“As I reached for a definition of voice ... what I found was a concept signifying different things to different people, a floating signifier changing from one text to the next ...”* (Yancey, 1994).

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a detailed description of authorial voice is presented by examining the current literature on authorial voice and academic writing in order to contextualise this study. Firstly, there is a brief exploration of the origins of academic writing and the relevant writing conventions for higher education. Thereafter, a review of the complex and multiple interpretations of voice follows. A discussion of some features that may indicate the presence of authorial voice in postgraduate academic writing, a discussion of master's dissertation writing, and an explanation of the discussion section of a dissertation, follow.

### 2.2 Academic writing in higher education

The focus for this dissertation was on authorial voice in academic writing; for this reason, a discussion on academic writing in higher education is necessary. Hyland (2013, p. 53) succinctly states:

We are what we write, and we need to understand the distinctive ways our disciplines have of addressing colleagues and presenting arguments, as it is through language that academics and students conceptualise their subjects and argue their claims persuasively.

Writing is considered an act of identity (Ivanič, 1998). As a result, academic writing, which is an act or activity, is linked to identity work (Thompson & Kamler, 2013). Consequently, academic writing may be regarded as a social activity conducted within an academic community. It is through academic writing that academic social interaction occurs. An academic writer, or more specifically, a master's dissertation writer, is obliged to produce knowledge, propose and counter arguments, and analyse relevant literature in academically acceptable fashion determined by the academic community.

In the last two decades, the perception of English academic writing has changed. It has shifted from being largely skills based with an emphasis on grammatical and linguistic skills

acquisition to being socially situated, scholarly writing that involves the writer's interaction within a discipline with texts and other people (Lea & Street, 1998; Thompson & Kamler, 2013).

Worldwide, English academic writing is extremely important, as many academics have to learn to use academic English to gain recognition through publishing in their academic field internationally (Lea & Street, 1998). English has not only assumed dominance socially, economically and politically, but it has also become a significant academic language. Academic writing skills are regarded as the necessary core competence for full and successful participation in and integration into the academic community.

Additionally, English academic writing is vital in higher education as it is key in assessing, developing and facilitating student learning across the academy. The term "academic writing" refers to writing that is created in and for "the academy" (Nelson & Castelló, 2012, p. 33). Academic writing embraces the writing that academics produce in their academic communities in creating new knowledge, and the writing forms and conventions that students must learn and adopt to enter their disciplinary fields. Academic writing is not just a skill, "a set of neutral techniques that are somehow separate from the social context" (Archer, 2010, p. 499), and a means of gate-keeping and assessment. Ivanič (1998) states that higher education institutions promote patterns of privileging for academic assessments through academic writing. It is, also, a literacy practice because writing in higher education is "not just what people do, but what they make of what they do, and how it constructs them as social subjects" (Clark & Ivanič, 2013, p. 82). Hyland (2013) maintains that through writing, students consolidate and show understanding of academic content. The very idea of academic writing being a social practice supports the stance that authorial voice is socially constructed.

The academic writing challenges that postgraduate students experience are of particular concern, since many students struggle with meeting the academic requirements for dissertation and thesis writing (Bitchener & Basturkman, 2006; Butler, 2011; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). These challenges are more pronounced in academic writing for social sciences, as the writing conventions are not as clear as for the natural sciences (Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). There seems to be consensus that academic writing is a challenging activity that demands the use of many skills, much time and a certain conformity. Academic language is a specialised discourse that is challenging for first or additional speakers of English (Archer, 2010, p.496). Academic writing is regarded as thinking and feeling work (Thompson & Kamler, 2013). Not only do students have to think through ideas and construct arguments, they also have to grapple with the mechanics of writing. Clarity, conciseness, objectivity, argumentation, critical thinking, and referencing skills are some of the more important features of academic writing, especially for dissertation writing. Irvin (2010, p. 10) describes academic writing as a

“complex literary task” that has two significant characteristics. Firstly, it is the presentation of a logical argument that consists of strong evidence to support a particular stance adopted by the writer. Secondly, academic writing is the analytic interpretation of a perspective, where there is strong emphasis on the “how and why questions” instead of the “what questions”.

Due to the significant challenges that academic writing may entail, students may experience an identity crisis. This challenge is the adoption of the identity of an educated person who, after serious reflection about a topic, has to publicly express this reflection through the act of writing. The importance of academic writing for this study is two-fold: “academic writing is not just about conveying an ideational ‘content’; it is also about the representation of self” (Hyland, 2002). For students to succeed academically, they need to develop a voice and a culture of intellectual enquiry. This is a complex process that involves students actively creating an authorial voice. An academic writer understands and recognises that a particular discourse is necessary in writing a text for any academic field in order to represent that field (Hyland, 2013) accurately. More relevantly, Irvin (2010, p. 8) states that “[a]cademic writing is always a form of evaluation that asks you to demonstrate knowledge and show proficiency with certain disciplinary skills in thinking, interpreting, and presenting”.

Genre analysis is one of the many significant methods of studying academic writing. For this study, genre analysis is meaningful as it describes the type of academic writing in which master’s writers become skilled and internalise. The type of writing for postgraduate students who want to join an academic fraternity may take the form of a dissertation, thesis, research article, et cetera, which is completed in fulfilment of a requirement of an academic institution or publication. The genre of academic writing discussed in this dissertation is that of a master’s dissertation.

Coffin et al. (2003) and Hyland (2009) expand on a few theoretical approaches for comprehending academic writing. They are writing as text, writing as process, and writing as social practice. The idea of writing as text was dominant for many years and the focus is on writing as being a product and quantifiable. This view of writing is significant for this study as it includes the ideas of academic writing as text production for the purposes of publication and assessment.

Writing as process focuses on the writing experience and emphasis is placed on individual ideas emerging naturally. Writing as social practice focuses on writing as a social experience and not as an individual exercise. The writer is influenced by his or her life and work experiences, assumptions and ideas. According to Thomson and Kamler (2013), academic writing is a conversation between scholars. The writer, who is part of a community of scholars and the institution that has specific expectations and language use, is expected to conform to

these community conventions. The reading and interpretation of the text by the reader also makes writing situated and a social practice. According to Hyland (2009, p. 31), writing is a “joint endeavour between writers and readers, co-constructed through the active understanding of rhetorical situations and the likely responses of readers”.

## **2.3 Authorial voice**

Certain contemporary social theories on academic literacies advocate that academic writing is more than the production of a text; it also entails the creation of an authorial identity (Lea & Street, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Hyland, 2002a). Authorial voice is an old and controversial concept. However, despite continued interest in and debate on voice in writing, and its expansive function to refer to “authors’ writing styles, authorship, language registers, rhetorical stance, written and spoken prosody, the self in the text, and scores of others” (Sperling & Appleman, 2011, p. 70), there is still no consensus on the nature of voice (Bakhtin, 1981; Stapleton, 2002; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Elbow 2007; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Guinda & Hyland, 2012). Perhaps it is Yancey’s (1994, p. vi + viii) description of voice that best approximates my and others’ experience of navigating an understanding of voice: “My confusion arose because of the absence of a simple definition [...] What I found was a concept signifying different things to different people, a floating signifier changing from one text to the next”.

In spite of the diverse definitions of authorial voice, it is “one of the most significant concepts in applied linguistics today” (Guinda & Hyland, 2012, p.1). Bakhtin (1981; 1986) states that voice, which represents the writer’s culture and history, is evident in any written text. According to Bakhtin’s (1981; 1986) dialogic, the use of language is marked by the unending repetition of the prose and ideas of other people and that both personal and social resources contribute towards the creation of a writer’s voice. The suggestion is that all writing has voice; writing is not impersonal and objective, as the writer’s authorial identity is infused into the text through conscious and unconscious discourse choices (Ivanič, 1998; Clark & Ivanič, 2001; Hyland, 2002a). Voice represents identity and agency, which are closely linked to the various research studies related to voice (Sperling & Appleman, 2011).

### **2.3.1 Individual voice**

Traditionally, the term “having a voice” suggested that one has authority and influence (Elbow, 2007). It was Elbow (1981, p. 6) who initially emphasised the concept of an individual voice; “[i]n your natural way of producing words there is sound, a texture, a rhythm – a voice – which

is the main source of power in your writing”. However, the idea of an individualistic voice has been debated and, consequently, the concept of voice has become more multifaceted over the last four decades. With the burgeoning of social constructivism, the emphasis on individual voice began to decline.

### 2.3.2 Voice as social construct

In 2001, voice was again popularised in a special issue of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* edited by Alan Hirvela and Diane Belcher. One of the stated aims of this publication was to position voice as a social constructivist perspective. Currently, the concept may indicate a multiplicity of voices as well as an authorial identity (Ivanič, 1998; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001). Ivanič's (2005) idea of writer identity and self-representation parallels the concept of authorial voice used by other researchers. Ivanič (2005) suggests that authorial voice is represented by how strongly the author is perceived in a text. According to Hyland (2002), the manner in which writers evaluate and take a stance may be regarded as authorial presence. Similarly, Bowden (1995) posits that an authorial voice is “style, persona and stance”. Hirvela and Belcher's (2001) discussion of “situational voice” emphasises how writers may assume different voices for different writing contexts. For Bakhtin (1986, p. 88),

...any word exists in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an other's word which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and finally, as my word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression.

Ultimately, it seems that voice may be evident in the writer, in the text and in the writer-reader interaction (Matsuda, 2015).

While the debate continues about the different dimensions of voice, there is more consensus that voice has both individual and social dimensions, which is the basis of the argument in my study on authorial voice. For this study, which is centred on the idea that voice is also socially-constructed, Matsuda's (2001) description of voice, based largely on a social interpretation, is significant. For this definition, voice is regarded as an indication of a writer's identity that is apparent in the text, that results from “the use of discourse and non-discourse features that language users chose, deliberate or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires” (Matsuda, 2001, p. 40). Ivanič and Camps (2001) emphasise that while written texts may lack the sound, rhythm and intonation of speech, the writer's identity is evident through the lexical, syntactical, and organisational constructs that are used in writing. However, specific language structures, such as first person pronouns, should not

be over-emphasised at the risk of ignoring content-related features, such as context and genre, which are equally important in the construction of voice.

Ivanič (1998) argues that the writer has an identity that is formed and portrayed through language patterns in the same way that the spoken accent distinguishes the speaker's identity. The main theme in Ivanič's (1998) framework is that the representation of the self through discourse is as important as the content of the writing. Further, Ivanič (1998) maintains that the identity created in the text is not singular; the writer creates multiple identities that may conflict with each other. Each aspect of writer identity is highly dependent on the context within which the writer operates. Ivanič's cloverleaf (1998) representation of identity is reflected in Figure 2.1.

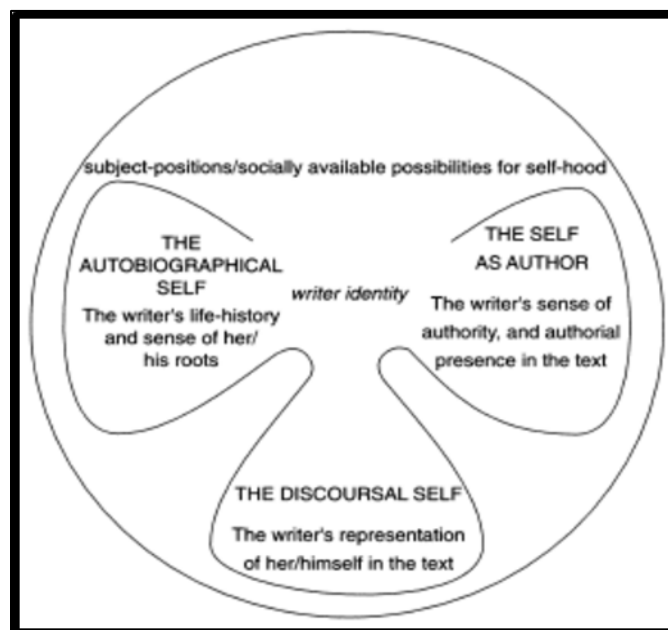


**Figure 2.1 Writer identities in text (Ivanič, 1998)**

Many studies on authorial voice have been aimed at students who are ESL writers of English who, seemingly, lack, and struggle to adopt an individualised voice in academic writing (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Akinson, 1997; Wu & Rubin, 2000). Some researchers indicate that L2 writers from different cultures may struggle with authorial voice in English academic writing because certain social practices in their cultures may inhibit their understanding and use of voice (Cadman, 1994; Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). However, while there is an assumption that L1 writers use voice effectively in writing, there is also evidence that first language English writers may also have problems in academic writing and in developing an authorial voice (Raimes & Zamel, 1997, Shulze & Lemmer, 2017). Therefore, it seems that authorial voice is a challenging concept for most writers, irrespective of the degree of their command of English. On the

other hand, other researchers argue that voice is irrelevant to academic writing (Stapleton, 2002; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003). I disagree and, based on the reasons provided below, I think that it is necessary that both L1 and L2 writers be taught how to develop and use an authorial voice (Cadman, 1994; Ivanič, 1998; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2002).

Authorial voice is fundamental in academic writing; it is not an option (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Hyland, 2002a; Matsuda, 2015). Firstly, and most significantly for my study, a postgraduate writer must demonstrate a significant authorial voice in a dissertation in order to gain entry to the academic community (Olivier & Carstens, 2018). Secondly, Ivanič & Camps (2001) urge that writers develop awareness about voice, as it is through voice that writers exercise control over the identity they project in their writing. Furthermore, Zhao and Llosa (2008) state that voice features are tools that novice writers and writing teachers can critically implement in creating a distinct and effective authorial voice in order to develop writing quality. An authorial voice does not appear overnight: it develops over time after much reading and writing. Finally, writers should become aware of the options of different voices that may be used in writing, so that they can exercise the power to consciously construct new voices and, subsequently, identities in writing.

However, developing an authorial voice is a major challenge for postgraduate students (Butler, 2011). The concept of authorial voice may be confusing for most postgraduate writers due to certain factors. Firstly, different and various definitions of the concept exist. Next, there may be a lack of guidance about the nature of and the practice involved in developing an authorial voice. Additionally, postgraduate writers may experience a lack of academic writing skills for postgraduate study. Another challenge for postgraduate writers may be experienced in reading for and writing a master's dissertation in English, a language that may not be the writers' mother tongue. Lastly, their academic institutions and departments, among other influences, may prescribe the authorial voice for postgraduate writers. For these reasons, specific linguistic structures that create voice in writing are discussed.

For this study, authorial voice was conceptualised as the manifestation of the academic character and as the manner in which the writer positions herself in the field of study while interacting with the academic community. The definition of voice which best suits this study is: "Voice is the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise from socially available, yet ever-changing repertoires" (Matsuda 2001, p. 40). While this perspective of voice acknowledges the reader, the author and the text, my study focuses on the individual and social features of authorial voice, without taking into consideration reader interpretations of voice.

I relate authorial voice to the linguistic choices that master's writers may deliberately or unintentionally make to portray identity within academic discourse (Matsuda, 2001). These linguistic choices are determined by the writers' experience, genre of writing and academic field.

## **2.4 Textual features which indicate authorial voice**

Ivanič and Camps (2001) describe academic writing as a “creative recombination of voices” that is based on a construction of the writer's choice. Writers choose rhetorically either to emphasise their presence or to downplay it, consequently, constructing their authorial voice. Hyland (2002b) proposes that a range of social and psychological factors determines the way writers voice their propositions and present them to their audience. Nevertheless, the discourse community they are contributing to can and should determine how they should build their academic discourse.

Authorial voice may be evident through language use in academic texts. The textual cues in the academic text allow the reader to infer authorial voice through the specific context and, consequently, a writer-reader relationship is created (Nelson & Castelló, 2012). While a writer may consciously strive to create a certain type of authorial voice through specific language use and style, this voice can only be realised through the reader's perception. Tardy and Matsuda (2009) state that the inference of an authorial voice in a text is prompted by a negotiation between the writer and reader, which occurs differently for different readers. The audience, context, and community must be considered so that the writer produces writing that is authorial and authentic.

Research indicates that there are definite textual features that may indicate a lack or presence of authorial voice in advanced academic writing, where one of the main criteria for successfully completing a dissertation and joining the academic community is the demonstration of an obvious authorial voice (Olivier & Carstens, 2018). Some indications of a lack of authorial voice may be indicated by the use of plagiarism (Howard, 1995; Abasi, et al., 2006), patch writing (Howard, 1995), excessive use of direct quotations (Petrić, 2012) and a lack of critical thought and argument (Thompson, 2005).

On the other hand, authorial voice may be indicated through significant features in writing which may indicate the presence of authorial voice. A textual feature most associated with identifying authorial voice is the use of the first person (Ivanič, 1998; Hyland, 2002b). Hyland (1999) emphasises that the use of the first person indicates a visible author presence and stance; in this way, the reader accepts the claims made in the text. According to Ivanič (1998),

if there is no use of the first person, it seems as if the writer is not taking responsibility for the writing.

Another investigation that studied the relationship between the quality of academic writing and authorial voice and is that of Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003). They explored the connection between the structures related to L1 authorial voice and the quality of English second language (ESL) academic writing by applying their widely used Voice Intensity Rating Scale to undergraduate ESL argumentative essays. Four components of authorial voice were measured using this scale: confidence (evidence of hedges and intensifiers); identification of self (rate of first person pronoun and active voice use); repetition of the main idea; and, evidence of authorial presence and independent thought. While their study offers empirical evidence on the significance of authorial voice in ESL academic writing, Helms-Park and Stapleton's (2003) scale has been challenged because it only represents voice as a personal construct (Matsuda & Tardy, 2009) and no correlation was found between text quality and authorial voice (Allison, 2018). However, the same voice intensity rating scale was applied to different ESL texts by Matsuda and Tardy (2007), and Zhao and Llosa (2008), who found a strong correlation between good quality writing and voice intensity.

When viewed through a social constructivist lens, authorial voice in academic writing is regarded as both a personal expression as well as the writer's interaction with the reader. The writer develops an authorial voice by acquiring the voices of others, through the act of writing (Prior, 2001).

## **2.5 Master's dissertation writing**

A master's dissertation may be categorised as a genre of text that is created within a specific institutional and cultural setting and is regarded as research writing (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). The South African university system works as follows: a student initially studies towards a three to four year undergraduate degree. Thereafter an honours degree, which is considered a postgraduate degree, is studied. A master's degree, through either coursework and a mini-dissertation or a dissertation only, may be studied after an honour's degree. The main purpose of a dissertation is to meet the academic and institutional conventions for a master's degree.

Dissertation writing is an activity that incorporates different areas such as the content of a subject, the arguments of the writer, academic discourse, choice of a specific genre, and research skills (Butler, 2011; Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). The writer should also express an authorial voice by taking a stance on the disciplinary ideas.

Dissertation writing may be regarded as a challenging endeavour due to the integration of these elements and is, consequently, an ideal genre for the investigation of authorial voice.

Master's study is the beginning of independent research and critical analysis. A dissertation that is written for a master's degree is a higher-order study where a candidate must demonstrate the qualities of being technically competent, proof of academic research, critical thinking, a significant comprehension of appropriate theory, as well as clarity and logical thinking. Without question, a more advanced standard of language skills and critical enquiry is expected than that for an honours degree. It is expected that the master's student present the same level of critical register as that of the academic material that must be read as part of the master's research journey. Although there is no formal requirement for a master's dissertation to be "an original contribution to knowledge" (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014), as for a doctoral degree, it is evidence of critical thinking. Significantly, for the master's dissertation which is a text written within a specific discipline, the writer must show critical knowledge application in that discipline and develop a suitable disciplinary voice in order to become a member of that academic community. There are a few significant benefits of writing a master's dissertation; it is not only the acquisition of an advanced degree, but it is also the introduction of the postgraduate student as an author and her initiation into the academic community.

As discussed earlier, one of the significant indicators of an authorial voice in writing is the writer's ability to think critically. The guidelines for the requirements of master's degrees in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (South African Qualifications Authority, 2013, p. 73) clearly outline the purpose of a master's degree:

Master's graduates must be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, design and critically appraise analytical writing, make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences; demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems...

A perusal of a few South African universities' postgraduate handbooks on postgraduate assessment criteria confirms that critical thinking that indicates authorial voice is one of the key assessment criteria for master's dissertations: "has applied skills of critical analysis and evaluation to the results of the research" (Seitz, 2016) and "shows evidence of critical and independent thought" (University of Cape Town, 2014). One of the significant indicators of critical thinking in writing is the presence of an authorial voice as argued above.

The construction and development of a dissertation, especially in the fields of social sciences and humanities, is a challenging task and may also be elusive for many (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Archer, 2010; Dell, 2010; Vivian & Fourie, 2016).

## **2.6 Discussion section of dissertations**

The aim of analysing the discussion section of master's dissertations was to examine the writers' choice of textual features that met the requirements for the discussion chapter of their dissertations, and if and how authorial voice was evident.

The discussion section in a dissertation is considered the heart of the text and requires much thought and work. For this chapter, the writer presents the results of the study and discusses the main findings based on the theoretical framework and literature review. According to Basturkmen (2009), the expectations for an effective discussion section are that "outstanding work would be insightful and stimulating, place the work in context, draw out the study's importance, significance and implications and identify new questions or next steps". The writing of the discussion section of a dissertation may be regarded as a challenging task not only because of the merging of the literature review content, the methodology, and the outcomes of the study (Basturkmen, 2009), but also because of the evaluation involved.

Hunston and Thompson (2001) list three functions of evaluation as being, firstly, an expression of the writer's opinion that indicates the writer's value system and community. Secondly, a relationship between the writer and reader is created and maintained and, lastly, discourse can be arranged by evaluation. Evaluation requires critical thinking and argumentation, which may be regarded as the writer expressing identity through the use of an authorial voice.

Research indicates that the discussion section of a dissertation is a challenging and possibly the most demanding section for students to write (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Geng & Wharton, 2017). The writer has to evaluate his or her work, contextualise the work within the discipline, and explain to the reader why the research study is significant and can contribute to the field. Besides the difficulties experienced at sentence and paragraph levels, another significant difficulty is writers not being able to structure arguments consistently. Not only are writers unsure about the type of content that is needed in the discussion section, they are also unsure about the intended audience. Significantly, it appeared that postgraduate writers find argumentation supported by evidence, and critical analysis difficult. Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995) indicate that it is through an authorial voice that students display critical thinking skills. In order to convince the reader of the significance of their results, the writers' voice has to be evident amid the voices of others in the research community (Geng & Wharton, 2017). This is

a challenging task for dissertation writers who are still novices in the genre. As a result of there being a need for a significant use of authorial voice in the discussion section, this section was selected for the analysis of textual features that writers may use to indicate authorial voice, relative to their specific disciplines.

## 2.7 Voice theory

Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology is different from other frameworks that were designed to analyse authorial voice because it is used to analyse academic voice types which writers may consciously and unconsciously use to become part of particular academic disciplinary communities. Ivanič (2005) argues that writing always conveys some authorial identity because all aspects of writing (the lexical, syntactic, semantic, visual, and material) create some sense of the author. Also, important for this socio-constructive research study, this typology incorporates both the individual and social constructs of authorial voice as "each individual ultimately exercises individual agency to take elements from different voice types and blend them into a unique, heterogeneous voice according to their own interests, motivations, allegiances, and preferences" (Ivanič & Camps, 2001, p. 21).

Through the examination of the writing of six ESL postgraduate students, Ivanič and Camps (2001) found that different voice types were constructed based on how writers positioned themselves according to Halliday's categorisation of language into three large purposes or meta-functions (Halliday, 1985). These three meta-functions (the ideational, interpersonal, and textual) were used as a priori categories in Ivanič and Camp's (2001) Voice Typology for the identification and interpretation of authorial voices in texts. Ivanič and Camps (2001) propose that writers consciously or unconsciously draw on certain types of authorial voices that indicate their character and or membership to specific groups. Writers' authorial voices are evident through the lexical, syntactic, organisational and material aspects of their writing. Firstly, writers use a range of voice types based on their ideas and worldviews, interests and stances towards content (ideational); secondly, representations of themselves based on various levels of confidence (interpersonal); and, lastly, the various techniques they use to create textual meaning (textual). For these reasons, Ivanič and Camp's (2001) Voice Typology, that categorises authorial voice as a range of linguistic realisations of the ideational, interpersonal and textual macro-functions, was a useful framework for identifying and interpreting authorial voice in the texts selected for this research study.

Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology was used for examining master's writers' authorial voice in the discussion section of the selected dissertations. Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice

Typology was created for an analysis of the writing of six ESL master's students from British universities. Significantly, for this socio-constructivist study, this broad framework that is based on Halliday's (1985) language functions focuses on authorial voice being both personal and social. Ivanič and Camps (2001, p. 21) argue that this conception of voice includes "both context and authorial agency as each individual ultimately exercises individual agency to take elements from different voice types and blend them into a unique, heterogeneous voice according to their own interests, motivations, allegiances, and preferences". As a result, voice is present in some form in all writing and may even change across the text.

Ivanič and Camps (2001) posit that voice may be recognised and described based on the stance that a writer creates across the three macro-functions. Firstly, an analysis of authorial voice can be conducted based on the writer's personal philosophies and worldview, interests, and specific stances towards the content (ideational). The ideational voice of the writer may be evident through noun phrases, syntax, and types of verbs, among other features. Secondly, voice can be determined in how the writer represents himself or herself with varying degrees of confidence (interpersonal), for example, through modality and person reference. Lastly, voice is apparent in the techniques the writer may use to construct textual meaning (textual) through different linguistic devices. Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology also allows for the categorisation of the description of a writer's voice for the identification, definition and interpretation of types of authorial voice in a text. Furthermore, it is especially useful in helping novice academic writers to join a specific disciplinary community because it provides a convenient, ready-made representation of types of academic authorial voice. Table 2.1 is a representation of Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology.

**Table 2.1: Ivanič and Camps' Voice Typology** (Ivanič & Camps, 2001, p. 11)

| TYPES OF POSITIONS        | IN RELATION TO                                                                                                                                                                                                              | LINGUISTIC RELATIONS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ideational positioning    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different interests, objects of study, methodologies</li> <li>Different stances towards topics: values, preferences, beliefs</li> <li>Different views of knowledge making</li> </ul> | 1. Lexical choice in noun phrase<br><br>1. Classificatory lexis<br>2. Generic reference<br>3. Evaluative lexis<br>4. Syntactic choice<br><br>1. Verb tense<br>2. Verb type<br>3. Reference to human agency<br>4. Generic or specific reference<br>5. First person reference |
| Interpersonal positioning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different degrees of self-assurance and certainty</li> <li>Different power relations between the writer and the reader</li> </ul>                                                    | 1. Evaluation<br>2. Modality<br>3. First person reference<br><br>1. Mood<br>2. First person reference                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Textual positioning       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different views of how a written text should be constructed.</li> </ul>                                                                                                              | 1. Noun phrase length<br>2. Mono- vs. multisyllabic words<br>3. Linking devices<br>4. Semiotic mode                                                                                                                                                                         |

### 2.7.1 Applying Ivanič and Camps' Voice Typology

Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology provides ready-made categories for the analysis of a writer's authorial voice for the identification, definition and understanding types of voice in a text. This voice typology was applied manually to identify the language structures that represent the ideational, interpersonal and textual macro-functions, which were then used as descriptive codes.

#### 2.7.1.1 Ideational macro-function

For the ideational macro-function, Ivanič and Camps (2001) claim that interests, opinions and perspectives on how knowledge is created determine the different positions that writers assume. Specific types of authorial voice are created as a result of the writer's linguistic choices, which reveal specific positions and interests. Significantly, Ivanič and Camps (2001)

realised that a writer's choice of language that is used in forming noun phrases can indicate the writer's specific discipline. Consequently, the writer's voice types may emerge as being informed and academically literate.

Additionally, ideational voice is evident through the various opinions and stances indicated through the writer's language choices. The use of specific lexis for classification, generic reference, evaluation and syntactic choice also determine the types of voice for the ideational macrofunction.

Thirdly, ideational voice types are also determined by the writer's perception on knowledge construction. Knowledge construction is linguistically represented through the tense and type of verbs, allusion to the writer's personal thoughts and actions, specific and general reference, as well as the use of first person pronouns.

#### *2.7.1.2 Interpersonal macro-function*

Based on Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology, the interpersonal stances of a writer in a text will determine authorial voice. Ivanič and Camps (2001) describe the interpersonal as comprising of the various writer-reader relationships of power as well as the varying levels of self-confidence and conviction. Different degrees of self-confidence and conviction are indicated by linguistic markers that indicate evaluative lexis, markers of modality that show degrees of conviction, the use of personal pronouns, and the verb mood categories of the imperative and the interrogative.

#### *2.7.1.3 Textual macro-function*

Ivanič and Camps (2001) posit that authorial voice is also realised by the writer's perception of how written texts are constructed in a specific discourse context, hence the reference to textual voice. The writer's textual voice is constructed through noun phrase length, the presence or absence of polysyllabic terms, sentence connectors and the semantics in a text.

## **2.8 Theoretical framework**

This research study has drawn from the Academic Literacies Theory that evolved from New Literacies Studies (Street, 1984) over the past few decades, in response to a "deficit model" of student writing (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007). The Academic Literacies Theory has drawn on fields such as new literacy studies, linguistics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Significantly, for this study, the Academic Literacies Theory regards academic writing as social form instead of just the acquisition of a set of cognitive skills that can be applied to any context (Lea & Street, 1998; Lea, 2004). According to Lea and

Street (1998, p. 157), the academic literacies framework is better able to accommodate the complex nature of student writing, especially with regard to “issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within, diverse student writing practices across the university”.

With the increase in culturally and linguistically diverse student numbers in HEIs there is much debate on falling standards of higher education (Albertyn, Kapp, & Bitzer, 2008; Archer, 2010; Butler, 2011). Specifically, the reading and writing abilities of students in higher education symbolise these reduced standards. As a result, language and literacy only become focal areas when they are regarded as problems that must be solved through remediation and additional support (Butler, 2011). The emphasis of this study is on the investigation of authorial voice in the writing for master’s dissertation, where voice is considered a challenging concept for most students. However, in the journey to understand voice, the significant concepts of identity and power relationships within the academic institution that were evident through diverse student writing in master’s dissertations were also taken into account.

The focus that the Academic Literacies Theory has placed on concepts like identity, power relations and knowledge construction in academic writing, has direct reference to the focus of this study where authorial voice is regarded not only as a personal construct, but also as a social process. The social nature of academic writing entails various kinds of collaboration such as the use and appropriation of research material that is customary in academic writing, co-authorship, writing supervision from advisors and assessor feedback (Nelson & Castelló, 2012). The academic literacies framework does not regard student writing and learning as surface skills; instead, the academic literacies approach regards student writing as encompassing several communicative practices that differ from one context to the other. The use of authorial voice is not only an individualistic practice (Elbow, 1981), it is a process and social practice that is determined by writers’ histories, motivation, purposes and opinions. It varies according to situation, purpose and audience. For these reasons, the academic literacies framework guided the data collection strategies for this research study and contributed towards answering the research question on how authorial voice was constructed in selected master’s dissertations in a specific academic department at a South African HEI.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

By analysing the existing literature on voice, a better understanding of voice has been developed to contextualise my study within existing research. A useful and appropriate

definition of voice is presented by Sperling and Appleman (2011, p. 71) in that “voice is a language performance – always social, mediated by experience and culturally embedded”. While authorial voice may not have a specific definition, it is both individual and social, and it plays an integral part in society, in education and in individual expression. Postgraduate writing, especially master’s dissertation writing, will only be supported and enhanced if writers are guided in understanding and developing their voice, and writing with authority. These tools not only support higher education assessment, but also must be encouraged for enabling the interpretation of several messages and voices in our text-dense world.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*“Where there is no text, there is no object of study, and no object of thought either”* (Bakhtin, 1986:103).

### 3.1 Introduction

The earlier chapters form the foundation for the design of my research study on investigating authorial voice in master’s dissertations. The focus for this chapter is on the description of the research methodology that was used in this study and the justification for all the choices made to achieve the research objective, namely to explore how master’s students understood and used authorial voice in dissertation writing. For this purpose, the choice of the interpretive research paradigm is discussed first. Thereafter, the qualitative research approach and case study design are described. Next, the research methods, which involve the data collection process and the data analysis, are explained, followed by the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Since I explored the experiences and challenges of creating an authorial voice by the writers of master’s dissertations, my interaction with the participants was a shared dialogue based on our similar experiences of writing a master’s dissertation. This interaction assisted in my understanding the construction and challenges of using authorial voice in master’s dissertation writing.

The following are the research question, sub-research questions and objectives of the study.

**RQ. How is authorial voice constructed in selected master’s dissertations in education?**

The following sub-research questions helped to answer the main question and guided the research methodology:

SRQ1. How do master’s writers understand the concept of authorial voice?

SQR2. What strategies do master’s students use to develop their own types of authorial voice?

SQR3. What guidance is available to help master’s students develop their authorial voice?

The following research objectives underpinned the research questions:

RO1. To explore master's students' understanding of authorial voice.

RO2. To determine some strategies that master's students use to indicate authorial voice in their dissertations.

RO3. To describe the guidance that master's students may receive in developing authorial voice in their dissertations.

## **3.2 Research methodology**

A research methodology is a purposeful, structured plan that guides the investigation of a research problem (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, Crotty (1998, p. 3) states that the methodology is the approach that directs the researcher "in choosing methods, and shapes the use of the methods chosen". Walters (2013) presents a more comprehensive perspective on the methodology as being the worldview or lens that determines the design of the study and the manner in which it is conducted. The methodology comprises of our sociocultural position, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and the methods. In other words, the research study is designed, conducted and understood through the methodology which is the lens influenced by the researcher's worldview. The method, which is a data generation technique like an interview or text analysis, is one aspect of the methodology (Walters, 2013). For this study, the research design and research methods as determined by the research paradigm, constitute this structured plan.

### **3.2.1 Research paradigm**

Babbie (2010) defines a paradigm as a "model or frame of reference through which to observe and understand" phenomena. A research paradigm may be described as an array of beliefs that represent a specific worldview that guides a field of study (Creswell, 2013). It is necessary and valuable to position educational research within a paradigm. Mertens (2015, p. 2) states that the reason for research is "to understand, describe, predict or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower individuals". Research becomes more worthwhile and scholarly if researchers understand and use worldviews or lenses to look at the various aspects involved in the research process. The worldview in this process is made up of being (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and ethics (axiology) (Bitzer, 2013). Paradigms are useful when they inform how data are interpreted and how theoretical frameworks are constructed. However, Plowright (2011) cautions that paradigms should not determine or dictate research questions; instead, research questions should direct research. The

methodology and the research design are influenced by the assumptions that form the paradigm. Walters (2013) emphasises that the researcher's socio-cultural position not only defines the methodology, but also influences the epistemological, axiological, and ontological positions.

The paradigm or worldview for this study was based on social constructivism, which is related to qualitative research, as individuals search for understanding of their world (Creswell, 2009). For this master's dissertation, I sought to understand the character of authorial voice in master's dissertations, contextualised within the genre of academic writing; therefore, this study is situated within an interpretive paradigm and is examined through a socio-constructivist lens. Socio-constructivism is derived from constructivism that has its foundations in developmental and cognitive psychology, which emphasises that meaning is derived from various theories on human experiences. John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner were the leading advocates of constructivism. Significantly, Vygotsky (1978), one of the major social constructivists, proposed that the community significantly influences meaning making.

Constructivism promotes social and communication skills based on collaboration and the exchange of ideas (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning occurs actively through experience and reflection; learning is not a passive, mechanical exercise. The student's thinking is grounded in the perception of physical and social experiences. Constructivism is an all-encompassing term that includes many constructivist approaches, one of the most dominant being the socio-constructivist approach. Within this paradigm, individuals attempt to construct their own meaning through interaction with others, with the aim of learning more about their world (Creswell, 2009).

The 1970s to the 1990s was an important period in the evolution of authorial voice theory (Elbow, 2007; Allison, 2018). The notion of voice emerged and influenced the principles and practice of academic writing; consequently, the nature of writing began to be regarded as inherently social and interactive (Ivanič, 1998; Allison, 2018). The theoretical perspective that emphasises writing as a social phenomenon is referred to as socio-constructivism (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Nelson & Castelló, 2012). Matsuda (2001, p. 401) defines a social constructivist voice as the writer's or speaker's choice of discourse and non-discourse language features that are drawn from constantly changing social inventories. The socio-constructivist learning theories that are attributed to Vygotsky (1978) are significant for this study because the development and use of an authorial voice is facilitated through interaction with other students, supervisors, institutions and research material, and based on the student's context. Not only must a master's student actively work towards constructing an authorial voice in the

dissertation through engagement with these different parties, the student also has to consciously construct an authorial voice which represents the link between existing knowledge and new knowledge. Socio-constructivism suggests that learning is a collaborative process where individuals develop knowledge mutually through a highly interactive process with culture and society (Vygotsky, 1978). A master's student will gain knowledge from what is written down, based on interactions within the academic community. I interacted with the participants and the texts, and gained insight into authorial voice in master's dissertation writing.

Although this was a socio-constructivist study, it was also interpretive, as I had to analyse and interpret the text analyses and interviews that were conducted for data collection (Creswell, 2009), while also considering the phenomenon under examination and the participants' social behaviour (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). For this reason, this research study was situated in an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm was strongly influenced by anthropology and became popular in educational research in the 1970s (Taylor & Medina, 2013). With regard to an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher is directly involved with the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, I was actively involved in analysing authorial voice as part of my own master's dissertation journey. Not only was my relationship with the participants subjective, but the participants' responses were also subjective as they expressed their own opinions on the research phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). Both the researcher's and participants' experiences are always foregrounded in a qualitative study. However, interpretivist researchers constantly question and reflect on their methods of interacting with the participants (Taylor & Medina, 2013).

Interpretivism is based on the premise that multiple realities exist; for this reason, interpretivist researchers must conduct their research in natural settings to achieve the most accurate understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2013). In this investigation, I attempted to examine the key concepts of this study in as natural a setting as possible: authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. This study will not and cannot determine a single ultimate truth about authorial voice, hence the choice of the interpretivist paradigm that allows for master's writers' multiple realities and experiences of authorial voice. A significant factor of the interpretivist approach for this study was that reality can be accessed through social constructions such as language and shared meanings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a), which is exactly the nature of a master's dissertation. This study was placed firmly in the interpretivist paradigm because socially-constructed knowledge would be gained from the investigation.

The interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher a close interaction with the participants, in this case, to understand how authorial voice was perceived and used by the writers of selected

master's dissertations. This close interaction with the participants was necessary to encourage the participants to freely share their opinions, feelings, and experiences regarding writing and authorial voice in their master's dissertation writing. However, I had to actively guard against becoming emotionally involved with the participants, which could have resulted in researcher bias (Creswell, 2013). To prevent such attachment and subsequent bias, I focused strictly on the goals of the research study.

This study was conducted from the perspective that several realities contributed towards knowledge creation (Mack, 2010). As a result, the participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences of their master's dissertation writing unreservedly (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Through the epistemological lens of interpretivism, I was able to capture, analyse and understand the multiple meanings that the participants attributed to their experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Creswell, 2013). The chosen paradigm supported the focus of this research study on analysing and interpreting the participants' practical experience of authorial voice in dissertation writing.

### **3.2.2 Ontology**

Ontology is regarded as the study of being or the nature of social reality (Walters, 2013; Mertens, 2015). Cohen et al (2011) define ontology as the means used by individuals to understand the nature of reality that is constructed on experience, research and logical thought. There are three broad ontological positions, which are realism, idealism and materialism (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Realist ontology is based on the belief that reality is external and independent of an individuals' reality. Where ontological idealism is concerned, reality can only be perceived through the human mind that constructs meaning through social interactions. Ontological materialism rests on the belief that reality is vested only in the physical or material world, from which experiences, beliefs, and values originate. The realist ontology of this research study was to examine the degree to which the social world could be treated as a body of inquiry (Mouton, 2001). For this study, I was interested in the process that participants went through to construct their knowledge and practice of authorial voice for their dissertation writing. Walters (2013) emphasises that it is vital that the ontological realities that underpin the research topic and methodology be recognised and considered by social science researchers. For this research study, the reality of the individual master's writers' experiences of academic writing and authorial voice for the master's dissertation was paramount.

### **3.2.3 Epistemology**

Epistemology can be described as ideas about how knowledge is shared with other human beings (Cohen et al., 2011). Epistemology is linked to the investigation of knowledge. Through

the epistemological element of research, there is an investigation into how the knowledge of reality can be gained (Mouton, 2001). The epistemology that supports the interpretivist perception of the world seeks to make sense of and examine experiences through the observation and interpretation of socially contextualised engagements (Creswell, 2009). The character of the interaction between the researcher and the phenomena being studied is the epistemology. In this research study, I explored the reality of master's dissertation writers' understanding, perceptions, and use of authorial voice. The personal epistemology of the master's writers influenced their level of understanding and negotiation of authorial voice in their writing. People depend on their experience when it comes to negotiating everyday life problems (Cohen et al., 2011). In the same way, the writers depend on their reality, their experience of academic writing skills and the academic community to negotiate the writing of their dissertation.

The epistemology of constructivism is based on a desirable, vigorous interaction between the researcher (the "would-be-knower") and the participant ("knower") (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 131). As a researcher, whose epistemology is influenced by social constructivism, it was my intention to observe this social reality, and with other scholars who are part of this reality, to co-construct my knowledge of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. However, due to multiple realities and ambiguities, I could only describe it in as definitive a manner as possible. The participants' realities were based on their individual experiences of master's dissertation writing and their academic communities.

The epistemology associated with the socio-constructivist perspective attempts an understanding and explanation of reality in a social context, based on the observation and analysis of the participant engagements (Creswell, 2009). The epistemology that underpinned this research study was based on the assumption that knowledge transforms, grows, and is constantly negotiated and reconstructed by the researcher and participants. The manner in which the researcher makes sense of complex social circumstances determines reality (Creswell, 2009). An interpretivist-constructivist approach is useful in revealing multiple truths, since reality is regarded as being constructed in the mind of the individual (Ponterotto, 2006). In the research reported on here, I explored reality on the construct of authorial voice, as indicated in the subjective understanding, perceptions, and reflections of master's writers as participants.

### **3.3 Research approach**

The distinct difference between qualitative and quantitative research is based on the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative data undergo specific and subjective sampling (Maree, 2007) with the interpretation being conducted linguistically (Creswell, 2013). In contrast,

quantitative data undergo systematic and objective sampling (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013) and are numerically or statistically interpreted. For my research study, it was immediately obvious that I would adopt a qualitative design due to the linguistic and descriptive data sets. I thus opted for a qualitative approach because it was an exploration and understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2009), namely authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. Authorial voice is an aspect of writer identity and, generally, studies on identity are significantly qualitative in character. For instance, Ivanič's (1998) framework on writer identity has been used in studies that take a social approach in the analysis of writer identity. Tang and John (1999) also conducted a qualitative study in analysing first person pronouns in undergraduate essays to determine authorial voice.

According to Ivankova et al. (2007), qualitative studies are generally characterised by general research questions, with the focus being on understanding the participant's experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. A qualitative research approach supports the comprehension and interpretation of meaning and human interaction. It is through interpretation, a significant factor in qualitative research, that a deeper comprehension of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing may be acquired. Qualitative research is appropriate for the exploration of a complicated research area such as authorial voice in master's dissertation writing, particularly when there is limited information about this challenging and not highly-researched phenomenon (Sperling & Appleman, 2011; Kamler & Thomson, 2014; Matsuda, 2015).

The research questions that underpinned this study demonstrated the need for inductive exploration, discovery, and understanding that are the emphases of qualitative research. However, I combined both inductive and deductive approaches, although this was an interpretivist study founded in socio-constructivism. Through a qualitative research investigation, the exploration of the multiple realities of how master's students understood and created authorial voice in dissertation writing was possible and the participants' realities could be shared and understood holistically (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Another strong characteristic of qualitative research is the supposition that absolute truth does not exist, as it depends on context and various perspectives.

A qualitative approach allows authorial voice to be studied in a naturalistic setting. Forms of inquiry such as case studies, narratives and ethnographies fall within the ambit of qualitative research design (Creswell, 2013). A study using qualitative (or non-numerical) data is concerned with non-statistical methods and small samples of participants who have most experienced the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2009). In this study, a small, convenience sampling of documents and participants was made based on their belonging to

a particular academic community, in this case, the selection of master's dissertations and participants who were the writers of the selected dissertations.

My intention, as a qualitative researcher, was to gain a deep understanding of the manner in which authorial voice was created in the master's dissertations and of the participants' perceptions of authorial voice. The qualitative researcher is regarded as the primary research instrument whose involvement and personal experience are not only advantageous for the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013), but also determines how the research process is undertaken and presented. For these reasons, my teaching experience of writing and personal search for authorial voice have helped me to realise the value and necessity of authorial voice in writing, as well as plan and conduct this research study on that very topic.

Two disadvantages of a qualitative research approach could be that of the cost and time involved (Stake, 1995). These relative disadvantages are far outweighed by the benefits of qualitative research, chief among them being the opportunity for the participants to respond freely on their multiple realities of academic writing and authorial voice in their master's writing journey.

The qualitative research approach supported the particular ontology and epistemology of this study that was aimed at a rich insight into authorial voice in the writing of master's dissertation. Thus, I chose qualitative research as the most appropriate research approach for the study of the construct of authorial voice in master's writing, specifically the writing, comprehension, and insights into master's writers. My study may be categorised as an interpretive qualitative study set within the socio-constructivist paradigm, with the method of inquiry being a case study.

### **3.4 Research design**

The research design is the self-evaluation process through which the researcher identifies the critical values of the needs for the research study (Creswell, 2009). The paradigm of a study as well as the approach are determined by the research design. This detailed plan is purposefully designed by the researcher in order to determine valid answers for the research questions.

#### **3.4.1 Case study**

The case study design is suitable for a constructivist paradigm because it supports the proposition of social construction of reality (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). This design is very useful especially when a phenomenon must be comprehensively studied and understood in its real

or actual context (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2018). The case study is a significant qualitative research method that assists in the choice of applicable methods for data collection, where a researcher may choose a small, specific sample to suit the purpose of the study (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). Individuals, groups or events could be the focus of a case study. For this study, a group of master's writers in the same setting and context as well as an event, the writing of master's dissertations, were analysed. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the nature of a research problem rather than depending on any form of quantification. For this reason, the case study is a suitable approach for a detailed study of a concept in its actual setting (Yin, 2018). Suitably, for this interpretivist view on authorial voice in master's dissertation writing, a case study design facilitates the understanding of how participants make meaning of the phenomenon being explored (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b) both individually and through shared social meanings. The case study design was further appropriate for this qualitative study since it allowed a thorough explanation of a small sample of cases, which may be extrapolated for understanding a larger number of similar cases. According to Yin (2018), a case study design may be appropriate in the following situations: when "how" and "why" questions are the focus of the study; when the behaviour of the participants in the study cannot be manipulated; and, when the contextual conditions that are relevant to the phenomenon under study must also be examined for the study. All three of these situations were applicable to this study that explored how master's writers negotiated academic writing in order to create genre-specific authorial voice in master's dissertations.

Case studies can be categorised as being either single or multiple (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). Multiple case studies are useful for the analysis of data within and across various settings and may use data from different studies to create a new case study, which is time and cost effective (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, multiple case studies can be effectively used to examine the differences and the similarities among the cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). In contrast, for the investigation of a single uncommon phenomenon or a group, a single case study is considered most appropriate (Yin, 2018). Another advantage of a single case study is that it allows for a rich description of the essence of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, a single case study is more preferable because it is cheaper than and not as time-intensive as a multiple case study (Stake, 1995).

Case studies are also classified as intrinsic and instrumental categories (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Through an intrinsic case study, a particular phenomenon is described, explicated as well as evaluated (Yin, 2018). An instrumental case study is useful in the analysis of a specific phenomenon, especially where other aspects besides the specific phenomenon may be of importance (Maree, 2007; Yin, 2018).

Stake (1995), Nieuwenhuis, (2007b) and Yin (2018) suggest that a case study can be effectively used to place boundaries to focus the aim of research. A case study can be bounded in the following ways: by time and place (Creswell, 2013), by time and activity (Stake, 1995), and by classification and context (Yin, 2018).

For this research study, I chose a single, instrumental, bounded case study to strengthen my understanding of the complex phenomenon of authorial voice in master's dissertations, written and published during 2018 and 2019 at a South African HEI. My reason for choosing a single case study was determined by my intention to gain an understanding of master's dissertation writers' understanding and perceptions of authorial voice during a limited period during my master's study. However, I also explored the academic writing genre for master's writing, for an understanding of the intricacies of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. In essence, the single case study, in contrast to a multiple case study, was beneficial in providing me with a rich description of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing within a limited period and in a cost-effective manner.

The case study design was relevant to this study for a few reasons. Firstly, the case study allowed for a close collaboration with the writers of the selected dissertations, especially when they shared their thoughts and feelings about their perception and use of voice in their writing. As a result, I was better able to understand the participants' reality of their use and understanding of authorial voice. Another strength of the case study design was its use for understanding complex phenomena, as in the case of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. Through the case study design I was able to more clearly understand the participants' perceptions of authorial voice and academic writing, as well as the types of authorial voice that were used in the selected master's dissertations. Furthermore, the case study design allows for multiple sources of information. Through the combination of different data collection methods, a single case study can be approached from different angles and the different types of information can be triangulated (Yin, 2018). The confirmation of findings from different perspectives can be gained through triangulation. For this study, triangulation was conducted through a detailed literature review, an interpretive text analysis of the discussion section of selected master's dissertations and the semi-structured interviews with four of the writers of selected master's dissertations.

However, a case study research design may also have significant disadvantages (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). For instance, it may not be possible to generalise the findings from this study to all other masters' dissertations written in other academic departments and in other academic institutions. In addition, there was the risk of the data collection and analysis being biased as the data were gathered and analysed by one person only. However, bias can be

prevented in the following ways. Firstly, it can be prevented by an appropriate, rigorous methodology design and application. Another method of preventing bias in this research study was through the practice of crystallisation (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a; (Cohen et al., 2011), where a validation group comprising of two critical readers validated the research study: the supervisor of this study and a postgraduate colleague.

In essence, a case study method has more strengths than weaknesses for a qualitative research study. For this investigation, the case study method promoted a deeper understanding of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing by allowing for a searching, in-depth description of the case. A case study method is most suitable when the researcher's aim is to acquire a more holistic perspective of a phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). The single, instrumental case study method was an ideal choice for this study, as I explored the manifestation of authorial voice within the specific context of master's dissertation writing, where the findings may be useful to view the broader genre of academic writing and identity for postgraduate writing.

Following on this discussion of the single, instrumental case study for a qualitative study, an explanation of the sampling method, size and site is presented next.

### **3.4.2 Sampling**

The procedure of selecting a population for a research study is the sampling process (Mertens, 2015). Sampling is conducted in order to obtain the best and strongest data source in support of the investigation of the research study (Babbie, 2010). Different types of sampling are possible for qualitative research. The first two types are probability (random) and non-probability (purposive) sampling (Cohen et al., 2011). For probability sampling, all members of the population who are randomly drawn have equal opportunities for selection, which may lead to findings that are more accurate. This type of sampling is useful if the researcher's aim is to generalise for seeking representativeness of a larger population (Cohen et al., 2011). A non-probability or purposive sample is a specifically selected segment of a wider population. This is usually a small-scale sample for small-scale research that is not intended for the purpose of generalisation (Creswell, 2013). Non-probability sampling is the sample method of choice for case study research. For these reasons, non-probability sampling was chosen for this qualitative research study.

Several forms of non-probability sampling can be conducted, such as convenience sampling, purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Convenience or opportunity sampling occurs through the choice of the nearest subjects who are easily accessible and available. This sampling cannot be used for generalisation and is usually suitable for case studies (Cohen et

al., 2011). For purposive sampling, a frequent feature of qualitative research, the researcher purposefully selects the respondents based on their possessing specific necessary qualities for the research study (Creswell, 2013). The individuals are chosen because they have experience of the phenomenon being explored. Snowball sampling is used when researchers select a small number of suitable individuals whose social networks are used for the identification of other suitable individuals who would qualify for the research study (Maree, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011).

In order to understand the complex phenomenon of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing, I used non-probability, purposive and convenience sampling for the selection of the participants, as they were considered to be most fit for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon and responding to the research questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a; Merriam, 2009). For the use of non-probability, purposive sampling, the researcher must make informed decisions about who or what would form the sample, the type of sampling that would occur and the number of individuals or sites necessary for sampling (Creswell, 2013). The non-probability sampling for this study was both purposive and convenient. Purposive sampling was used because the selected master's dissertations and interview participants were purposefully selected based on particular traits for this study to "provide the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b, p. 79). Only master's dissertations were chosen for examination because the purpose of this study was the investigation of authorial voice in the discussion section of selected master's dissertations. This research study was an investigation of how authorial voice was developed in master's dissertation writing. Furthermore, this was a convenience sample because I was a student in the same department where the dissertations were easily accessed from the institutional repository. This sample was also determined by my available time and resources, as participants were limited to master's dissertations and master's dissertation writers from a particular period at a specific HEI.

#### *3.4.2.1 Research site*

A research site that is suitable for the specific type of research must be selected for a rigorous research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). Creswell (2013) suggests that, especially in qualitative research, the research site should be easily accessible to the researcher to bridge the gap between practice and theory.

This research study was based in an academic department at a South African HEI. Throughout this research study, I was also engaged in teaching undergraduate academic literacy and I was registered as a master's student in the same department. Creswell (2013:151) cautions against introducing an imbalance in power by studying in one's "backyard", as the researcher

could suffer repercussions from the institutional management in the advent of unfavourable findings. Since my focus was on investigating the perceptions and practice of authorial voice in master's dissertations, my study would not draw scrutiny from the institutional management for any perceived attack on workplace authority.

The specific department was deliberately chosen for a few reasons. For practicality and accessibility, the dissertations that were examined in this study originated from one department from a university in South Africa. Next, this relevant department houses research in the same field as this dissertation: education and language studies. Thirdly, my dissertation fulfilled the conditions for a master's degree in the same department. Additionally, if I had selected dissertations from several departments and different faculties, it would have been necessary to discuss the different academic writing practices of different disciplines that exist throughout the university. While this would have afforded a rich research opportunity, it would have been outside the scope of this research study. Lastly, I do understand some of the academic writing requirements for this department, as my work experience has focused on language studies, particularly in academic writing and English education.

#### *3.4.2.2. Sample size*

Maree (2007) suggests that the sample size should be determined by the nature of the research study. Both Creswell (2013) and Yin (2018) agree that between one and four samples are appropriate for a case study. For this research study, two sample sets were chosen to explore authorial voice in master's dissertation writing.

The first sample set consisted of data from eleven successfully completed master's dissertations from a population of 23 that were identified and drawn from the institutional repository for selection based on the following inclusion criteria. Firstly, the master's dissertations were published in 2018 and 2019, the most recent dissertations available in the department of the relevant HEI of at the inception of the research study. Secondly, they were easily accessible from the repository of the specific HEI. Thirdly, these studies were published in English. These texts were not purposively selected based on the quality and length of texts. Table 3.1 presents a brief description of the analysis code, subject of study and length of text for the eleven dissertations that were selected for this research study.

**Table 3.1 Description of selected master's dissertations**

| Dissertation | Title                                      | Number of pages:<br>discussion section |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| D1           | British mathematics textbooks              | 16                                     |
| D2           | Autism                                     | 18                                     |
| D3           | Grade 6 mathematics education              | 56                                     |
| D4           | Senior level athletics in South Africa     | 11                                     |
| D5           | Music education in private primary schools | 15                                     |
| D6           | Physical education by Grade R teachers     | 28                                     |
| D7           | Dysfunctional school culture               | 12                                     |
| D8           | Beginner teachers' perceptions             | 30                                     |
| D9           | Implementation of CPTD system              | 14                                     |
| D10          | Adult education                            | 15                                     |
| D11          | Second language acquisition                | 16                                     |

For the second sample set, I conducted semi-structured online interviews with some of the writers of the selected master's dissertations who responded to the interview invitation. For this purpose, this sample set comprised of four interview participants who were writers of four of the selected 11 dissertations from the first sample. The writers of all 11 selected master's dissertations were invited to be interviewed. However, only four of the 11 dissertation writers responded to the invitation to be interviewed. As a result, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with four writers. Table 3.2 provides an indication of some biographical information of the interview participants.

**Table 3.2 List of interview participants**

| Participant (P) | Field of master's study                             | Duration of master's degree | Registered for PhD studies | Type of study       | Home language |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| P1              | Early Childhood Education                           | 2017-2018                   | Yes                        | Auto-ethnography    | Afrikaans     |
| P2              | Humanities Education                                | 2016-2018                   | No                         | Single case study   | Setswana      |
| P3              | Curriculum and Instructional Design and Development | 2017-2018                   | Yes                        | Single case study   | Afrikaans     |
| P4              | Early Childhood Education                           | 2017-2018                   | No                         | Multiple case study | English       |

### 3.5 Data collection

Data collection and data analysis tend to occur simultaneously in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). Creswell (2013) states that qualitative researchers often use specific data collection methods such as documents, questionnaires, observations, and interviews. These data collection methods allow the researcher to understand the specific context within which the participants operate, as well as the influence of the context on the phenomenon being explored (Babbie, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Typically, qualitative data collection methods focus on small samples that enable a rich, deep exploration of the phenomenon under study. Instead of data being collected from large samples that are then aggregated to other similar contexts or samples, the small samples obtained through qualitative data collection methods enable emphases on the analysis of the individuality of these small samples (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). The qualitative data collection methods used for this study were chosen specifically for understanding how voice was understood and implemented in a natural context.

For this case study research design, I used two methods of data collection: documents for analysis and semi-structured interviews. The document analysis tool was used to generate data for SRQ2 to determine the strategies that master's students used to indicate authorial voice in dissertation writing. The semi-structured interviews were chosen to gather data to answer RO1 to explore master's students' understanding of authorial voice. In this way, it was possible to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of voice from the participants' point of view (Rule & John, 2011; Yin, 2018) and so answer the research questions. Table 3.3 provides a summary of the research phases, research sub-questions, research objectives and data collection sets.

**Table 3.3 Summary of research phases, sub-questions, objectives and data collection sets**

| Research phase | Research sub-question                                                                   | Research objective                                                                                          | Data collection set                 |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1              | How do master's students understand the concept of authorial voice?                     | To explore master's students' understanding of authorial voice.                                             | Semi-structured interviews          |
| 2              | What strategies do master's students use to develop their own types of authorial voice? | To determine some strategies that master's students use to indicate authorial voice in their dissertations. | Discussion section of dissertations |

|   |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 3 | What guidance is available to help master's students develop their authorial voice? | To describe the guidance that master's students may receive in developing authorial voice in their dissertations. | Literature on authorial voice |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|

The qualitative methods of data collection allow for inductive reasoning where the theory is supported by the data collection (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b; Roulston, 2013). These data collection tools were used to obtain trustworthy and accurate data (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). The aim of using multiple tools for this study was to prevent and reduce bias that may arise by using one data collection method only (Cohen et al., 2011). Also, the use of multiple tools allowed for triangulation, which is a necessary strategy in interpretive qualitative research for ensuring trustworthiness (Cohen et al., 2011). Each of these methods was suitable for qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2009).

### 3.5.1 Documents for data analysis

Qualitative studies often use documents as data collection methods (Creswell, 2009; Cohen et al., 2001). Documents are valuable and more effective than other data collection methods as they reveal the language and thoughts of participants when the participants are not present. Also, documents are inexpensive and more easily accessible. This data collection method is consistent with a case study research design. Documents such as policies and gazettes are tangible materials in which facts or ideas have been recorded. For this study, however, the documents comprised the discussion sections of 11 master's dissertations from a department at a South African HEI. The data gathered from the discussion sections of the dissertations that were analysed, allowed me to gain a rich understanding of authorial voice and were useful in determining some strategies that master's students use to indicate authorial voice in their dissertations.

The analysis of the discussion sections of the dissertations served as a primary method of data collection and was supported by the collection of data from the semi-structured interviews. These documents served as a real reflection of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing at a specific place and point in time.

The 11 master's dissertations were available in the public domain, in the public repository of the relevant university. Every dissertation was uploaded to the institutional repository after the degree had been awarded. For this reason, the dissertations were easily accessible without requiring any special application for their use. Each dissertation was accessed and downloaded from the repository and saved in MS Word format on my computer.

### 3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a favoured data collection tool for qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). The purpose of interviews in qualitative studies is to allow for a more searching, thorough investigation of the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2018). According to Rule and John (2011), interviews allow for a guided two-way conversation where the researcher can acquire more insight into the participants' world and perceptions of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Interviews are significant data collection tools for qualitative research because they allow the researcher to perceive the world through the participants' expressions of reality.

However, Cohen et al. (2011) caution that the researcher must be mindful that, firstly, the interview is also a social encounter and not only an information gathering site. Secondly, an interview has a potential for bias that must be acknowledged and controlled.

Rule and John (2011) describe three categories of interviews. Structured interviews are tightly organised and allow little deviation from the predetermined interview schedule, while unstructured interviews do not have pre-planned questions. The third type of interview, the semi-structured interview, is more suitable for a case study approach that attempts to capture an in-depth examination of a small research study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b; Rule & John, 2011). The epistemological and ontological paradigms for this research study determined the semi-structured interview type for this interpretive qualitative study (Mertens, 2015). The semi-structured interviews were beneficial for this research study for the following seven reasons:

1. Semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility and less formality than structured interviews, but they offer the benefit of the structure of a structured interview which facilitates an easier comparison of coded responses.
2. The researcher is aided by the structure of the semi-structured interview questions in order to keep the interview as well as the participants focused on the main ideas of the study.
3. The researcher is allowed better access to the participants' perspectives as semi-structured interviews offer the participants a suitable medium to share their perceptions and experience on voice and dissertation writing (Creswell, 2013).
4. Through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher is better able to prompt the participants towards fuller responses, especially with regard to a complex phenomenon such as authorial voice.
5. Through a semi-structured interview, the participants' language use is significant in gaining attitudinal information that provides insight into their perceptions and experiences of voice and master's dissertation writing.

6. Semi-structured interviews generate rich data that can be analysed in different ways.
7. Lastly, with semi-structured interviews, the researcher is able to explain questions in instances where the interviewees do not understand the questions.

The interview schedule for the semi-structured interview was constructed at the stage of my reading for and working on the proposal for this study. My reading of the seminal research on authorial voice and academic writing (Elbow, 1994; Clark & Ivanič, 2001; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Hyland, 2002a; Hyland, 2002b; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Blommaert, 2008) shaped the composition of the interview questions that were focused on the writing of the participant's dissertations, academic writing and authorial voice. Later, these questions were revisited during my writing of the literature review. Thereafter, the questions were discussed critically with my supervisor and edited accordingly. Before I started the formal process of online interviews with the four participants, I conducted one pilot interview with a master's student who was not part of the selected sample to practise my interviewing approach. This useful pilot interview afforded me the opportunity to refine the 20 interview questions (cf. Addendum B) and my role as interviewer during the interviewing process.

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled after the questions had been finalised. All 11 of the selected dissertation writers were sent email invitations to be interviewed. However, only four of the dissertation writers voluntarily responded to the email invitations. One reason for only four writers responding to the initial interview invitation was due to the fact that some writers had changed contact details and could not be contacted. Also, two writers cited work pressure as a reason for not agreeing to be interviewed. Although this was a small sample, the interviews were lengthy, in-depth and provided rich data.

In the initial communication with the potential interview participants, the following were provided: the purpose of the study, the length of time for the interview, the benefits of the research, the researcher's and supervisor's contact details and an assurance of the confidentiality of all information received, including the fact that participation would remain voluntary and anonymous. An additional criterion was that the participants had to respond to the interview questions in English.

While interviews can be conducted in various ways (face-to-face, telephonically, via email, in a group, video calls), I had initially envisaged conducting face-to-face and online video interviews depending on where the participants resided. In-person face-to-face interviews are regarded as offering the best quality of participant and interviewer experience in qualitative research (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010). However, as there is marginal difference between in-person face-to-face and video-call interviews (Krouwel, Jolly, & Greenfield, 2019), the use of

video calls was further justified due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown which prevented face-to-face interviews. Consequently, four online Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate video interviews were scheduled via email. I scheduled one-hour appointments with each participant at mutually suitable times. Upon the four writers accepting the invitation to be interviewed, they had to submit written informed consent before the interview. Addendum A indicates the standardised letter.

In order to enable the participants to familiarise themselves with the interview questions, the interview questions were sent to them in advance. This was a necessary step as the phenomenon of authorial voice is a complex construct and a few years had passed since the participants had completed their dissertations. The participants were advised to refer to the interview questions during the interview.

Each interview began with an introduction to the research topic and the aim of the interview. I requested that each participant confirm his or her consent to be interviewed. I also reaffirmed the confidentiality of the interview by assuring each participant of anonymity, by removing any information from the transcripts that may lead to identification. Each participant was reminded that he or she could refuse to either answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any stage. Thereafter, the participant's permission was requested to record the interview. Twenty semi-structured questions were discussed in interviews of one hour with each participant to gain an understanding of their perceptions and experiences of academic writing and authorial voice in dissertation writing. For backup, informal handwritten notes were taken during the interview sessions (Creswell, 2009). Both Blackboard Collaborate and Microsoft Teams are useful online interview platforms with distinct advantages (Krouwel et al., 2019). However, the interaction between interviewer and participant may be somewhat stilted and may result in less rapport and trust, due to a lack of access to personal contact and body language cues (Seitz, 2016).

Throughout the interviews, I avoided sharing my personal opinions with the interviewees so that their responses were not unduly influenced. However, the informal notes that I made during the interview process to record my initial perceptions and thoughts did contribute to the analysis of the data and the presentation of the findings. The recordings of the interviews and the informal notes added value and facilitated the trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Rule & John, 2011).

I elected to gather data through semi-structured interviews with the master's writer participants, in order to respond to the first research question. Through these interviews, I gained an insight into the participants' first-hand experiences about their understanding of authorial voice. As a result, I not only analysed the master's dissertation texts, but I also

acquired insider perspectives and beliefs on voice and academic writing. Interviews are a quicker route to directly access the participants' experience and perceptions of the phenomena being explored.

## **3.6 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is underpinned by an interpretive paradigm that contributes towards the examination of meaningful and symbolic qualitative data (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Data analysis must be based on the researcher's in-depth understanding of the data (Roulston, 2013). A significant function of qualitative data analysis is to allow the important themes that organise the data to reveal research findings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). The researcher engages in a continuous learning process, as he or she must use his or her intuition, insight and impressions to understand the data. The data analysis process is non-linear as all facets of the data collection, sorting, analysis and interpretation are intricately interwoven (Nieuwenhuis, 2007c). The data organisation and analysis for this study is elaborated on further in the next sections.

### **3.6.1 Data organisation**

In this research study, I examined two sets of data, each underpinned by a discrete research sub-question that necessitated a specific method of analysis that contributed towards answering the overarching question. Throughout the study, the management and tracking of different data types was necessary for the organisation of the data and a continuous rigorous analytic process.

The data collected from the document analysis and semi-structured interviews were organised in their specific sets. The first step in data organisation is the classification of the data where written and spoken words are captured as typed documents (De Jager, 2012), which makes it easier for electronic storage.

#### ***3.6.1.1 Data organisation for document analysis***

The discussion sections of 11 selected dissertations were analysed for authorial voice. The selected dissertations were downloaded from the institutional repository and saved as MS Word documents for easier handling. Thereafter, the discussion section from each dissertation was selected, copied and saved as separate MS Word documents in a new folder. In those dissertations where the results and discussions sections were merged into one chapter, I extracted only the discussion section, the section in which the interpretation and significance of the findings were discussed. Altogether, 20 different folders containing the 11 texts were

created for analysis. Each folder represented one linguistic construct based on Ivanič and Camp's (2001) voice typology. For example, all 11 texts were stored in one folder labelled "Personal Pronouns" for the analysis of the linguistic construct of personal pronouns (cf. Addendum E).

The process of data analysis began with the coding of each discussion section. Firstly, the personal details were deleted from each of the documents to ensure the writers' anonymity. Next, each discussion section was assigned a code comprising of the letter "D", which was the abbreviation for "dissertation" and a number from one to eleven. Also, features such as direct quotations, figures and tables, footnotes and bibliographies were excluded from the text analysis.

### *3.6.1.2 Data organisation for semi-structured interviews*

For the first research sub-question, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the master's writer participants. Each interview was recorded with the participant's consent and the recording of the video was saved electronically. The online video interview recordings were stored electronically in both MP4 and MP3 format to facilitate the transcription process. The personal details of all participants were deleted to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Instead, each transcription was labelled with the letter "P" for "participant" and a number from one to four.

To ensure that the data were accurately captured, all the interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word text. The transcription was done for each interview with the aid of the transcript function in Microsoft Office. Roulston (2013) states that research interviews may be regarded as being socially constructivist as the interviewee is the focus of the analysis and the interviewee's responses are co-constructed by the interviewer. For this qualitative study, the verbal research was captured in written form through transcription (Kowal & O'Connell, 2013). A literary transcription was conducted so that the differences in pronunciation were also captured meaningfully by the researcher through repeated reference to the voice recordings of the interview for verification. Kowal and O'Connor (2013) maintain that correlation must exist between the recordings and the transcriptions. As a result, the interview recordings were minimally adjusted for the transcriptions. The transcription began with the first interview question and ended with the participants' response to the last interview question. The preamble and postamble were not transcribed. Some editing and tidying up of the text were necessary in the following ways. Firstly, unnecessary affirmations and interjections such as *er*, *um* and *OK* were discarded. Also, deviations from the themes of the discussion were indicated by the use of the ellipsis (...). Additionally, confidentiality was maintained by replacing names and other distinguishing references with (\*\*\*). Lastly, long repetitive text that

added to the word count was removed or summarised, without altering the meaning of the original text. Ultimately, balance was maintained by staying as true to the text as possible (Kowal & O'Connell, 2013).

I listened to the recordings and read the transcripts several times, with the aim of acquiring a deep understanding of the data (Maree 2010). Memoing (the act of recording reflective notes) was another useful process that I used to immerse myself in the data. This daily process of recording ideas and insights from the research process can generate data for analysis and help in the recognition of patterns in the data (Maree, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011).

### 3.6.2 Analysis

For the process of analysis, the collected data were summarised and examined in specific ways to identify meanings, patterns and themes. For the text analysis, the discussion sections of the master's dissertations were analysed using of Ivanič and Camp's (2001) Voice Typology. The collected data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed by identifying words and phrases which were organised through themes and sub-themes (cf. Addendum F) (Ivankova et al., 2007; Creswell, 2013). Figure 3.1 shows the research design steps for this study.

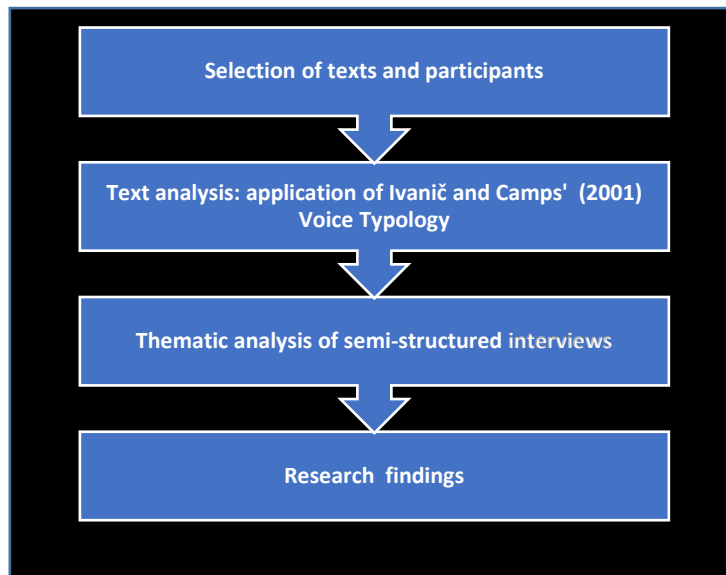


**Figure 3.1 Concept map of the research design**

#### 3.6.2.1 Coding

The findings and results for any research study are the products of deliberate and systematic analysis and interpretation. For this process, the most important elements from the data gathered through transcripts and documents need to be identified and then written up logically and coherently to answer the research questions and provide significant insights (Miles,

Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The process of turning qualitative data into a coherent interpretation depends on coding. Coding, the first stage of analysis, is the procedure of identifying meaningful segments of meaning in data and marking them with a code (Saldana, 2016). Coding has significant advantages for qualitative studies (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Firstly, coding ensures a deep immersion in the data and renders the analysis and interpretation of the findings more transparent. Next, data becomes more accessible and retrievable through coding. Thirdly, the sorting and structuring of the data is easier. Lastly, it ensures transparency and validity (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). Basic codifying involves a streamlined process as illustrated in Figure 3.2 (Saldana, 2016, p. 13).

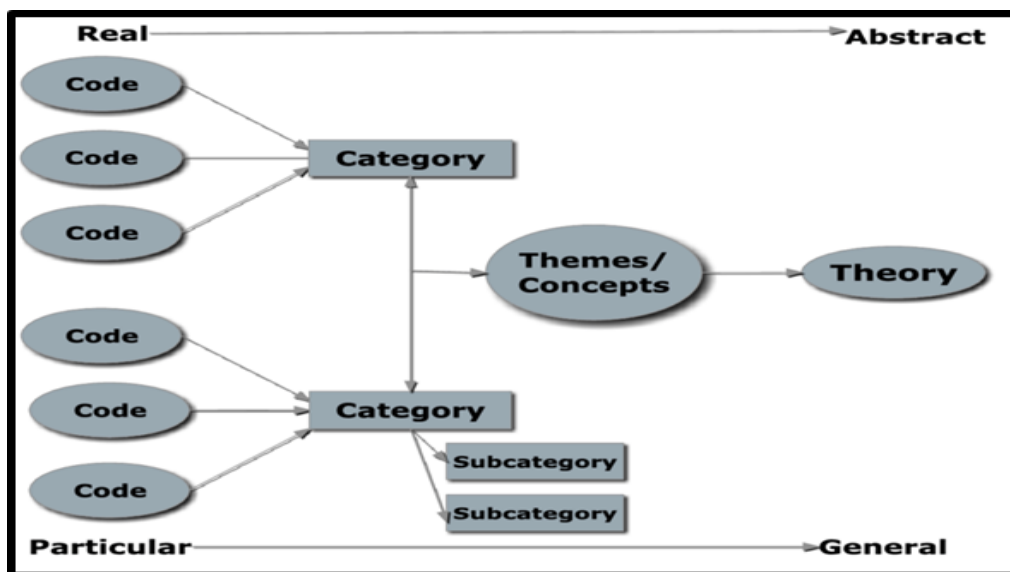


**Figure 3.2 A streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry**

Coding may occur deductively and inductively. Deductive coding involves the researcher capturing the essence of the data by detecting patterns and categorising data (Saldana, 2016) based on pre-defined codes (Miles et al., 2014). This type of coding is useful as it helps to focus on those issues that are known to be important in the relevant literature for the study. For this reason, deductive coding was used for the text analysis. Inductive coding occurs when codes are created from the data through the use of words and phrases used by the participants (Saldana, 2016). For the thematic analysis of the data generated through the interviews with the master's writer participants, deductive and inductive coding were used.

Qualitative researchers do not agree about how much data should be coded. Saldana (2016) advocates that only the most significant parts of the data should be coded, while other researchers believe that all collected data should be coded in case significant data are lost (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). Saldana (2016) suggests that up to half of the

data can be summarised or omitted to focus on the most significant parts for a detailed analysis. As a result of the collected data for this research study being so large, I followed the recommendation of using the most significant data for analysis of both data sets.

### 3.6.2.2 *Analysis of texts*

The discussion sections of the 11 selected dissertations were analysed. According to Basturkmen (2009), the generic expectations of a discussion section is that the research study must be placed in context, the study's significance must be extended and new questions must be identified. It is expected that the discussion section, which is regarded as more evaluative, may provide more evidence of authorial voice because the description and interpretation of the results must be convincing to readers. It is in this section that the writer must indicate how the results of the research study contribute to and integrate with the existing disciplinary literature (Basturkmen, 2012).

For the first data set, the text analysis, I initially considered the use of a Computer-assisted Qualitative Software Program (Cone) such as ATLAS.ti for the identification of the linguistic choices made by the writers of the selected dissertations. ATLAS.ti would have been useful to manage the data, the coding, classification, extraction as well as the conceptualisation stages of the analysis. Although ATLAS.ti is a valuable tool in the initial processes of data analysis, I would still have had to interpret the findings provided by the ATLAS.ti analysis. For this reason, I decided to do the analysis manually so that I could become completely immersed in the data to draw more accurate conclusions. Also, I was able to focus more on interpreting the data than on tinkering with the interesting, but perhaps not immediately relevant features that ATLAS.ti may have offered. Additionally, Saldana (2013) recommends that coding can be done manually on hard-copy printouts which allows for a deeper reflection. Manual coding facilitates a deeper understanding of the participants and the phenomenon being studied, as the researcher repeatedly interacts with the data (Miles et al., 2014; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Manual coding may also prevent the lack of depth and focus that could result from using coding software (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

Roulston (2013) advises that the researcher reorganise the data through coding and categorisation. This process entails reading, reflecting, rereading, writing and rereading so that ideas can be connected to create main ideas from different categories. In this way, the trustworthiness of the data analysis process can be increased.

This section of the data analysis involved the application of the voice typology outlined by Ivanič and Camps (2001) for examining a master's writer's authorial voice in the discussion section of the selected dissertations (cf. Table 2.1.). A deductive coding approach was applied in this study by the use of Ivanič and Camps (2001) Voice Typology. Defining a category can

be very abstract; however, for this research study, the constructs outlined in Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology helped in coding and categorisation. The linguistic constructs which became the descriptive codes for the data analysis of the discussion sections were taken from the macro-functions described in Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology and took the form of specific linguistic features for each of the three macro-functions. The interpretive codes, also drawn from Ivanič and Camp's (2001) study, were categorised as authorial voice types. I borrowed these authorial voice types, which are regarded as ready-made by the academic community (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). This list is shown in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Authorial voice types based on Ivanič & Camps' (2001) Voice Typology**

| Ideational                    | Interpersonal        | Textual                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Interested-in-the-field voice | Confident/bold voice | Academic literacy voice  |
| Knowledgeable voice           | Uncertain voice      | Plain English voice      |
| Professional voice            | Authoritative voice  | Reader-considerate voice |
| Managerial voice              | Neutral voice        |                          |
| Opinion-holder voice          | Self-aware voice     |                          |
| Knowledge-as-objective voice  |                      |                          |
| Knowledge-as-personal voice   |                      |                          |
| Critical voice                |                      |                          |

I identified the linguistic choices made by the writers of the selected dissertations through manual coding. Thereafter, I interpreted these linguistic choices by mapping them onto Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology and made inferences regarding their significance to the study. Finally, I grouped the inferences into categories and emerging themes to make interpretations regarding their significance to authorial voice.

### 3.6.2.3 *Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews*

The second stage of analysis was a thematic analysis of the selected writers' responses in the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were used as a data-gathering method to establish the writers' social and academic contexts as well as to analyse how these factors may have influenced their dissertation writing and use of authorial voice. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007b), the purpose of using semi-structured interviews in a study is to corroborate the data that is gathered through another source; in this case, the data gathered from the interviews complemented the data gathered from the document analysis. My intention was to gain a deeper perspective on the participants' understanding and use of authorial voice in the writing of their dissertations.

The data gathered from the interviews were analysed with the use of Creswell's (2013) seven-step systematic data analysis approach. The raw data were recorded, transcribed and prepared for analysis. Firstly, the data were read several times so that they became familiar. Thereafter, the data were thematically coded through the use of descriptive terms. Then, the thematic codes were categorised. While the main themes were deductively coded, sub-themes emerged from the data through inductive analysis (cf. Addendum F).

Thereafter, significant words and phrases were identified, which were then organised into themes and sub-themes (Ivankova et al., 2007). In order to facilitate my insight into and analysis of the writers' perceptions and use of authorial voice, I identified significant linguistic structures, patterns and themes (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A blend of both deductive and inductive coding was used in the data analysis of the semi-structured interviews. Patterns "...demonstrate habits, salience and importance in people's daily lives" (Saldana, 2016, p. 6); for this reason, the identification of patterns makes findings more trustworthy.

Thematic analysis holds some advantages. Data analysed through thematic analysis were categorised in themes and sub-themes, which made comparison and contrast possible. Another advantage of thematic analysis is that the data can be reduced and simplified. Moreover, thematic analysis allows researchers to structure the qualitative data in a manner in which the research objectives can be accomplished. However, thematic analysis does allow for human error, as there is the risk of researchers misinterpreting the data gathered. As a result, false and unreliable conclusions may be made. It is at this point that member-checking may be useful to prevent incorrect assumptions and conclusions being made.

A code frame, as captured in Figure 3.3., was used to present the findings of the qualitative thematic analysis. The code frame consisted of the four main themes and the 10 sub-themes that were presented in the participants' exact words, which were the focus of my interpretations. These themes were interpreted for drawing conclusions as well as to highlight the significance of the research study.

| Your dissertation                                                                                                                                        | Academic community support                                                                                                | Academic writing                                                                                                      | Authorial voice                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Choice of topic</li> <li>•Qualities of good disseration</li> <li>•Personal belief evident in research</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Academic relationship with supervisor</li> <li>•Other academic support</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Academic English proficiency</li> <li>•Academic English challenges</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Understanding voice</li> <li>• Types of voices</li> <li>• Creating voice</li> </ul> |

**Figure 3.3 Themes and sub-themes for thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews**

### 3.7 Trustworthiness

Although the aim of this empirical qualitative study was the exploration of the phenomenon of authorial voice in master's dissertations, I cannot claim to be impartial. I do recognise that the findings may inevitably be selective in the interpretation of the data collected for this study. Although the nature of this research study and my worldview inevitably make this study subjective, it is accepted as characteristic of a qualitative study – that we are co-constructors of knowledge. While the rate of qualitative research has increased over the past few decades, there is still much discussion on the challenges of confirming its validity or trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013). However, there is general agreement that the rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative studies must be established, resulting in much literature on this issue (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Crotty, 1998; Kowal & O'Connell, 2013; Creswell, 2014). As a result of the difference in the criteria for the evaluation of quantitative and qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recognise the need and propose the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research.

The quality of interpretive research studies is carefully regulated by rigorous standards (Taylor & Medina, 2013). The trustworthiness of a study is extremely important in any research. In qualitative research where data are interpreted based on the research questions, subjectivity may taint the data analysis. While it is necessary that a qualitative researcher becomes deeply immersed in research in a real-world setting (Patton, 2002), it must be demonstrated that the study is credible. In qualitative research, "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). It is, therefore, the researcher's ability and effort that determines the credibility of a qualitative study. My analysis of the data and subsequent conclusions were subject to the considerations that are associated with qualitative research. These include an understanding of multiple realities and participants being co-constructors of knowledge. As a result, I considered their views to guide my interpretation of the findings. Creswell and Miller (2000) describe the trustworthiness of a study as being the degree of the researcher's accuracy in representing the participants' realities of the social phenomena being studied. The criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were used to establish the trustworthiness of the qualitative data generated in this research study.

#### 3.7.1 Credibility

Creswell and Miller (2000) state that the choice of procedures to ensure credibility in a study is governed by two perspectives: the lens the researcher chooses to validate the study and the researcher's paradigmatic assumptions. The lens that was used for this qualitative study

was based on my interpretation of the responses of the people who participated in the study. To establish credibility, researchers must ensure that the selection of the research participants has been accurately identified and described (Elo et al., 2014) and the gathering of data, the setting and themes are portrayed through rich, thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013). The term “thick description” originated with Gilbert Ryle, a British metaphysical philosopher, who explained the word as involving a deep understanding of and being completely immersed in a context or phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2006). As a result of these accurate, detailed, descriptions, readers will be able to establish credibility by being drawn into the text and by being better able to understand and make inferences about the findings. In this study, I have provided rich, thick and accurate descriptions so that readers are able to understand the participants’ heterogeneous, complex experiences and perceptions of authorial voice without compromising anonymity (Ponterotto, 2006). Significantly, for this socio-constructive, qualitative research study, the thick descriptions also entailed accurate descriptions and interpretations of the participants’ social actions within the academic community.

### **3.7.2 Transferability**

Transferability is the second component in ensuring trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is described as the degree to which the data can be extrapolated and conveyed to other environments (Elo et al., 2014). For case study methods especially, markers of quality assurance will vary according to the specific requirements for each case (Yin, 2018). Nieuwenhuis (2007c) advises that the case must contain some meaning and value for other researchers, consequently, making transferability possible. For this study, I tried to interpret and convey the results and subsequent findings from the text analysis and semi-structured interviews in a trustworthy way.

### **3.7.3 Dependability**

Trustworthiness was also ensured through dependability, which is the measure of how stable the data remains over time and different situations. The constancy of the research process will determine the dependability of a study. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Elo et al., 2014). To ensure dependability, I attempted a clear description of the criteria for all the phases and processes.

### **3.7.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability, another step in ensuring trustworthiness, may be described as the neutrality of the researcher throughout the research study. While it is expected that qualitative studies include subjectivity and bias (Maree, 2007), the credibility of a study should not be

compromised (Creswell, 2013). Especially for a case study, the results and interpretation must be supported by the findings that match the data (Elo et al., 2014). Confirmability is also maintained through the accurate representation of the participants' responses and the researcher's accurate description, reporting and interpretation of the data. In order to ensure the confirmability of my study, I remained focused on the content and my supervisor continuously monitored my progress. I also made notes of my thought processes to facilitate the interpretation of the findings based on the data (Miles et al., 2014). This self-reflection process helped me to remain aware of bias that may affect the confirmability of my research study.

### **3.8 Crystallisation**

Another technique for controlling bias in a qualitative research study is crystallisation. This study was based on a constructivist paradigm, where the assumption is that knowledge, which is socially constructed, may change depending on the circumstances, resulting in several perceptions of one reality. Hence, crystallisation is necessary because it "provides us with a complex and deeper understanding of the phenomenon" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b, p. 81) and occurs when the researcher is deeply immersed in the data and reflects on the pertinent issues emanating from the data. For this practice, the researcher must offer supporting evidence that is gathered through more than one method, such as documents, interviews and observations (Merriam, 1998). For this study, a comprehensive literature review, text analysis as well as thematic analysis of interviews were used as sources for the crystallisation of the data.

This study was based on a qualitative paradigm where it is assumed that reality is socially constructed and that the participants' perceptions of the phenomena under investigation are different versions of reality. It is important to confirm the accuracy of the representation of the participants' realities. For this reason, member checking was practised (Nieuwenhuis, 2007c; Creswell & Miller, 2010); an activity which actively involved participants as co-constructors of knowledge in the research process, by requesting them to view, comment on, assess and verify the accuracy of the transcriptions after the data collection period. For example, participants were asked to comment on whether the transcriptions of the interviews were a correct representation of their personal experience of authorial voice. Nieuwenhuis (2007c) suggests that these checks be done formally and informally throughout the research study to enhance the credibility of the study.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), a study can be regarded as trustworthy if an audit trail is maintained. For this study, the audit trail comprised of the following procedures. Work in process was shared with two impartial peers, who were engaged in doctoral degrees in language studies and education, for reading and comment. In addition, my supervisor provided critical, objective feedback on all stages of the study. Additionally, the MEd Humanities Education cohort group, which comprises of supervisors and postgraduate students, met on a monthly basis for academic support and discussion of individual research studies where critical appraisal was made. Lastly, a professional editor, who helped to identify any remaining lack of credibility in the study, did a professional editing of the study.

Finally, the quality of this study was further enhanced by striving for detailed and rich description and a clear presentation. Additionally, the recording of data was conducted meticulously. Nieuwenhuis (2007b) suggests that the researcher keeps anecdotal records consisting of short descriptions of the research process. More detailed, sequential running records of observations that focus on actions and the context, and a structured observation record of predetermined actions or behaviours based on the literature should also be kept. The credibility of this study was increased by my following these record-keeping suggestions.

### **3.9 Ethical clearance**

This study was guided by the prescribed ethical principles of the relevant HEI. Two important issues were considered: the informed consent of the interview participants and the protection of the participants from any harm.

An application was made to the head of department and the dean of the faculty requesting permission to use master's dissertations from 2018 and 2019 (cf. Addendum A). Additionally, permission was needed to conduct interviews with the writers of the selected dissertations, since there was no public access to the students' contact details. Once this permission was received, an ethical clearance application was made to the Ethics Committee of the HEI for the research study to begin. After the ethical clearance had been granted (cf. Addendum B), the writers were contacted, informed about the nature of the study and invited to an interview (cf. Addendum C).

The following guidelines ensured that participants entered the research study voluntarily, understood the main ideas of the research study, as well as the risks and requirements that were involved. The gains that participants should experience from the study should be greater than any possible risk (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Firstly, participants were provided with detailed

verbal and written information about the purpose of the research study. Next, the risks involved in the study, such as the use of personal time to engage in the interviews, were presented. The participants' anonymity was ensured throughout the study as the participants were only referred to by pseudonyms. Additionally, they were apprised of their voluntary participation in the research study and about their option to withdraw at any time without any prejudice. Most importantly, the participants were protected by confidentiality being maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis processes. The contact details of the researcher and supervisor were shared with the participants. Each participant was invited to sign a letter of informed consent to participate in the study. Lastly, participant names were removed from all identifiable texts and the data were securely stored throughout the research process. Both the voice recordings and data transcriptions have been safely stored in the university's empirical data repository.

### **3.10 Limitations of the study**

Each study has limitations. Some factors may prove to limit the study and application of the research data. Firstly, it is possible that the Hawthorne effect may have influenced the participants' responses to the interview (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007). According to McCambridge et al. (2014, p. 247), "research activities may influence participant cognitions, emotions, and behaviour". The participants' behaviour may have altered due to their awareness of being studied. As a result, their responses to the semi-structured interview questions may have been affected due to new thinking about the concept of authorial voice, and may in turn have affected the findings of the study.

Furthermore, it is possible that due to the data being drawn from a self-selected population from one specific department at one university site, the findings of this study will not be generalisable outside of this context and participants. While the dissertations were easily collected from the public space of the institutional repository, I encountered more difficulty in contacting the writers of the dissertations for the interviews. Some of the writers had moved and changed addresses, thus considerably reducing the number of interview participants for the study to four. Although my corpus was relatively small, it was considered sufficient for the nature of this master's study. Notwithstanding the small corpus, the four participants' responses did provide rich data that afforded insightful feedback.

Another factor that may have been limiting is my lack of access to the examiners' final assessment feedback on the selected dissertations, which may indicate comment on the

authorial voice in the master's dissertations. Even so, with the solid audit trail and thick descriptions, the study can be replicated.

Next, the document analysis was interpretive and was limited by the researcher's views. Also, the sample size was small due to the limited number of dissertations which were available for selection from the specific academic department for the 2018 and 2019 cohorts. However, rich and thick descriptions, going deep and not broad, were made.

Another limitation may be the fact that this study only focused on dissertations of master's students from one department. Dissertations from other departments, faculties and universities were not included in this study; therefore, the conclusions from this study may not be easily extrapolated to all other dissertations. Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2014) urge that the researcher should be aware of delimiters that must be monitored throughout the study.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

In this qualitative research study, a descriptive case study design was used to examine authorial voice in the discussion section of master's dissertation. For this purpose, the research design, the data collection methods and data analysis were discussed. Additionally, the issues of rigour, difficulties, limitations and ethical considerations were examined. In Chapter 4, the analysis of the data is presented in two parts: the analysis of the discussion sections of the master's dissertations and the thematic analysis of the responses from the semi-structured interviews.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*“The chapter[s] that follow document the results of your fieldwork”* (Mouton, 2001:124).

### 4.1 Introduction

The early and recent emphasis on authorial voice in the academic writing academy is significant, as related in Chapter 2 (Elbow, 1973; Bakhtin, 1981; Clark & Ivanič, 2001; Ivanič, 2005; Hyland, 2002b; Hyland, 2013; Matsuda, 2015). The unabated interest in authorial voice is based on its importance in academic writing, especially for master’s dissertation writing where there is a need for independent research and critical analysis.

The methodology for this research study is outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 first presents the findings for the text analysis of the discussion sections of the 11 selected master’s dissertations and thereafter the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews held with four of the 11 dissertation writers. Next, the discussion section of this chapter presents an interpretation of the findings that were guided by the research question and sub-questions, the literature review and conceptual framework.

### 4.2 Findings of text analysis

I analysed the discussion sections of 11 selected dissertations for authorial voice in an attempt to respond to the second research sub-question of this study on the strategies that students use to develop their own authorial voice types. These written texts provided a rich source of information on the phenomenon of authorial voice in master’s dissertation writing. By applying Ivanič and Camps’ (2001) Voice Typology, I conducted a textual analysis of these texts, with the focus on the identification of authorial voice through specific linguistic items drawn from the ideational, interpersonal, and textual macro-functions (cf. Chapter 2). The data were analysed deductively as the themes and categories were drawn from Ivanič and Camps’ (2001) Voice Typology. The linguistic constructs that are the descriptive codes for the data analysis of the discussion sections were taken from the macro-functions described in Ivanič and Camps’ (2001) Voice Typology and took the form of specific linguistic features for each of the three macro-functions. The interpretive codes, also drawn from Ivanič and Camp’s (2001) study, were categorised as authorial voice types. I borrowed these authorial voice types (cf,

Table 3.4), which are regarded as ready-made by the academic community (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

Sections from the texts with relevant, underlined lexical features are discussed throughout this chapter. Only select data relevant to the research focus and question have been presented and discussed as all the codes could not be presented and discussed due to the limitations of the nature of the study. It would have been beyond the scope of this study with its limited time span to include all the data due to the large amount of data.

The manual description and coding for the text analysis occurred line-by-line at the sentence level. Not all direct quotations were included in this analysis. Each linguistic realisation was manually set out in different documents. The descriptive codes and the specific voice types were captured on the same text. Thereafter, the descriptive codes and the specific voice types were recorded in table format.

#### 4.2.1 Ideational positioning

Ideational positioning refers to the manner in which the writer uses certain voice-types that reflect the writer's personal ideas and perceptions of the world (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). These positions are indicated through the writer's specific linguistic use that determine the writer's authorial voice in the text. A depiction of the relationships and linguistic use linked to the ideational macro-function is presented in Table 4.1. Thereafter, each linguistic item or descriptive code is explained through the data.

**Table 4.1 Ideational macro-function**

| Type of positioning    | In relation to                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Linguistic relations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ideational positioning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different interests, objects of study, methodologies</li> <li>Different stances towards topics: values, preferences, beliefs</li> <li>Different views of knowledge making</li> </ul> | <p>1. Lexical choice in noun phrase</p> <p>1. Classificatory lexis<br/>2. Generic reference<br/>3. Evaluative lexis<br/>4. Syntactic choice</p> <p>1. Verb tense<br/>2. Verb type<br/>3. Reference to human agency<br/>4. Generic or specific reference<br/>5. First-person reference</p> |

#### 4.2.1.1 *Different interests, objects of study, methodologies*

According to Ivanič and Camps (2001), the writer's position is determined by fields of study, ideas, worldview, and different ideas and opinions on knowledge making. More simply put, the writer shows his or her interests through the choice of content in the text.

#### 4.2.1.2 *Lexical choice in noun phrase*

The use of specific lexical choice in noun phrases is an indication of the writers' aim at aligning with their specific academic fields as well as their interest in their subject matter. Through the use of subject specific lexis, the writer creates a voice that suggests knowledge, academic literacy and being an insider of the specific disciplinary field (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Some examples of academic lexis in noun phrases that were identified in the discussion sections are:

*English first language speaking learner (D1); challenges in communication (D2); governing body involvement (D4); micro-political perspectives (D7); and seamless progression (D10)*

Each of these noun phrases locate the writers within the group of people who are interested in their relevant fields. All 11 texts show evidence of lexical noun phrases which position the writers as being interested in their relevant fields, having insider-knowledge about their disciplines, and as insiders of the general academic discourse community.

The obvious affiliation to a specific discipline is evident in the following excerpt from D1 where the highlighted choice of noun phrases represents an alignment with the teacher education discourse community. These noun phrases appear frequently throughout D1 and suggest that the writer is an insider of the professional discourse community, an expert in the discipline as well as knowledgeable. Also, an educator voice is evident through the use of the highlighted noun phrases which are commonly used in the teaching and learning environment.

**(D1) Providing learning objectives at the beginning of every unit is sufficient when working with first language speakers, but when teaching EAL learners it would be more effective to state the learning objectives at the beginning of every exercise.**

Additionally, lexical noun use related to the academic community is evident in the following excerpt from D1. This use clearly indicates the author of D1 as having a knowledgeable voice, as one who has knowingly created an academic literate voice through specific lexical noun phrases related to academic writing to relate to other academic discourse members and to be part of this community.

**(D1) In this chapter I will marry the theoretical literature from Chapter 2 with the practical findings from Chapter 4. A formal evaluation of each section will be followed by practical recommendations.**

In the same vein, the analysis of noun phrases of all 11 texts also show evidence of the writers exhibiting an academically literate voice through the use of research terms.

(D4) *Four themes emerged from **the analysis of the data**.*

(D6) *Document analysis was another **data-collection method** that was used for **this study**.*

With these noun phrases, the writers firmly aligned themselves with the ethos of people who are engaged in these particular disciplines. The use of such lexis was deliberate as the writers intended to gain membership to specific communities.

#### 4.2.1.3. *Different stances towards topics: values, beliefs and preferences*

Ideational positioning is more than writers evincing particular interests and relating to specific fields of study. It also includes writers taking particular stances or attitudes towards their fields through the choice of classificatory lexis, generic reference, evaluative lexis, and syntax. These linguistic realisations were identified in each of the 11 texts and the writers' authorial voice type was determined.

#### 4.2.1.4 *Classificatory lexis*

Classificatory lexical terms are those adjectives that modify a noun attributively and represent the noun as belonging to a specific category or field. Through the use of classificatory lexis typical of their respective disciplinary fields, the writers aligned themselves with their fields. As a result, their voice types emerged as being expert, knowledgeable, professional, and academically literate (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). The following are instances of lexical items that were labelled as classificatory lexis.

(D3) *As indicated in **chapter 3**, the **empirical research** was essentially a **participatory action research study**, in an attempt to improve my **mathematics education practice** with my Grade 6 mathematics learners within **three consecutive reflective action research cycles**.*

(D6) *The participants in the first pair agreed that PE was an important part of the **Life Skills learning area**. They agreed that **gross motor skills** are integral in developing **pre-reading and pre-writing skills, fine motor skills and spatial awareness**.*

(D10) *These responses were compared to data obtained from interviews and **reflective tasks** in order to substantiate or dispute concepts and beliefs about **learner progression from AET level 4 to Grade 10 within correctional schools**.*

Additionally, each of the analysed texts revealed an academic voice type in the use of classificatory lexis typical of academic language. Also, the writers' repetition of the classificatory lexical devices throughout the texts resulted in the creation of a professional voice.

#### 4.2.1.5 Generic reference

Secondly, the writers' stance towards the topic can be illustrated with generic reference that refers to the use of specific nouns, noun phrases, and adjectives. These lexical items indicate constituents of a category of people, places, or things such as *learners*, *researchers*, *schools* and *textbooks*. As indicated in Table 4.2, common generic references were used frequently in all of the analysed texts.

**Table 4.2 Generic references**

| Generic references common to analysed texts |                      | Types of voice      |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| research study                              | data                 | Academic voice      |
| textbooks                                   | learners             | Knowledgeable voice |
| secondary schools                           | students             |                     |
| classrooms                                  | teachers             | Professional voice  |
| resources                                   | researcher           |                     |
| recommendations                             | participants         |                     |
| subject                                     | academic performance |                     |
| theory                                      | parents              |                     |
| process                                     | children             |                     |
| communication                               | culture              |                     |

The three significant voice types that were evident in the 11 texts with generic references like those indicated in Table 4.2 above, were the academic, professional and knowledgeable voice types (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). For example, in the following excerpts from D5 and D8, the use of the bold phrases indicate that academic and knowledgeable voice types are evident towards the fields of study.

**(D5)** This **participant** also indicated that some **parents** fail to support **PTA fund raising activities**, thus failure to support the **PTA activities** is caused by **lack of resources**.

**(D8)** ... the findings were related to how **beginner teachers** perceive themselves as **teachers** within the **schooling system** grounded upon the implementation of **school policies and classroom practices**...

#### 4.2.1.6 Evaluative lexis

Evaluation through linguistic means which indicates cognitive ability has been studied extensively (Hunston, 2007; Stewart, 2010). Lexical items that clearly represent a positive, negative or neutral writer stance on a topic are evaluative lexemes. Evaluative lexemes may take the form of adjectival phrases and words (**good** behaviour, **positive** reward systems, skills are **poor**, makes them **self-initiated**), nominals (*increases their **desire for learning***,

common **challenges**, **Grade 4 learner**) and adverbs (**merely stated**, **were dated correctly**, **who actually participated**). All of the analysed texts showed significant use of evaluative lexemes.

Different voice types are identifiable through the use of evaluative lexis in the various texts, which indicate the writers' position relative to their field of study. All texts show strong and frequent evidence of the manipulation of evaluative lexemes. For example, knowledgeable, strong opinion-holder and teacher voices are evident in the evaluative lexeme use in the excerpt from D3 as the writer nudges the reader towards accepting her substantiated argument with the help of loaded, connotative nominals:

(D3) *It is therefore not only the **transfer** of the curriculum that takes place within a classroom; it also includes the **controlling** of their **interactions**. We are trying to prepare **learners** for their **futures**, expecting of them to follow **value judgements** of what is **important** to know, but we cannot do that if learners cannot take **responsibility** for their **actions** and if they are not able to analyse a situation without **regurgitation**.*

In the following excerpt from D6, the writer evinces knowledgeable, assured and critical voice types in her observation of teacher practice through the use of the evaluative adverb, **vaguely**; the adjective, **unsure**; and the nominals, **terminology** and **importance**. The use of the lexis, **vaguely** and **unsure**, holds negative connotations, suggesting that the writer's opinion that a necessary proficiency in a very significant area of teaching practice is lacking.

(D6) *These teachers were **vaguely** aware of the **terminology** and areas that are developed during a **PE lesson** but they were **unsure** of the **importance** of the various areas.*

Finally, the writer of D7 was positioned as having a passionate and an interested-in-the-field voice types in the following excerpt. Through these voice types, she indicated a close involvement with and a personal interest in her field of study.

(D7) *The **magnitude** of the **challenge** soon ignited my **competitive** spirit. There was a **mammoth** job to be done. The **real test** of my **leadership ability** was about to unfold but I believed I had the **faith** that I could make a **difference**.*

#### 4.2.1.7 Syntactic choice

Syntactic choice is also important in constructing authorial voice in the manner in which the writers position themselves ideationally in relation to knowledge (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Writers may reflect varying degrees of authority, abstraction and formality or informality on their topic through syntactic choices. These syntactic structures are passive and active

structures, modal verbs, generic and specific nominal references, subjective or objective ways of making reference to people, and the use of nominalisation (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

All 11 texts showed many instances of the passive construction. These examples of the passive indicate the writers as adopting a formal, academic voice in order to align with their academic communities (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

In the following example from D5, the passive constructions, **was guided** and **were categorised**, are acceptable and desired scientific writing use, although the passive voice also has the effect of creating a distance between the writer and the text. Consequently, a more formal, objective and academically literate voice is created (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

(D5) *The data analysis and interpretation processed **was guided** by Epstein's model of Parental Involvement. Data [that were] **coded** from the initial transcriptions from audio recordings of the seven semi-structured interviews **were categorised** using Epstein's six types of Parental Involvement themes.*

#### 4.2.1.8 Different views of knowledge making

Another facet of ideational positioning relates to the writer's perception of knowledge and manner of presenting knowledge. Authorial voice is also created through the manner in which the writer uses lexical and syntactic features to illustrate that knowledge construction is either objective or personally subjective (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Some of the linguistic features analysed in the texts, which may indicate the writers' position on the construction of knowledge, were verb tense, verb type, reference to human agency, generic or specific reference, and first-person reference.

##### 4.2.1.9 Verb tense and verb type

Verbs are key lexical constructs in academic writing. Through the deliberate use of specific verb type and verb tense, writers indicate which content is derived from other sources, express research activities and convey the interpretation and evaluation of research findings. The type of verb tense in the 11 dissertations was marked by the use of the simple present tense, simple past tense and the present perfect tense. These tenses are distinctive of Western academic register, which indicate the writers' inclination towards gaining membership to the academic community. The past tense forms seem to support the function of reporting results in the discussion chapter. The following excerpts indicate the use of verb tense in some of the analysed texts.

(D1) *In developing classrooms, textbooks **serve** (present tense) the purpose of planning and preparing lessons and the learners **are** (present tense) frequently actively **engaged** (past tense) with them (Rezat, 2009). Love and Pimm (1996) **argue** (present tense) that textbooks **should never be used** (past tense) in isolation but Shellard and Moyer (2002) **point out** (present tense) that time constraints often **prevent** (present tense) teachers from **adapting** (present continuous) the textbook on a regular basis. The ideal textbook **should be** (past tense) sufficient when **used** (past tense) by the learners on their own.*

(D3) *The interviews **conducted** (past tense) with mathematics teachers of different experience levels before **facilitating** (present tense) learning, **provided** (past tense) rich data to how mathematics education **is viewed** (past tense) through implementers of the curriculum. The information below **represents** (present tense) the most prominent results from the initial coding, as it **was identified** (past tense) in the interviews.*

The texts indicated many verb types that represented research, study and thinking, and verb types that created academic and objective authorial voice types (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). These verbs also suggest the writers' inclination towards an interest in and gaining membership to the academic community.

#### 4.2.1.10 Reference to human agency

The writer's position towards knowledge construction is also evident through the manner in which other writers and researchers are mentioned. Writers tend to refer to humans as knowledge producers both in the abstract as well as in subjective forms. In the analysed texts, human agency was referred to objectively with writers using third-person phrases, as well as phrases which indicated that scholarship was regarded as an object as in the examples taken from D5: **Epstein's model of Parental Guidance** and **the literature review chapter 2.7**. Other writers and researchers are mentioned in the third person, by their surnames or as objective entities, which is the norm in research and academic writing as illustrated in D7: **the views of Kelchtermans** and **Piot, Ballet (2011)**, and in D10: **as suggested by Creswell (2014, p. 197)** and **consistent with the findings by Mkosi (2013)**. The types of voice that were constructed in relation to knowledge were academically literate, objective and suggested the writers were insiders of their fields of study (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

#### 4.2.1.11 Generic reference and first person reference

Each of the analysed texts shows much use of generic reference to refer to concepts related to the specific fields of study. This use of generic reference is indicative of academic discourse and creates an academically literate voice as well as a professional and insider voice. These voice types were evidence of the writers' stance in adopting the voice types of the academic communities to which they desired membership. Examples of generic reference are indicated in the following excerpts from the analysed texts:

(D1) *Learners struggled to find their way through **topics** and **course content**, as the order of the **topics** is not easy to understand.*

(D4) *Notably, not all **athletes** found injuries their greatest challenge during the **transition** from **school** to **senior level participation in track and field** in South Africa.*

(D7) *As an **auto-ethnographic study**, this chapter will **reflectively integrate** my own **perceptions** and **experiences** with those of the **research participants** and the **literature**.*

The final lexical construct under the umbrella of the ideational macro-function, the use of first person reference, advances that human thought and activity directly result in knowledge making (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). While the use of first person reference in some texts were limited, other texts, especially those that formed part of auto ethnographic studies, abounded in the use of first person references. The writers of these texts viewed knowledge making as personal and subjective, and that human agency was foregrounded in knowledge making. In these excerpts, the writers indicated their own lived experiences as the basis of their knowledge construction (Ivanič & Camps, 2001) with personal reference and narrative accounts of their experience of their topic. The following examples of first person reference were drawn from some of the analysed texts.

(D2) The literature that *I* have consulted, as well as the theoretical framework and *my* research questions were all combined to make sense and attach meaning to *my* data....

(D7) However, the magnitude of the challenge soon ignited *my* competitive spirit. There was a mammoth job to be done. The real test of *my* leadership ability was about to unfold but *I* believed *I* had the faith that *I* could make a difference.

(D10) *I* ensured that *I* documented ideas and made notes on the margin of *my* field note book of aspects which seem conspicuous about progression. Then, *I* started with the process of coding... .

On the other hand, most of the texts reflected little to no use of first person reference. As a result, these writers did not align themselves completely with the position of knowledge being constructed from subjective, lived experience. The voice types indicated through this stance were distanced from the field, objective, and academically literate. The following two excerpts represent the lack of the use of personal reference, which is still promoted by some members of academia as the acceptable approach to the construction of knowledge for master's dissertation writing.

**(D5)** *The data analysis and interpretation processed was guided by Epstein's model of Parental Involvement. Data coded from the initial transcriptions from audio recordings of the seven semi-structured interviews were categorised using Epstein's six types of Parental Involvement themes.*

**(D9)** *The biggest contrast between the data and the literature was the finding that it was the responsibility of the teacher to take control of his or her own professional development. In the study, the participants could not substantiate how they chose the activities they had completed up to that point.*

## 4.2.2 Interpersonal positioning

For the interpersonal macro-function, the constructs of evaluation, modality, first-person reference, and verb mood were linguistically analysed. The writers' authorial voice types with regard to varying levels of authority and confidence, and the different writer-reader power relations were evident with these specific linguistic constructs.

**Table 4.3 Interpersonal positioning**

| Type of positioning       | In relation to                                                                                        | Linguistic relations                                      |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Interpersonal positioning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different degrees of self-assurance and certainty</li> </ul>   | 1. Evaluation<br>2. Modality<br>3. First-person reference |
|                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different power relations between writer and reader</li> </ul> | 1. Mood<br>2. First-person reference                      |

### 4.2.2.1 Different degrees of self-assurance, certainty, and different power relations

A writer's authorial voice may also be determined by the degree of the writer's self-assurance that is represented through lexical items such as evaluation, modality and first-person pronoun use (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). Additionally, the power relations between the writer and reader may be created through lexical items which indicate specific moods and first-person reference.

### 4.2.2.2 Evaluation

The evaluative lexical constructs used by the writers in the analysed texts positioned their interpersonal voice as being authoritative and self-assured. Such use of evaluative lexis indicates the writers' control of all facets of the writing. For the ideational macro-function, the use of evaluative lexis in the analysed texts indicated the writers' voice types as knowledgeable, interested, professional, opinion-holder and critical (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). For the interpersonal domain, the same linguistic constructs may position the writers as self-

assured and authoritative. For example, an assertive and critical voice was evident in the evaluation lexis in the following excerpt from D6.

(D6) *The participants indicated that there is **minimal** information available in CAPS and that training with regard to PE is **non-existent**.*

The evaluative lexis in the following excerpt emphasises the writer's certainty and her being in control of both the text and content. Additionally, a self-assured voice is constructed with evaluative lexis such as **authentic**, **certain**, **strict**, **quietly** and **proper** in D3.

(D3) *I decided to focus on the **acquisition** of human virtues to solve **authentic** problems by means of facilitating learning in order to gain **21st century** skills. I started putting **certain strict** rules in place, such as standing **quietly** in two **proper** lines before entering the classroom.*

#### 4.2.2.3 Modality and mood

Modality also reflects writers' positions towards their field of study and reinforces the knowledgeable, somewhat formal and opinion-holder voice types. In the following excerpts, the use of modality expresses the writers' strong stance and opinions towards their topics. In the following excerpt, the use of the modal, **should**, constructs an assertive, teaching voice type where the reader is regarded as an equal.

Furthermore, the use of **should** in the analysed texts also creates a distinct mood through the very strong self-assured voice type. Not only is a direct, commanding tone created, but the modal also enhances an equality between the writer and reader.

(D1) *At the start of every unit, the topic **should be communicated** clearly and accompanied by sufficient examples of what is expected of the learners.*

(D11) *Teachers believe that learners **should be introduced** to English as early as Grade 1.*

Generally, the use of specific modal hedges in the analysed texts align the writers with the academic discourse community as the voice types they indicate are academically literate and self-assured. To a lesser degree, some modal hedges, such as **may** and **could** indicate a less certain and tentative voice type, which is to be expected of novice master's dissertation writers. This voice type is illustrated in the following excerpts:

(D2) *The services of an occupational and speech therapist, as well as an educational psychologist **could be engaged** and various extra-mural activities **could be financed** to provide additional support.*

(D11) *Increasing English language learners' classroom interactions **may** enhance the effective use of English.*

#### 4.2.2.4 First-person reference

The writers of master's dissertations can exert authorial presence and claim authority by the use of first-person reference. Such reference may take the form of the first person singular or plural pronouns as well as other forms that indicate the writer's presence, such as **the researcher** or **the author**. For example, the writer of D3 refers to herself as the **researcher**:

(D3) *The findings of this model were therefore based on the **researcher's** reflective journal.*

The authority that is claimed by the writer is regarded as self-assurance and an indication of the writer's belief that understanding and knowledge making are subjective (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). In the following excerpts from texts D3 and D7, the writers are presented as self-assured with a distinct belief that they have roles in creating knowledge and understanding (Tang & John, 1999). The strong use of the first person subject pronoun suggests the writers' position as opinion-holders as they firmly assert their authority.

(D3) *Although I think that I successfully have activated the human virtues of self-motivation, perseverance, communication in learners as they dealt with feelings in the form of frustrations, I have no clear evidence that this is true. However, I sensed a definite positive change in the behaviour of learners, but I will have to make a much better effort regarding the learners' attainment of virtues.*

(D7) *I assumed I had an objective view of the world but I realise I can never see the world accurately. I am constantly constructing and reconstructing meaning. In fact one could argue that the data I collected and worked with is ambiguous. I came to realise that perceptions are very powerful and are determined by our biases.*

The relationship between the writer and reader can be determined by the writer's use of authoritative voice types. These voice types could position the writer as being either self-assured or more deferential to the reader and possibly to the knowledge.

#### 4.2.3 Textual positioning

Writers also show authorial presence by their specific and different ideas on the construction of written texts. The textual positioning of linguistic constructs are indicators of the authors' views on how the text must be constructed for the specific writing purpose. Textual positioning is analysed in the texts through the identification of the length of noun phrases, mono- and

multisyllabic words, sentence connectors or linking devices, and semiotic mode. Table 4.4 outlines the linguistic realisations of the textual macro-functions.

**Table 4.4 Textual positioning**

| Type of positioning | In relation to                                      | Linguistic relations                                                                               |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Textual positioning | Different views of how a text should be constructed | 1. Noun phrase length<br>2. Mono- vs multisyllabic words<br>3. Linking devices<br>4. Semiotic mode |

#### 4.2.3.1 Noun phrase length and mono- vs multisyllabic words

Noun phrase length and the use of either monosyllabic or multisyllabic words contribute towards the creation of the writer's authorial voice. The use of long noun phrases, multisyllabic words and long sentences indicates an academically literate voice (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). While many of the analysed texts do contain long noun phrases and multisyllabic words that reinforce the insider voice that was apparent for the ideational and interpersonal macro-functions, a few writers used short noun phrases and more monosyllabic words, consequently, establishing a plain English voice (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

All of the analysed texts also contain many multisyllabic words as evidenced in the excerpts below. The inclusion of multisyllabic words align the writers to their respective academic communities and indicate the authorial presence as being formal, expert, and academically literate (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). In the following excerpt from D11, the writer's academically literate and expert voice is strengthened by using multisyllabic words which also include Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) terms.

**D11** *The **problem** is most **encountered** when **learners** change to **English** as LoLT in Grade 4. In this grade, most **subjects** are learnt through **English** and it is **believed** that they will have **acquired reading and writing competence during this transition** (Fleish, 2008). **However, learners** are not yet **competent** to **perform** well in **English**.*

This trend is also apparent in the excerpt from D7. There is ample evidence of many multisyllabic, formal linguistic terms of academic discourse and technical terms associated with education leadership, which shape the writer voice as being academically literate, formal, and deeply invested in the topic.

(D7) *Throughout the reflective practice, this self-study dominated my thoughts and time. Putting critical moments into perspective was a challenge for me. Five years on this journey of principal leadership has helped me develop perspective as a way to ground my focus and to continue attempting to positively affect school culture and facilitate change through the lens of servant leadership.*

#### 4.2.3.2 Linking devices

Another type of textual positioning is created with linking devices or “markers of cohesion” (Ivanič & Camps, 2001, p. 41). These linking devices direct the reader on the reading and interpretation of the text, and clarify the relationships between phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs. Cohesion between these units is created through transition signals such as **however, as a result, for example**, etcetera, as well as the recurrence of main nouns and pronouns that refer to key nouns. As a result of the correct use of these discourse markers, a reader-friendly voice is created (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

The use of suitable and meaningful linking devices creates logical sequencing, unity and cohesion of ideas as well as a reader-considerate, sophisticated, academically literate, and formal voice (Ivanič & Camps, 2001) in the text, as illustrated in the following excerpt from D1. It is apparent from this example that the writer created cohesion between the given paragraph and the last through the use of the addition linking device, **Additionally**. Also, the content within the paragraph was logically sequenced through the use of bold linking devices, suggesting adherence to the academic writing conventions of L1 English dominant tertiary institutions.

(D1) **Additionally**, the textbook becomes an invaluable resource for EAL learners at home, **when** the English speaking teacher is not available to explain difficult words or concepts (Ghamri, 2012| Al Falasi, 2004: Khalaf, 2009). Wen-Cheng (2010) adds that the literacy level of a learner in a developing classroom might not be such a great barrier **if** there is an effective textbook to guide that learners in accessing definitions and examples in a language they can understand.

#### 4.2.3.3 Semiotic mode

The last type of textual positioning is that of the writer’s preferred semiotic modes. The construction of authorial voice is not only dependent on the writer’s use of written language, it is also dependent on the writer’s use of multimodal resources such as chapter order, layout, font, use of space, use of symbols, and the inclusion of visuals.

The semiotic modes of all 11 analysed texts were indicated by the writers' conforming to the master's dissertation writing academic genre conventions of the particular department. All the texts were marked by the inclusion of features such as a contents page, use of headings and sub-headings, diagrams, tables, specific fonts, etcetera, which create the impression of the writers being reader considerate and academically literate (Ivanič & Camps, 2001).

### **4.3 Discussion of findings from text analysis**

Through the textual analysis of the discussion sections of the 11 dissertations, the strategies that the writers used to create authorial voice were analysed through the application of the linguistic constructs presented in the three macro-functions drawn from Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology.

#### **4.3.1 Discussion of findings for ideational macro-function**

Through the analysis of the ideational macro-function where specific lexical items were analysed, the voice types which emerged were knowledgeable, professional, interested in the topic, and academically literate (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). The texts also revealed an objective voice type which suggested that the writers conformed to how knowledge making should be presented in the dissertation genre. The writers of the texts either consciously or unconsciously understood the need to infuse their writing with the type of authorial voice that was expected for this genre of writing, by considering the audience and the purpose of the text (Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016).

For example, there is ample evidence in all 11 master's discussion sections of specific lexical items, such as noun phrases, classificatory lexis and generic references, which are typical of the writers' fields of interest that firmly align them with their specific disciplinary communities. In light of Matsuda and Tardy's (2007) reader-based approach, the perception of voice is linked to the knowledge of a shared community of practice (Wenger, 2010). In their study on blind manuscript reviews, Tardy and Matsuda (2009) found that 61 per cent of their respondents indicated that the writer's depth of knowledge was an indication of the writer's authorial voice. Since dissertation writers need to show affiliation to their respective fields of study, they either knowingly or unknowingly use specific ideational lexical items that firmly place them within the ranks of their disciplinary communities. Additionally, this affiliation gained through the use of typical classificatory lexis would add credibility to their writing, which would also strengthen their opportunity to receive a strong assessment grade. This finding was borne out by the interview participants' sharing that they had read other master's dissertations,

immersed themselves in reading research material, discussed academic practice with their supervisors and peers, and had academic writing help, all in order to write and present good master's dissertations. Although their first aim was to complete a postgraduate degree successfully, they had also worked actively to become part of the academic community.

Another lexical construct related to the ideational macro-function group which was common to all the analysed texts, was the use of the passive construction. The use of the passive construction has the following effects on texts. On the one hand, it makes the writer seem somewhat impersonal towards and distanced from reader of the text. The subjects in the passive construction sentence become less obvious and the focus falls fully on the actions (Hyland, 2002a). As a result, the reader would have to work harder and may not be drawn into the text immediately. In this way, an academic, formal and professional writer voice is discernible (Ivanič & Camps, 2001). On the other hand, because of the writer adopting these academically literate voice types, the reader is convinced of the writer being an insider of the academic community and, to a certain extent, trustworthy. Consequently, the reader may be reassured by the passive construction use that is still a recommended academic writing style that reinforces an academic register. The passive construction was frequently used in all the analysed texts, consequently, clearly indicating authorial voice. This construction is still an acceptable and desired academic writing form that would have been internalised through the research material that the dissertation writers used and mimicked in an effort to show membership to the academic community.

#### 4.3.2 Discussion of findings for interpersonal macro-function

In the analysis of the linguistic structures for the interpersonal macro-function, the voice types that were identified were largely assured, confident and that of an opinion-holder, which conformed to academic writing requirements. However, there was evidence of the writers adopting more non-academic voice types too (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Prior, 2001). This finding supports Bakhtin's (1986) postulation of voice being multivariate. For example, while the use of certain modals such as **should**, **must** and **would** indicate confident, bold and opinion-holder voice types, other hedging modals such as **could** and **may** create a sense of uncertainty and hesitation towards the matters under discussion. As a result, a tentative and less self-assured voice type is evident which indicates that the writer is not confident in making bold statements related to the field of study. While such hesitancy may not be problematic in other genres of writing, it may suggest that the writer is not as knowledgeable as is necessary for master's dissertation writing. Overall, there was significant use of hedging modals in the analysed discussion sections. The use of these hedging devices (Hyland, 2002a) may indicate

that the writer cautiously acknowledges the possibility of different opinions, consequently, allowing the option for negotiation, which is acceptable for the master's dissertation genre.

The use of the first person subject pronoun, *I*, is a direct indication of authorial voice in writing. Hyland (2002b, p. 351) states that “the most visible expression of a writer’s presence in a text” is “the use of exclusive first person pronouns”. Consequently, the use of these pronouns indicates students’ voice in their writing. This pronoun may be used in different ways to indicate different degrees of authorial presence in a text as presented in Figure 4.1. In the phrase, *I will examine*, the pronoun represents the writer as the creator of the writing and knowledge, and in the phrase, *I believe*, the writer’s role of an opinion-holder is suggested (Tang & John, 1999) – both indicating a strong authorial presence.

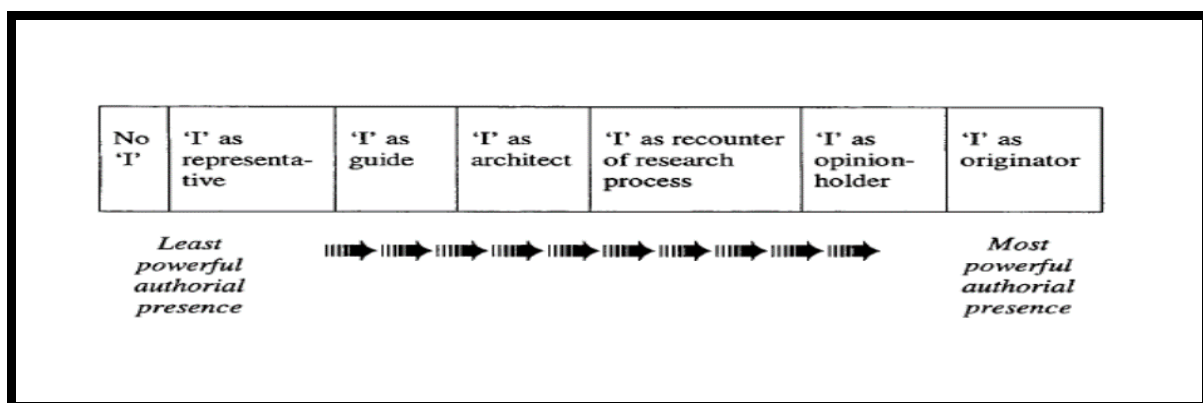


**Figure 4.1 Levels of authorial presence (Tang & John, 1999, p. 29)**

Inasmuch as the social science academic departments seem to promote the use of personal pronouns in academic writing (Hyland, 2002b), the use of personal pronouns in certain research fields is still not regarded as a correct academic writing style. Hyland (2001b, p. 208) states that an objective voice may be maintained in academic writing through the “[e]radication of the self”. It is not unusual then that, with the exception of texts D3 and D7, which were auto ethnographic studies, the other nine analysed texts showed a very limited to a complete absence of the use of personal pronoun references, thus indicating their conformity to the conventions of the traditional academic register. For example, in natural science research communities, an academic text that contains no personal pronouns is likely to be lauded as powerful scientific discourse and signals the authorship of rational, academic thought (Hyland, 2002b). This academic writing technique of omitting personal pronouns to create an objective, academically literate voice is still promoted in many academic writing guidelines, textbooks and style manuals (Hyland, 2002a). For this reason, it was not unusual that the analysed texts significantly lacked the use of personal pronouns, especially those which presented qualitative research studies where a more subjective and personal stance was necessitated by the nature of the study.

Seemingly, there may be tension between the literature on academic writing and voice that advocates first person use (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Hyland, 2002b; Nelson & Castelló, 2012), and actual writing experience. Novice writers, in this instance master's writers, take their writing cues from the several examples of academic writing which may be largely objective and devoid of first person use to which students must refer for their study, and the preferences of supervisors and examiners. Naturally, the novice master's writers will be influenced by these examples of academic writing and expert advice, and imitate this largely dominant type of objective academic writing. This is a possible reason why novice master's writers may struggle with understanding and developing their own voice in their master's dissertation writing journey, specifically with regard to the use of personal pronouns. However, a more positive spinoff of this imitation is that "[w]riters learn to write by imitating other writers" (Brook, 1988:23). The writer admiring and respecting another writer and wanting to be like that writer prompts this imitation. In a sense, the writer is imitating the identity and, consequently, the voice of the admired writer.

Additionally, it is also likely that the use of first person reference, for example the first person plural forms, *we* and *our*, could be an indication of equality between writer and reader. With these inclusive plural pronouns, the writer actively influences the reader to accept the argument by drawing the reader into the text and seeking solidarity (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Tardy & Matsuda, 2009; Hyland, 2013). This use of the personal plural pronouns is evident in D7 where the writer draws in his or her target academic community of peers and academics to share her school management experiences. The use of this linguistic construct supports the theoretical premise of this study that authorial voice is socially constructed, a perspective which also includes the reader as co-constructor of voice (Prior, 2001; Tardy & Matsuda, 2009; Matsuda, 2015). However, the first person plural form was not a common occurrence in the other analysed texts, as a result, indicating the leaning towards the dominant objective, academically literate voice type.

#### **4.3.3 Discussion of findings for textual macro-functions**

Similarly, the voice types evident through the analysis of the textual macro-functions also revealed an alignment with the academic register through the presence of specific lexical items. For example, the use of lengthy noun phrases and linking devices indicate an academically literate voice and an insider voice, suggesting the writers' desire to align with the academic community, which is supported by voice literature (Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Hyland, 2002b; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007).

However, the use of other textual macro-function linguistic structures hints at a more deliberate attempt at creating academically literate voice types. For example, a voice type that reveals a

consideration for the reader was evident with linking devices. As a result, the findings of the textual analysis indicate that authorial voice is multivariate, depends on the writers' agency, and may be conflicting.

Overall, the analysis of the ideational, interpersonal and textual macro-functions revealed that there was a strong presence of authorial voice types that revealed the writers' inclination towards the English academic discourse community. However, there were also more tentative, less self-assured voice types, possibly indicating the emergence of the writers' individual voice. There is thus tension between creating a voice, and not being able yet to use a voice. The appropriate authorial voice types could be the result of imitation where the writers model their writing on successful academic writers (Brook, 1988) so that they can achieve the desired discourse style. This technique is not undesirable and is a common means of improving writing. Not only do the writers imitate the academic writing style, but they also imitate the identity and the voice of successful writers.

#### **4.4 Findings of semi-structured interviews thematic analysis**

The findings from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews shed some light on the second research question by revealing the strategies that students used to develop their own authorial voice types. The aim with the interviews was to understand the participants' dissertation writing journey, with emphasis on their academic writing experience and their understanding and development of authorial voice. The four semi-structured interviews afforded rich data about the participants' dissertation-writing experience.

The four over-arching themes identified from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews were: your dissertation, academic community support, academic writing, and authorial voice.

##### **4.4.1 Your dissertation**

For this theme, I examined the participants' decision to study towards a master's degree and the choices they made towards that process. My intention was to understand the participants' motivations for studying a master's degree; as a result, I encouraged the participants to talk about their dissertation-writing journey. This theme was further illustrated by the sub-themes based on the following interview questions that appear with the original numbering in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5 Your dissertation**

| Sub-themes                             | Interview questions |                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4.7.1 Choice of topic                  | 1.                  | How did you decide on the topic for your research study?                                                                                                   |
| 4.7.2 Qualities of a good dissertation | 5a                  | What are the qualities of a good dissertation?                                                                                                             |
|                                        | 5b                  | From where did you get these ideas?                                                                                                                        |
| 4.7.3 Personal belief in research      | 8.                  | Do you believe that a master's dissertation is a place for a student to share his/her personal beliefs based on his/her research findings? Please explain. |

#### **4.7.1.1 Choice of topic**

When the participants were asked about the manner in which they had chosen their topics, all four expressed that they had autonomy in choosing their topics. In each instance, each participant chose a topic that had some personal significance and was supported by the supervisor who helped in adapting the topic. P1 indicated that his supervisor contributed significantly towards directing his choice of topic by suggesting that he considered his personal experiences of autism:

**(P1)** *Why don't you write about yourself because of your story and the fact that you can contribute a lot towards knowledge in the field and what it will mean for parents? And I think it was something that stuck with me.*

Similarly, P3 described her personal journey in finding her topic based on her student teaching experience:

**(P3)** *I realised that there was a big discrepancy in terms of how the learners treated me in comparison to how they treated my mentor, their current teacher, and that's how my topic for the master's was created.*

#### **4.7.1.2 Qualities of a good dissertation**

For this sub-theme, I was interested in learning about the participants' initial attempts to make sense of their dissertation-writing journey as well as determining their preparation for their dissertation. A master's dissertation is an unfamiliar genre that may pose a challenge to students and affect the development of the appropriate authorial voice types.

With regard to the question on the qualities of a good dissertation, varied responses were received. While P1 and P3 stated that important qualities of a good dissertation were the originality and its unique contribution to the discourse community, the other two participants (P2 and P4) shared more nuanced ideas. P2 made significant points about a good dissertation

having a clear layout, competent language use, a lack of plagiarism, and academically correct research. P4 mentioned that readers outside the academic community must easily understand a good dissertation and, quite significantly for this study on authorial voice, her response indicated that she consciously used certain writing devices to construct voice in her dissertation:

**(P4)** *One of the main things I have learned throughout my research journey is that you can make it sound as intelligent and as knowledgeable and use all these theoretical terms.*

In response to the question on how participants understood the dissertation criteria, their responses were similar. P3 stated that he resorted to reading other dissertations and writing feedback:

**(P3)** *I read some of my colleagues' master's and I read their feedback.... I got a sense of what the critical reader was looking for.*

In addition to reading other master's studies to understand the scope and nature of their own master's dissertation study, other participants employed other methods to understand the academic demands for writing their dissertation. P4 indicated that she read academic material to gauge what was suitable material for dissertation writing.

**(P4)** *You go to Google Scholar and you see all these journal articles.*

Interestingly, P2's response emphasised the notion of the importance of the academic community in supporting dissertation writing:

**(P2)** *I got these ideas from the other students that we were studying with. We used to sit together and discuss the challenges even though they were studying different fields ... and you will learn from them.*

Similarly, P1's response reinforced the idea that all participants depended on the academic community in one form or another in understanding the requirements for good dissertation writing:

**(P1)** *A lot of reading, a lot of speaking to other people, to other researchers internationally as well and also really a lot of reading the methodology part of other students' studies.*

#### 4.7.1.3 Personal belief and research

With regard to the question on whether the participants believed that a master's dissertation was a place to share personal beliefs based on research findings, the participants' responses echoed their early sentiments about their research topic and writing motivation being driven by personal interests and circumstances. All participants agreed that it was necessary to balance their personal opinions against the mandatory research that was essential for

dissertation writing. After agreeing that personal experience drove her dissertation writing because her topic was directly related to personal experience, P4 added:

**(P4)** *It was challenging because I thought that this was not really allowed unless it was backed up with literature. Also, how do you balance your beliefs and someone else's beliefs and how do you get that across to a reader? When that all comes together, that's research, but to get there is one of the most challenging things about research.*

#### 4.4.2 Academic community support

For this theme, the participants' relationship with significant academic role players during the dissertation writing process was examined. The Academic Literacies Theory supports the idea that each writer is a social being whose authorial voice is socially influenced (Lea & Street, 1998; Lea, 2004). This theme was divided further into two sub-themes based on the interview questions presented in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6 Academic community support**

| Sub-themes                                    | Interview questions |                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4.7.2.1 Academic relationship with supervisor | 3                   | Did you and your supervisor have different opinions about the way in which you organised and wrote your dissertation? Please explain. |
|                                               | 4                   | Did your supervisor encourage you to express yourself and be original in your dissertation? Please explain.                           |
| 4.7.2.2 Other academic support                | 2                   | Were you helped in any way in your master's studies? Please explain.                                                                  |

##### 4.4.2.1 Academic relationship with supervisor

For this sub-theme, I was keen on understanding the participants' academic relationship with their supervisors, specifically with regard to the content and organisation of the dissertation. Although all four participants noted that they largely accepted the academic advice and guidelines of their supervisors because of their experience and their student-supervisor relationship, they did express that they had experienced differences of opinion relating to content and language use at certain stages of their academic interaction. Seemingly, none of the participant's relationship with their supervisors were strained to the extent of a breakdown in the academic relationship. Encouragingly, the participants stated that when they did have differences of opinion with their supervisors, they engaged in discussion, compromised and mutually decided on the best possible solution to complete the dissertation.

P1 described two different relationships with two different supervisors. One of his supervisors allowed him free reign to be as original as possible. Interestingly, he describes his relationship with his second supervisor as his being the knowledge expert, while the supervisor supported him with academic writing conventions and the dissertation structure. This supervisor relationship seemed to offer the writer more engagement and support.

**(P1)** *My supervisor was totally different because he's allowed me now to make use of my personal ideas. He told me this is your study. You need to come up with the ideas. I will just help you to make it better.*

**(P1)** *Also a lot of support in terms of the academic structure which was quite challenging. My supervisor didn't have a lot of knowledge of my specific field. ... like I was the teacher so we tended to have lots of discussions with regards to if it was relevant. She double checked with me if it was right ... but my perception was you're working with somebody that mentored a lot of students, which got lots of experience of this and I tended to listen to her advice.*

The second question for this sub-theme, based on whether the supervisor had encouraged the writer towards originality in the dissertation writing process, also elicited meaningful responses for my understanding of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. All the participants stated that their supervisors actively encouraged them to be original and that they were given much freedom of expression to find this originality. The responses from P2 and P4 to this question indicate their understanding of the originality demanded from their supervisors:

**(P2)** *You must be yourself when you write so that she can read something different from other students. That's what education and academic writing is all about.*

**(P4)** *I definitely remember hearing, "I need to hear your voice. I lack hearing your voice." I think I would take other authors' ideas and references so often that I would lack my own standpoint in the argument that I was proposing.*

#### 4.4.2.1 Other academic support

Each writer is a social being who is part of several communities, not the least being the academic community. The aim was to determine how the academic communities, if at all, influenced the participants' authorial voice in their dissertations. It was evident from the participants' responses on whether they had received help in their master's studies that each received support in some form. Commonly, all four participants claimed that they had received help from their supervisors, albeit in varying degrees. Of the four participants, P4 most strongly acknowledged that her supervisors were her primary academic support.

*My supervisors, traditionally they help in terms of writing and topic construction. I had a topic and through discussions with the supervisor it starts to narrow down into a foundational topic that you can actually use to create your master's study.*

While P2 remembered receiving some help from his supervisor, his subsequent responses suggested that he felt quite demoralised after the support sessions, possibly even to the extent of wanting to abandon his dissertation writing journey.

**(P2)** *...when she marks the piece of work that I've written, later on we would have a meeting where during those meetings you would look at the comments and you would feel like what you have done is nothing based on the comments she'd written...*

**(P2)** *... sometimes when you look at them or when you are at home, you look at those comments, and it is like this is the end of the road. I'm no longer going to...*

P3, who is now a lecturer and dissertation supervisor himself, stated that his dissertation writing journey was a lonely experience where he initially had little idea about the dissertation requirements and writing process. However, where he seemingly lacked in supervisor guidance, he emphasises the role that his academic department played in supporting him through his dissertation writing experience. He described the frequent departmental cohort sessions that helped provide the requirements and guidelines that he needed to complete his study.

**(P3)** *My master's was alone and I felt like I'm lost. So actually I had no idea what the product should look like.*

**(P3)** *... help through the cohort sessions. So now it's more structured and there's this system and support in place. And they give you, I think, three years for M then it must be done. You need like a motivation.*

Significantly, although not academic support, both P1 and P4 mentioned support from another important quarter: the moral support they had received from their families during the writing process. They also mentioned that their families helped with being participants in the study, reading and correcting drafts.

**(P1)** *My mom was my main participant. My father was a participant. My brother was a participant. The occupational therapist...*

**(P1)** *... my mom needed to assist me with my narrative part... with Mom's assistance... we basically do a mind map ... we looked at my story before we wrote.*

**(P4)** *Starting off with my family, they played a massive role in terms of igniting that spark for me to want to study further while teaching.*

### 4.4.3 Academic writing

The interview questions that contributed towards a deeper understanding of the participants' academic language use for their dissertation writing are presented in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7 Academic writing**

| Sub-themes                           | Interview questions |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4.7.3.1 Academic English proficiency | 6                   | Is English your mother tongue? If not, how long have you been using it as an academic language?                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                      | 7a                  | Do you feel that you would have been more confident in expressing yourself if you had written your dissertation in your mother-tongue? Why do you say so?<br>Were you confident in the type of English you used for writing your dissertation? Explain. |
| 4.7.3.1 Academic English challenges  | 7b                  | Please give examples of the (language) difficulties you may have experienced.                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                      | 15                  | Did you receive any help with academic writing from your supervisor, a writing centre, writing workshops, a language editor, etc.?                                                                                                                      |

#### 4.4.3.1 Academic English proficiency

The first sub-theme relates to the participants' academic English proficiency, specifically about English home language proficiency. Of the four participants, only one, P4 was an English L1 speaker. Two participants, P1 and P3, were Afrikaans L1 speakers and one participant, P2, was a Sesotho L1 speaker. However, all participants used English as the preferred academic language for dissertation writing. With the exception of P2 who had been using English L2 as an academic language from primary school, P1 and P3 only started using English academically for their master's study.

In response to the question about their preferred language choice for dissertation writing, two of the three participants who were English L2 speakers (P2 and P3) claimed that they would have been more comfortable in expressing themselves in their mother tongue and expressed a lack of confidence in the academic writing skills.

**(P2)** *I would have even used better words to express whatever I wanted to say if I were using my mother tongue, rather than any other language or English which is a second language.*

**(P3)** *... to write in your mother tongue it would be essentially more beneficial.*

**(P3)** *... if I had an idea for my master's sometimes at night at 3:00 AM, you wake up and then you've got an idea. I wrote it normally in Afrikaans and then I would send it to [supervisor]. She will translate it but she will give me guidance in the English language.*

However, P1, who is also an English L2 speaker, firmly declared that he chose to write in English because he would gain a wider audience and make his academic presence felt internationally through the medium of English. In spite of his conviction that writing in English was the best choice, he did admit to experiencing many challenges in English writing.

**(P1)** *The reason why I chose English is because I wanted to contribute to the field as much. Also, I think Afrikaans language is also limited to a number of people living in our country instead.*

#### 4.4.3.2 Academic English challenges

All participants, including the English L1 speaker, expressed challenges in using academic English in their dissertation writing. While academic English research indicates that students who are not English L1 speakers do experience academic language challenges and subsequent difficulty with creating authorial voice, it is evident that even English L1 speakers do experience some challenges. P1, who used English confidently throughout the interview, did express several times that he had serious challenges with writing in English. Although he had started reading in English during secondary school, he had only begun using academic English in his master's study.

**(P1)** *I had challenges in writing in English. ... sentence construction, word pronunciation, also the changing of writing from Afrikaans to English. But in terms of academic writing, dissertation writing, it was such a tremendous challenge*

P3 described the amount of time consumed in making sense of writing in English as well as the effect on his confidence after receiving supervisor feedback on his writing.

*(P3) So the coding took way longer to transcribe in Afrikaans and then to translate it and to make sense of it. Of course, it was time consuming and also it's just about your confidence. I was writing and the language editing is coming back the whole time with just red marks and also it breaks your confidence if you get this feedback from a reader that is fluent. Why am I doing this? So confidence-wise it's challenging.*

Seemingly, challenges in English academic writing are not confined to those who are not English L1 speakers. Interestingly, the English L1 speaker, P4, also expressed challenges with English academic writing during her dissertation writing.

*(P4) I definitely struggled with verbosity because in my mind that's what I thought English academic writing was meant to be. So, the structuring and the grouping of common terms and common ideas was definitely something that I have learned.*

In response to the question about whether the participants had received academic writing support, all participants confirmed that they had received some form of academic writing help. Significantly, each participant mentioned that the supervisor was the main source of support when they experienced academic writing challenges. The other types of support that were mentioned were writing workshops for postgraduate students hosted by the institution (P2 and P3), language editors (P1, P2 and P3) and family support (P1 and P4).

*(P2) Yes, I received a lot of support from my supervisor. I also received a lot of support from the University. We were referred to language editors by our supervisors. They have the academic knowledge of how language should be written. This was very important for a second language speaker when it came to finalising my dissertation.*

*(P4) I think my supervisor helped me here and there with grammatical issues and content, so definitely, yes, from my supervisors.*

#### **4.4.4 Authorial voice**

Research sub-question 1 focused on understanding how master's writers understand authorial voice in their dissertation writing. The interview questions that contributed towards a deeper understanding of the participants' perception of authorial voice are presented in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8 Authorial voice**

| Sub-themes                     | Interview questions |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4.7.4.1<br>Understanding voice | 9.                  | What do you understand by the term “voice”?                                                                                                                             |
|                                | 14.                 | Has your supervisor or any other academic reader ever asked you about your academic voice? (E.g., Where is your voice?) Please explain if you were asked this question. |
| 4.7.4.2 Types of voices        | 10.                 | Is your voice evident in your dissertation? Please explain.                                                                                                             |
|                                | 11.                 | Are there other voices evident in your dissertation? If yes, please explain.                                                                                            |
| 4.7.4.3 Creating voice         | 12.                 | Did you try to create a specific type of voice in your writing?                                                                                                         |
|                                | 16.                 | Did you have a specific reader in mind during your writing?                                                                                                             |
|                                | 17.                 | How did you try to engage or draw your reader in?                                                                                                                       |
|                                | 18.                 | Do you think that voice for dissertation writing can be taught?                                                                                                         |

#### 4.4.4.1 Understanding voice

For this sub-theme, the aim was to determine the participants’ understanding of voice by confirming whether they had actively thought about or been prompted to consider their use of authorial voice during the dissertation writing process. These significant questions on authorial voice received similar answers. All four participants described voice being their personal opinion reflected in their research, the inclusion of their personal experiences in their studies, critical analysis, and their interpretation of research. Perhaps these ideas on voice are best encapsulated in the response by P4.

**(P4)** *Voice is bringing my opinion to light through an informed platform. So, my voice is backing someone else’s research up by using their literature to support my belief. But I should also take my experience and bring it to life through the idea that I am trying to relay.*

With regard to whether their supervisors had mentioned the importance of voice in their dissertation writing, all four participants responded differently. While one participant stated that his supervisor had not discussed the concept during his dissertation writing, three participants confirmed that they had been urged by their supervisors to write original material with authority. P1 claimed that he had been praised on his distinctive voice in his dissertation.

**(P2)** *My supervisor always told me that I must not write what she has read before. I must ensure that every time I write, I must put across my own my own thoughts, my own opinion and my own voice about the subject matter at hand. We must not just repeat what other scholars out there have written.*

**(P1)** *I had compliments with regards to my writing as well as the manner in which I interpreted my voice. The manner in which I shared my personal experiences and also for me being in the field.*

#### 4.4.4.2 Types of voices

For this sub-theme, the participants had to think actively about whether their voice and those of others were evident in their dissertations. In response to whether their voice was evident in their dissertations, three of the participants indicated that their voice was evident although they indicated that they did not quite understand the concept. Only P4 acknowledged her challenges in creating her own authorial voice.

**(P4)** *I would write up ideas and sections and it would make sense to me, but my supervisor would have a totally different thought on it. I would take on her idea rather than voice my opinion, because I trusted her knowledge more than mine. It was definitely different, but I don't think I was ready to take it on and say, "I'm confident about this, I know this."*

**(P4)** *I do not know if I used my voice effectively in order to portray what I was thinking or what I was feeling, or what I was trying to get across to the reader. So, in terms of using my voice effectively in my dissertation, I do not think so.*

All participants acknowledged their awareness of the presence of other voices in their dissertations. The inclusion of research material and the participants who were involved in the studies created some of these voices. P1 stated that not only was his voice inextricably part of his narration of his personal experience in his auto ethnography, but he argued that he was also representing the voices of the participants in his study.

**(P1)** *Yes, it is evident because I am the main participant and I think that I need to be diplomatic in that sense because I gave my voice to my other participants in my study.*

#### 4.4.4.3 Creating voice

The aim of this sub-theme was to determine whether the participants consciously created types of authorial voices. The questions that were categorised under this sub-theme were designed to elicit the participants' responses on whether they had consciously manipulated authorial voice in their master's dissertations.

In response to whether specific voice types were created in their writing, three of the participants reported that they had not consciously created specific authorial voices. P1 indicated that he thought voice would be automatically evident in his writing through his sharing of his personal experience in his auto ethnography. However, he also expressed a strong fear of sharing his voice for the fear of being judged and rejected due to his condition.

**(P1)** *Well, for me personally one of my biggest challenges was to write on an academic level. I believed voice will automatically be heard.*

**(P1)** *In the process of writing my narrative, I was just ashamed. I was quite frightened to write because I don't know if it will be acceptable. I wanted to avoid any form of prejudice so I was afraid to share my voice. Personally, you know the fear of being excluded.*

Significantly, for this study where the use of the first person pronouns are regarded as evidence of authorial voice, P3 believed that his deliberate use of the first person subject pronoun in his dissertation writing had affected his dissertation assessment negatively.

**(P3)** *I remember I wrote it in for example, in what you call it first, it's almost like me telling the narrative, so I used the I the whole time. So at the end it was approved and my critical readers nailed me on it. They said I should be writing it in third person. It's like ... referring to myself as a researcher or the author. So I got penalised in that so that's one of the challenges I picked up.*

However, it was only P4 who suggested that she may have deliberately created an academically literate voice in her dissertation writing by imitating the research she had read.

**(P4)** *Maybe it was my researcher voice coming out that I mimicked someone. I may have liked the way they voiced their opinion, and I may have mimicked that in my research and my writing.*

In response to whether they had specific readers in mind for their dissertation, all four participants stated that they had envisaged specific readers who were members of the participants' fields of study. Both P1 and P4 succinctly described their readers as follows:

**(P1)** *As this is an auto ethnography about autism, my target audience is basically the service providers.*

**(P4)** *Teachers, certainly, were my main target audience. Possibly principals or HODs and then other academics who are writing in the Faculty of Education, specifically Humanities. But, then again, it was largely based on credibility; anyone researching the topic of credibility could have used sections of the study that I had created.*

The participants' responses varied on possible strategies they may have used to draw in their target readers. P1 stated that he tried to draw his readers in through story telling. P2 considered the writing process as being important in capturing the readers' attention, while P4 considered that simple, clear and concise writing was essential to keep the readers' interest.

With regard to the final question on whether authorial voice for dissertation writing should be taught, three participants thought that it was possible and necessary to teach students how to incorporate voice into writing. P1 and P4 suggested that voice be taught from an earlier academic level.

**(P1)** *I think we need to go back to undergraduate study as well as postgraduate referring to the period of I would say ... your 4th year and your masters.*

**(P4)** *I definitely think that is needed because the jump from honours to masters is massive.*

However, P2 believed that it was not possible to teach voice for writing. Instead, he proposed:

**(P2)** *I do not think that the voice for a dissertation can be taught. It comes through a lot of reading. One can come up with your voice when you have gone through a lot of reading.*

## 4.5 Discussion of findings for semi-structured interviews

The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to examine the participants' experiences and perceptions of the master's dissertation writing process and authorial voice. The participants' responses are based on the four themes represented in the previous section. The information below represents the most prominent results from the analysis of the interviews.

### 4.5.1 Your dissertation

The participants' intention and choices in studying for a master's degree were examined under this theme. Undertaking a master's degree is a significant decision as the writing of a master's dissertation is regarded as an advanced research study (Archer, 2010; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). The writer must use and hone many academic skills of technical competence, scholarly research, and critical ability during the dissertation writing process (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). For this reason, it is important to understand if, from the outset, the participants had freedom of choice in what and how they worked on for their master's dissertation.

#### *4.5.1.1 Choice of topic, personal belief and research*

Each participant was clearly driven by personal experience in the choice of dissertation topic. Significantly, all four participants stated that the topic was finalised after engagement with their supervisors, thus indicating that the participants needed the guidance of the supervisors to align their topics with the academic conventions for the genre. All participants agreed that it was necessary to balance their personal opinions against the mandatory research that is essential for dissertation writing. P1 enthusiastically stated that both he and his supervisor were excited about his topic because it was unusual and they wanted to make an impact in the relevant field both nationally and internationally.

P3 indicated that he had spent at least a year in settling on his topic because he wanted his own perceptions and experiences to be foregrounded in his study. He indicated that he did not want to completely change the focus of his topic to suit his supervisor, suggesting that his supervisor did not quite understand his focus.

All four participants indicated this sense of wanting to represent an independent, unique experience through their master's dissertations. The fact that each participant had decided on a topic that was driven by personal experience, leads to the notion that the same motivation would be carried through into the actual dissertation writing and would result in a strong authorial voice.

#### *4.5.1.2 Qualities of a good dissertation*

The responses on what constituted a good dissertation varied among the participants. While two participants thought that a dissertation should preferably be unique in its field, the other two participants described different qualities such as the formatting of the writing, plagiarism, research (P2) and clarity of writing (P4). It was obvious from the responses that each participant had some idea of certain desirable qualities for a good dissertation. However, considering that all four participants had been through the entire process of studying for a master's degree, and three of the four participants were, at the time of the interviews, registered for doctoral degrees, I would have expected other important criteria as responses to this question. I anticipated that these participants would better understand the genre requirement after having been immersed in the master's dissertation writing process for at least two years. The academic community and HEIs do expect that a student who has completed a master's degree would demonstrate critical thinking, understand appropriate research techniques, understand the genre requirements and show some knowledge of academic theories (Butler, 2011; Andrews, 2015). Due to the participants' sketchy responses about the basic master's requirements, I was unsurprised at their responses about their authorial voice in their writing. Admittedly, the concept of voice is also not clearly defined in

the literature. Importantly, their vague, unformed responses also suggested the ongoing need for academic support throughout the postgraduate journey. However, the participants' uncertainty about voice and their challenges with academic writing were in stark contrast to the presence of the appropriate voice types that appeared in the academically well written dissertations that I analysed. This contradiction may be attributed to the language editing that each master's dissertation must undergo before being submitted for assessment.

All participants indicated that they read extensively about dissertation writing and P2 stated that he also discussed the nature of dissertation writing with peers. P3 expressed his gratitude for the departmental cohort sessions which he claimed helped him understand the dissertation demands. Significantly, all of these activities are socially-constructed and emphasise the value of the academic community support (Wenger, 2010).

#### **4.5.2 Academic community support**

A master's dissertation writer does not work alone or in a vacuum. The writer is a member of an academic community where common master's writing concerns are shared and discussed with the aim of finding solutions to postgraduate study and supervision problems (Wenger, 2010). I was interested in exploring the idea that each writer is a social being who has to interact within the academic community, which influences authorial voice. A socio-constructive view on authorial voice supports the idea that the individual voice is shaped by social resources, "the texts he or she has encountered, the desired, projected identities of the author, and the voice of the shapers" (Tardy & Matsuda, 2009, p. 47). The successful completion of degrees at HEIs are linked to the institutional environment, the characteristics of the student cohorts and supervision protocols (Albertyn et al., 2008; Malan, Erwee, Van Rensburg, & Danaher, 2012). Since academic writing is a social practice, different collaborations ensue in the development of the master's dissertation. Some of these practices would be the use of research literature, writing supervision and assessor feedback (Nelson & Castelló, 2012). In the next section, the key aspect of the student-supervisor relationship is discussed followed by a discussion of aspects of student cohort and institutional academic support that impacted on the participants' development of their master's dissertation and, consequently, on authorial voice.

##### ***4.5.2.1 Academic relationship with supervisor***

The master's supervisor is the main member of the dissertation writer's academic community (Wenger, 2010, Schulze & Lemmer, 2017) which has significant implications for the dissertation writing journey. It is through the supervisor that the master's student navigates this journey and organises the dissertation writing activities and concepts, which in turn, affects

the type and extent of the writers' authorial voice. Among many other roles, supervisors also have the pedagogical role of initiating their students into the academic writing of their respective disciplines (Butler, 2011; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017).

The participant's responses indicated that this vital relationship between the supervisor and master's writer determined how the master's writer managed the research study and the extent to which the writer exercised authority in the dissertation writing process. Although all four participants noted that they largely accepted the academic advice and guidelines of their supervisors because of their experience and their student-supervisor relationship, they did express that there were differences of opinion relating to content and language use at certain points in their academic interaction. Inevitably, though, it is clear that the writers acknowledged the supervisors' role and authority that allowed the supervisors' voice to be a significant part of the writing.

The data and the literature provide evidence that the symbiotic relationship between the supervisor and master's writer is vital in co-constructing authorial voice. However, it is likely that the writers could have sacrificed their own voice in constructing their dissertations according to their supervisors' and departmental guidelines, due to the several challenges that master's dissertation writing presents. Perhaps this symbiotic relationship contributed significantly towards the writers developing the appropriate academic authorial voices evident in the analysed master's dissertations. While the writers may have sacrificed their individual voices, they had met the requirements for the genre and, consequently, attained their master's degree. It is also important to remember that master's writers are still novice writers, apprentice writers who are still in the process of developing their personal distinctive voices.

#### *4.5.2.2 Other academic community support*

Over and above the main support received from the supervisors, participants acknowledged other academic support that was available during their dissertation-writing journey. It was evident from the participants' responses that other types of support were available for their research study, which were only useful if the participants made the effort to access the support.

The participants described the other forms of academic support besides that offered by the supervisor. These were departmental cohort sessions for postgraduate students, writing workshops, peer groups, language editors and, for two participants (P1 and P4), family. In his dissertation-writing journey, P1 actively sought out experts in his field and engaged with at least three other academics besides his two supervisors. He stated that this made his research study richer, more nuanced and affected his voice in his dissertation.

The participants' experiences of the different forms of academic support demonstrate the different voices that may eventually be interwoven in the dissertation. The influence of these support structures may not be clearly discernible in the published dissertation, but occur continually behind the scenes. An academic community may be regarded as a community of practice, as it consists of people who have a collective, shared learning experience (Wenger, 2010) – that of writing and passing a master's dissertation. All members are committed to this goal. This may be one of the reasons why the participants had been able to create the necessary authorial voice types in their dissertations successfully, despite being unsure and hesitant when they expressed their perceptions of authorial voice in the interview.

#### **4.5.3 Academic writing**

Academic writing is the most important skill necessary for academic success at any level of education (Butler, 2011; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). Challenges with academic writing skills at postgraduate level seriously hamper dissertation writing and are regarded as significant reasons for some postgraduates not completing dissertations (Albertyn, et al., 2008).

All four participants indicated that their master's dissertation writing journey was fraught with challenges in writing academic English. Specifically, two of the four participants, both L2 speakers of English, showed serious challenges in their command of spoken English. They described their frustration at their difficulties in expressing themselves freely in their writing and acknowledged that their writing difficulties were due to their limited exposure to reading and writing in English. These participants believed that their performance would have been better if they had been able to write their dissertations in their home language. In essence, they had two major challenges: the language and the subject matter. Unsurprisingly, the participants stated that studying and researching in English impeded their academic progress and performance. Several studies on academic literacy and writing indicate that postgraduate students have significant challenges in developing the L1 English academic reading and writing skills that are necessary for postgraduate study (Albertyn, et al., 2008; Butler, 2011; Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). While all participants agreed to being interviewed in English, the lingua franca and medium of instruction of the institution, at least two participants, P2 and P3, struggled with expressing themselves clearly in English, which gave credence to their expression of their English language challenges. Due to the use of lower frequency vocabulary, listening to and speaking a language are easier skills than reading and writing (Butler, 2011). However, the participants struggled because they admitted to having limited exposure to English reading and writing as they had only started using English as a medium for study since the beginning of their master's dissertation. This expression of their challenges with academic English brings Blommaert's (2008, p. 426)

thoughts to mind: “The object we call ‘language’ is still understood by many as a uniform, closed, bounded and rule-governed phenomenon”. By implication, seemingly the writers had to adopt academic English by any means necessary to achieve their goal to join the global academic community and to convince their assessors of their competence (Guinda & Hyland, 2012). Perhaps they should have made a conscious choice, with the help of the institution, to use academic English earlier in their academic journey, which would have enabled them to manipulate academic English more ably for the master’s leg of their journey. In this way, perhaps their own voice would have been more evident in their writing.

#### *4.5.3.1 Academic English proficiency*

It is predicted that more than fifty percent of the world’s population would be speaking English by 2050, and more postgraduate students worldwide will choose English as their academic language (Blommaert, 2008; Butler-Adam, 2018). For this reason, English proficiency is necessary in academia (Hyland, 2013). According to O’Driscoll (2001), the choice of academic language in higher education is linguistic behaviour that determines social identity.

Based on the participants’ responses, it was evident that being either an English L1 or an L2 writer did affect writing and, consequently, voice. Not only was their written communication affected, but their conscious and unconscious manipulation of writing techniques to create voice may also have been affected. Three of the four participants were English L2 speakers. Two participants consciously chose to write their dissertations in English instead of Afrikaans. P1 stated that his choice to write in English was driven by his need for a wider national and international audience for his dissertation. His reason hints at the dominant influence of English L1 language (cf. Chapter 2) and culture (Abasi et al., 2006; Butler, 2011) and supports Pennycook’s (1994) idea that due to the global perception of the English language being significantly economically and socially worthy, the English teaching industry has grown exponentially. O’Driscoll (2001) who postulates that language choices determine identity presents another interesting perspective. In choosing English L1 for academic writing, the student is adopting a cosmopolitan persona that implies prestige and status, as well as an accommodative persona to reflect cooperation and socially desirable behaviour.

Significantly, these two English L2 participants (P1 and P2) had only started using English academically for their master’s degree. Prior to registering for this degree, their academic language of choice had been Afrikaans L1. Although P1 also expressed serious problems with academic writing, he was convinced that using English was the only way in which to read relevant research and share his ideas in writing with an international community. He perceived academic English as “becoming less a language than a basic academic skill” (Hyland, 2013, p. 54).

Although there has been much emphasis on the importance of mother tongue education and the development of the eleven official South African languages as languages of learning and teaching (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020), these initiatives have not been realised. It is for this reason that P2 was unable to write his dissertation in Sepedi, his home language. He described the numerous challenges he encountered in manipulating academic English for his dissertation writing. He concluded that it was likely that these challenges may have resulted in his not fully realising his voice in his writing. By implication, he suggested that his voice might have been stronger and easier to navigate if he had written his dissertation in his home language. For example, Ivanič (1998) recounts how her co-researchers described losing the sense of their real self in the process of academic writing, thus suggesting the constraining power relation between academic discourse and the master's writers' identity. On the other hand, the writers' choice in writing the master's dissertation in academic English was also empowering, as they became members of the academic community by implicitly and explicitly expressing their voices in their writing.

This inclination to align with the academic discourse community is also borne out by the participants' responses in the interviews. All participants stated that they had read as much research as possible to be able to imitate the discourse presented in research material. This coping strategy that the participants had employed in their dissertation writing had several implications. This idea supports the socio-constructivist nature of authorial voice being socially constructed by the master's writers' academic communities. It also suggests the dominant influence of English L1 (cf. Chapter 2) and Western culture (Abasi et al., 2006; Butler, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, the three participants who claimed the most English L1 writing challenges confirmed that their final master's dissertations were professionally edited before the final submission for assessment. Due to the numerous academic writing challenges that master's dissertation writers experience, academic writing support from supervisors and language editors has become mandatory (Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013).

#### *4.5.3.2 Academic English challenges*

Postgraduate academic writing is of concern to academia because many postgraduate students find dissertation and thesis writing challenging (Bitchener & Basturkman, 2006; Butler, 2011; Shulze & Lemmer, 2017), especially in the social sciences where academic writing conventions are less explicit than in the natural sciences. Unsurprisingly, each participant described significant challenges with the academic English necessary for master's dissertation writing. Not only did writers experience the master's dissertation as a new genre that required the acquisition of conceptual and methodological knowledge, but also their

challenges were heightened by having to adopt a new type of writing (Butler, 2011; Kamler & Thomson, 2014)

While academic English research indicates that students who are English L2 speakers do experience academic English challenges with creating authorial voice, the responses of the English L1 participant also reflected academic language challenges. However, this participant did not express the same degree of discomfort as the English L2 participants did.

Significantly, three of the four participants indicated that their dissertations were professionally edited before the final submission. It is not unusual that some HEIs demand that students have their final dissertation drafts professionally edited (Butler, 2011; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). Each of the three participants had included written proof of editing as part of their dissertations. For this reason, there were no obvious errors in form and structure in their dissertations. Significantly, there was ample evidence of academically literate authorial voice types in these three participants' analysed texts, although they had emphasised experiencing extreme academic language challenges while writing their dissertations. It can be argued that without the help of the mandatory language editing, these self-confessed struggling writers may not have succeeded in presenting the desired authorial voice types in their dissertations.

In contrast, P4 stated that her dissertation had not undergone professional language editing as her supervisor had thought her academic language use to be adequate for the genre. However, she did express experiencing academic English writing as challenging, although she was an L1 English speaker. Her comment that academic English felt like a new language evokes Casanave's (2002) observation that no individual is a native speaker of academic English. While much of the literature on voice does confirm the academic writing challenges of L2 writers, there are also significant accounts of the difficulties experienced by L1 students (Ivanič, 1998; Lee, 2011).

Three participants stated that they had significant problems with academic English writing and described the discomfort they had experienced with the feedback they had received on their writing. This discomfort was heightened because the dissertation was an assessment that had to be evaluated. The reasons for some of the participants' somewhat acute discomfort after receiving feedback on their writing is easy to understand. Firstly, extensive writing instruction and practice is minimal in the pre-university, undergraduate (Schulze & Lemmer, 2017), and postgraduate phases. Secondly, although writing is necessary for all tertiary assessment purposes, it is seldom facilitated and promoted in the disciplines as it is taken for granted and regarded as a skill that should have been learned (Archer, 2010; Butler, 2011). Next, master's dissertation writing is regarded mistakenly as just text production instead of an intellectual, iterative process that involves writing, revising and refining several drafts.

One participant, P3, who indicated his difficulty in using academic English for his dissertation, described jotting down ideas for his master's dissertation in his mother tongue and sending these notes off to an academic mentor who then translated his writing into academic English. At some HEIs, if students have serious language challenges, an academic mentor may be assigned who is responsible for helping the students to improve their academic writing skills (Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). Master's writers' experience of either their L1 or L2 English academic language will be different and will eventually determine how they create their voice in their dissertations. It is evident that P1's desperation to overcome his challenges with academic writing was so intense, that he eventually resorted to sacrificing his voice in allowing his ideas to be translated into the desired academic discourse. As a result, the writer settled for his dissertation reflecting the appropriate academic voice types for assessment purposes.

#### **4.5.4 Authorial voice**

Master's writers are influenced by institutional structures in the way in which they create meaning in their dissertations. For this theme, I explored the participants' perceptions of authorial voice and the extent to which they were encouraged and allowed to create voice in their dissertations.

##### ***4.5.4.1 Understanding voice***

The participants' responses regarding authorial voice conveyed much uncertainty, which is a reflection of the elusive nature of voice as represented in the literature (Yancey, 1994; Zhao & Llosa, 2008; Hyland, 2013). Although some of the responses showed some understanding of voice, it struck me that the participants did not fully understand the meaning and the signs of voice in writing. However, the participants' uncertainty regarding voice can be understood, as most research studies related to authorial voice have indicated that definitions and understanding of voice were conflicting and diffuse (Elbow, 2007; Sperling & Appleman, 2011; Nelson & Castelló, 2012).

While three participants stated that their supervisors had commented about the absence of authorial voice in their writing, it was interesting to note that none of the participants confirmed being given concrete advice on how to include their voice in their writing. Perhaps this is a reason for the tension between having a voice and not understanding how to develop this voice in academic writing for master's dissertation writing. Therefore, it is necessary to initiate master's writers in the use of specific linguistic choices that will help to create appropriate voice (Hyland, 2002b).

#### 4.5.4.2 *Types of voices*

For this sub-theme, the aim was to gauge whether the participants were aware of their own and other voices in their dissertation writing. Albeit unknowingly, the participants have always been exposed to authorial voice in reading material. As a result, some participants identified other voices, like those of researchers that were cited in their writing more easily than they could their own voice in their dissertations.

#### 4.5.4.3 *Creating voice*

Considerable research is accessible on the relationship between the writer and reader (Canagarajah, 2015; Hyland, 2002a; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012). It is unequivocally clear in the literature both authors and readers are needed as co-constructors of authorial voice. The participants' responses indicated that developing a voice was a gradual process that occurred through much reading, understanding and writing.

Three of the four participant responses indicate an unconscious lack of awareness of other readers besides their supervisors. The master's writer should consider the reader-writer relationship as research indicates that both the writer and the reader are essential for the co-construction of authorial voice (Hyland, 2002b; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Canagarajah, 2015). Writers need to be aware of and consciously write for specific readers, consequently, deliberately creating specific voice types.

In response to whether their writing indicated authorial voice, all four participants indicated that their dissertations had a clear authorial voice. However, they did acknowledge that it was a challenging journey to write academically correctly. For this reason it may be likely that the presence of authorial voice in their dissertations was not necessarily by design. Although three participants stated that their supervisors had mentioned voice in writing, little importance was attached to the construct and none of the participants reported having received any guidance on how to create authorial voice in their writing. A few reasons could be attributed to this situation. Firstly, a greater number of supervisors in South African HEIs are new supervisors who are still developing their academic writing skills. As a result, some supervisors may be unaware of authorial voice and how to guide students in developing their own voice (Zhang & Zhan, 2020). Secondly, the significant academic writing challenges in language forms and structure that three participants admitted to experiencing in writing their master's dissertations may have monopolised the supervisors' attention to the exclusion of considering authorial voice (Butler, 2011). Consequently, it is evident that students need explicit guidance from their supervisors and academic community to construct their voice in dissertation writing successfully.

It is significant that all participants agreed that voice construction was important and necessary, considering that three of the four participants were PhD students at the time of the interviews. However, their undeniable challenges in understanding and consciously creating authorial voice could be due to the genre limitations presented by the master's dissertation, and the L1 academic writing instructions and standards of the academic community.

## 4.6 Synthesis of interpretations

To understand and answer the research questions, I examined the literature on academic writing, voice theory, the socio-constructive nature of voice, the Academic Literacies theory, and the genre of masters' dissertation writing. I also conducted a qualitative case study investigation and analysed data collected from semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

In synthesising the findings from the two data sets, the three research sub-questions were satisfactorily answered. The literature review, and the analysis and interpretations of both the semi-structured interviews and document analysis offered insight into and understanding of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing.

In response to the first research question on how master's students understand the concept of authorial voice, it was evident that the participants had some sense of the phenomenon. Based on the interpretation of the responses for the first theme, it was evident that all participants had adequate choice in their topic and material for their master's dissertation writing. These responses augured well as they suggested an autonomy of thought that should translate into authorial voice.

Another significant finding that supports the literature on voice being socially constructed (Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998; Prior, 2001; Ivanič & Camps, 2001), is that all four participants indicated that they had received various types of support from their academic community in negotiating their master's dissertation academic writing. While such academic support is necessary and part of the master's dissertation writing journey, it may be likely that the authentic writer voice was sacrificed as the writers settled for structuring their dissertations according to their supervisors' suggestions or departmental guidelines.

All four participants confirmed that it was challenging to meet the demands of academic writing (Sibomana, 2016). I had expected that these challenges might have manifested in the form of hesitant arguments, difficulties in navigating the dissertation genre, numerous language errors and a hesitant or complete lack of authorial voice. Although all participants cited varying

degrees of academic English writing problems in writing their master's dissertations, the document analysis of the discussion sections of the master's dissertations did not reflect the academic writing challenges. Instead, the analysis of the texts indicated that the writers had used the appropriate level of academic writing and their writing reflected significant academic voice types. Academic writing is regarded as a form of academic capital or currency for writers to gain acceptance and access to power in academic communities (Bourdieu, 1991). The master's dissertation writers and their support community understood this currency well, so much so that mandatory editing of all dissertations but one had to occur before the dissertations were submitted for examination. The successful completion of a dissertation is actually dependant on the language editor who plays a significant role in helping postgraduate students cope with academic writing challenges (Albertyn, et al., 2008; Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013). Kruger and Bevan-Dye (2013) explored the important supportive role played by the supervisor and the language editor in this regard. This accounts for the fact that all the analysed discussion sections were academically well-written, which allowed the appropriate academic voice types to emerge.

In response to the last interview theme on the participants' understanding of voice, all participants revealed vague and varying opinions of authorial voice. This was predictable as the literature on authorial voice emphasises that voice is a complex and challenging construct which enjoys little consensus among researchers (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Guinda & Hyland, 2012; Allison, 2018). However, there was a disjuncture between the participants' unclear understanding of authorial voice and the findings from the document analysis of the master's discussion sections. Not only was the academic writing acceptable, but also, there was clear evidence of different voice types, which are academically acceptable by the academic community. The most dominant were the academically literate, professional and objective voice types. This appropriate use of authorial voice for the dissertations can again be attributed to the participants' mimicking the type of writing that they were exposed to in their research material. In addition, the language editing of the dissertations contributed significantly to their suitable, error-free academic writing, which allowed the appropriate voice types to emerge.

The document analysis revealed findings in support of the second and third research sub-questions on the strategies that master's students used to develop their own types of authorial voice, as well as the guidance that students may have received on developing authorial voice. This research study focused on how master's dissertation writers created authorial voice in their dissertations. For this purpose, Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology was applied in analysing the discussion sections of the dissertations. Based on the findings from the document analysis, it was evident that the master's dissertation writers had constructed and predominantly used academic voice types by drawing on significant linguistic features that are

common to academic writing for the dissertation genre. Linguistic features such as nominalisations, hedges and boosters, reporting verbs, the passive construction and the use of personal pronouns featured prominently in the analysed texts. The choices of these linguistic features may have been deliberate in the master's writers' attempts to construct themselves as members of the academic community in order to gain membership to that community. Writers use appropriate, legitimate expressions that are socially accepted by academic communities (Bourdieu, 1991).

While the analysed texts showed a dominance of acceptable academically literate voice types, some non-academic voice types were evident. It is most likely that non-academic voice types were evident in the discussion sections where the writers had to interpret the results that were intrinsic to their respective studies only. For the interpretation of their results, there may have been no other sources of reference that could have been imitated, thus resulting in the development of non-academic voice types. Some interview participants had indicated their reliance on reading other academic texts in order to aid their dissertation writing. It is likely that they imitated or parroted typical linguistic constructs that indicate the academically literate voice types used in the academic source material that was compulsory reading for their master's study, hence the dominance of acceptable voice types suitable for master's dissertation writing. This is not an unusual phenomenon, as some writers who may experience academic writing challenges have to fulfil the academic writing and genre needs for the development of their master's dissertations. As a result, the writer's voice becomes the voice of academia and the institution, as the writer, the supervisor and the institution are rewarded when the academic writing voice conforms to the requirements of academia.

In essence, the research question on master's students' perceptions and understanding of authorial voice has been answered based on the findings of this study. It is safe to conclude that master's writers did have some perception and understanding of authorial voice, albeit conflicting and unclear due to their novice academic writing experience. This understanding of authorial voice was evident in their final dissertations that mostly indicated the desired academically literate voice types, hence reflecting the socially-constructed nature of academic voice. Also evident in their dissertations were individual voice types that reflected a lack of confidence and assurance. However, questions were raised about whose voice or voices were represented in the dissertations, considering the necessary language editing that ten out of 11 dissertations underwent before being submitted for assessment. The editing of dissertations prior to assessment may result in the loss of the master's writer's individual voice.

In synthesising the findings from the two data sets, the first two research questions were satisfactorily answered. In response to the first research question, it was evident that the

desired authorial voice types for the master's dissertation writing genre were visible in the discourse of the analysed discussion sections of the master's dissertations. From the analysis of the texts, it was clear that the writers had used the correct expressions and discourse, which indicated the desired academic voice types that were necessary and acceptable for the academic community. However, there was some disjunction based on some of the findings from the semi-structured interviews that indicate that the writers may not have a clear understanding of authorial voice and how to create voice in their writing. Significantly, tensions were revealed about the master's writers' perceptions on authorial voice in dissertation writing through their complex, varying responses about voice and academic writing.

## 4.7 Conclusion

The presentation and the discussion of the main findings form the core of this chapter. For the presentation of findings, the discussion section of 11 master's dissertations were examined for authorial voice. I used Ivanič and Camps (Ivanič & Camps, 2001) Voice Typology to examine the texts for linguistic constructs that indicated authorial voice. Next, I conducted a thematic analysis of four semi-structured interviews that were held with four dissertation writers.

The aim of these interviews was to examine the writing process that the participants had engaged in through understanding how master's writers think, understand, adapt knowledge, and perceive their dissertation-writing journey. These interviews provided rich and interesting data on four themes: **Your dissertation, academic community support, academic writing** and **authorial voice** through the analysis of specific questions. Even though the sample consisted of only four participants, the extensive discussions and the numerous questions led to thick and rich data and provided a clear sense of the participants' perceptions and experiences of academic writing and authorial voice.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!" (Carroll, 1865).

### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 I presented the findings and discussion of the application of Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology to the discussion sections of master's dissertations and the thematic analyses of the semi-structured interviews. In this final chapter, I conclude the dissertation with a summary of the research. Thereafter, the research contributions are presented, followed by suggestions for future research.

My research study explored authorial voice through the analysis of master's dissertation writing. In this chapter, the synthesis of the interpretations are presented according to the research questions. Firstly, the types of voices that were created in the texts are discussed according to the use of specific linguistic constructs based on the application of Ivanič and Camps' (2001) Voice Typology to the discussion sections of master's dissertations. Next, I discuss how the participants' understanding of how authorial voice was constructed or possibly impeded by reflecting on the four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews. These themes are **your dissertation**, **academic community support**, **academic language**, and **authorial voice**. Before the interpretation of the analysed data, I once again present the sub-research questions that were the focus of my study.

SRQ1: How do master's students understand the concept of authorial voice?

SRQ2: What strategies do master's students use to develop their own types of authorial voice?

SRQ3: What guidance is available to help master's students develop their authorial voice?

This empirical study was conducted to explore master's dissertation writers' perceptions and strategies of voice. The implications of the research are represented below, with reference to relevant theory.

## **5.2 Implications of findings**

The implications that emerge from the findings can be grouped into two categories: the first category consists of factors that facilitate the development of voice; the second category concerns factors that may hamper the acquisition and development of voice. Tension is created by the implications of the findings from the two data sets.

### **5.2.1 Factors that aid voice development**

The findings in this study indicate some factors that supported the master's writers in writing academically correctly and in developing authorial voice. Significantly, the second and third research sub-questions are also supported by these findings. The text analysis of the master's dissertations shows evidence of acceptable standards of academic writing and the use of various linguistic strategies that the master's writers had used to create the necessary academic voice types. Some of these enabling factors that contributed towards the academic writing and authorial voice are the writers' personal choice in deciding on the topic and content of their dissertation, and academic community support.

Firstly, the writers were free to choose their own dissertation topics that were based on their personal experiences and preferences. As a result, it is likely that a certain authority and independent thought were transferred to the master's dissertation because the writers were working on subjects that were personally relevant and meaningful. Through the experiences and personal ideas that were written in the dissertation, the master's writer may have indicated voice as representing the autobiographical self (Ivanič, 1998). The Academic Literacies Approach (Lea & Street, 1998) also supports this empowering voice type.

Next, each participant indicated having received some measure of support from the academic community. This support took the form of supervisor facilitation and feedback, peer group discussions, academic writing support through editing and the postgraduate cohort community of practice. It is likely that the academic community support did translate into the presence of significant academic authorial voice types in the analysed master's dissertations, attesting to a socialised voice. It is evident by the desired academic voice types in the analysed discussion sections that master's writers did imitate the academic writing style as well as the identity and the voice of successful writers.

### **5.2.2 Factors that hamper voice development**

Significant factors may have hampered voice development for the master's writers, which were largely drawn from the findings of the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews in this study. These factors are a lack of academic community support, academic writing challenges, and a lack of understanding of authorial voice. Importantly, these factors do aid in

answering the first research sub-question on how master's students do understand the concept of authorial voice.

The first factor that may impede voice development in master's dissertation writing is a lack of support from the academic community. Some participants cited the master's dissertation writing experience as a lonely and confusing journey. Although all participants received some form of supervisor support and feedback, the consensus was that the participants would have welcomed more structured support, especially in academic writing.

Secondly, all participants described the significant, sometimes debilitating, academic writing challenges they had experienced. While all master's writers had taken academic writing courses in the first year of their undergraduate studies, they indicated that an academic writing course dedicated to master's writers would have been of benefit to meet the master's academic writing requirements. As a result of the challenges that the writers faced, their authorial voice was impacted. Due to the significant writing challenges that master's writers experienced, they had to resort to language editing before their dissertations were submitted for assessment. Consequently, the authorial voice types that were evident in the dissertations may be open to scrutiny, as ultimately, it may not be the writers' voice that is dominant after the editing process. It is evident that master's writers do need structured academic writing support from the academic community to develop their academic writing skills and, consequently, their authorial voice.

Thirdly, although voice is a widely-used term, it is vague and not clear-cut (Yancey, 1994; Thesen, 2013). All the participants gave varying definitions of voice, some more uncertain than others. Perhaps, the writers had an idea of voice but could not explain the concept nor implement voice in their writing without guidance. Ideally, both students and supervisors should have the same understanding of voice to facilitate master's writers developing voice. Petrić (2010) urges that voice should be clarified so that both supervisors and students have a mutual understanding of the term. In this way, misunderstandings may be prevented. Another disconcerting challenge regarding voice in master's dissertation writing was that some participants had neither discussed with nor had they been urged by their supervisors to use voice in their writing. In essence, it is necessary that supervisors consider structured methods of supporting master's writers in developing their voice to match the expectations of the academic community.

### 5.3 Significance of study

This study has added to the existing body of literature on authorial voice and academic writing for postgraduate education. New insights about these concepts have been gained through this study.

This study is significant due to its relevance in identifying and examining authorial voice as well as emphasising its importance in master's dissertation writing. Developing authorial voice should not be subordinate to institutional and departmental practices.

Pedagogically, this study is important for all in the academic community who write and are engaged in teaching writing, such as supervisors, teachers of academic writing, students and academic writers, who form the community of practice (Wenger, 2010) for master's writers. Based on the participants' expressions of the master's dissertation writing experience being even lonelier because of academic writing challenges, the master's writers need to be in close and focused contact with competent writers to be able to develop the type of writing that skilled and competent writers produce (Macbeth, 2010). Not only should these key players be alerted to the importance of constructively and deliberately supporting master's students to develop voice through various lexical devices, but they must also be able to effectively apply voice pedagogy through their knowledge and understanding of the strategies for the construction of voice (Zhang & Zhan, 2020).

The literature on voice suggests that voice can be taught and learned through certain writing strategies (Zhao & Llosa 2008; Sperling & Appleman, 2011; Guerin, 2012). Most master's writers need academic writing support because writing is the only means through which ideas can be conveyed (Cotterall, 2011) in the process of developing authorial voice. In their need to develop academic writing skills for the acquisition of the degree, it is evident that master's writers do resort to imitating the desired academic discourse and the voice types, so much so that their own voices are sacrificed. However, this is a normal process in the journey of honing an academic voice. In her study conducted with master's students, Petrić (2010) found that most writers regarded authorial voice in academic writing as expressing their personal opinion, a response that was also expressed by some of the participants in this study. However, supervisors, academic writing centres and academic writing communities of practice could guide postgraduate students in internalising the idea that authorial voice is more than just an expression of personal opinion, that specific lexical devices can be learned and applied to develop voice. For example, master's writers can be initiated into the use of intertextual markers such as personal pronouns to increase engagement with their readers. Additionally, master's writers can be facilitated towards developing an individualised voice by expressing degrees of confidence through specific hedges and boosters (Nelson & Castelló, 2012).

Finally, master's writers can also be guided on creating a reader-friendly voice with linking words. Initially, these lexical devices will help writers in developing their own fledgling voice until they hone and develop more distinctive authorial voices through iterative writing practices.

It is expected that supervisors will have advanced degrees, have perfected the skills of successful academic writing and have developed significant authorial voices. However, in reality, some academics may have challenges with the demands of academic writing (Voegele & Stevens, 2017) and may still be developing their own authorial voices. While it is necessary that emerging academics become supervisors to support the ever-increasing numbers of postgraduate students, they also need time to develop their own research passion, academic writing and voice creation (Cassim, 2011; Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013) to be able to guide their students in their own voice development. It may be necessary that the supervisors themselves join communities of practice with peers to share and develop the necessary skills of advanced academic writing and authorial voice (Voegele & Stevens, 2017) with the intention of guiding their students towards more constructive academic writing and authorial voice development.

All interview participants indicated that they managed their master's dissertation writing through reading and imitating other writers. This was especially true for the three L2 participants. Imitation is one of the most important and common techniques of learning how to write that is also used by seasoned writers. Through initially imitating the writing of other writers, we create and hone our own writing styles and, subsequently, our voice (Brook, 1988). If this is the case, then supervisors could suggest sources that present strong academic voices, so that master's students can start developing their own voice through imitating and modelling writers whose voices they identify with through reading and iterative writing. Also, collaborative learning groups (Monaghan, 2007) consisting of expert and novice postgraduate writers could be set up by academic departments, with the express intention of supporting their master's writers with their academic writing challenges, thus freeing work-laden supervisors to focus on the more demanding development of their students' authorial voice.

Research indicates the need for more comprehensive postgraduate academic writing support for dissertation writing (Butler, 2011; Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). This study casts light on the recognisable challenges experienced by master's students in the academic writing necessary for master's dissertation writing. All four participants indicated experiencing significant challenges with the academic writing for their dissertation. The findings of this study can be integrated with academic language teaching to benefit and empower master's students. Many universities, nationally and worldwide, have implemented strategies to improve the development of academic writing for PhD candidates (Williams, 2012; Schulze & Lemmer, 2017). If the literature on academic writing and voice supports the

idea that doctoral students need constant academic support in academic writing and in developing an authorial voice (Butler, 2011; Williams, 2012, Schulze & Lemmer, 2017), by implication, master's students experience similar if not worse difficulties in developing their academic writing and voice. For this reason, master's students do need an ongoing academic writing programme beginning in the early stages of tertiary education, which is dedicated to coping with the challenges posed by academic writing. A tailor-made master's academic writing programme should differ significantly from the necessary ongoing HEI writing programmes, in raising a "critical awareness" of authorial voice in academic writing (Ivanič & Camps 2001:3), where writers can actively control the projection of voice in their writing. As a result of improved academic writing skills, master's students will be aware of the options on how to strengthen their authorial identity in their writing (Hyland, 2002b) and be better able to develop their authorial voice. The knock-on effects could be that more master's students would be retained and graduate within the required period; also, PhD students may have fewer challenges in acquiring and manipulating voice in thesis writing.

## 5.4 Limitations

The following are some of the limitations that may have influenced my study.

Firstly, although I worked with small samples, they were considered suitable for the scope of my master's study. The selection of the master's dissertations for analysis from the relevant department depended on the number of master's dissertations that were available for the selected period of 2018 to 2019. Based on purposive sampling, the 17 available dissertations were whittled down to 11 that met the relevant criteria for the text analysis for this study. Subsequently, for the second sample set, only four interview participants were selected because only four dissertation writers responding to the interview invitation. Although these sample sizes are considered suitable for the qualitative research undertaken for this master's study, a larger sample size would have been preferable to facilitate transferability.

Secondly, case studies on identity are regarded as being biased. It is possible that there will be some personal bias in the relationship between the participants and the researcher that may colour the data analysis. However, to minimise bias, with guidance from my supervisor, I ensured accurate description, reporting and interpretation of the data by strictly focusing on the content.

Another limitation was that only the understanding and perceptions of voice of master's dissertation writers were explored through semi-structured interviews. It would have made for a more nuanced study if the experience and perceptions of voice of master's supervisors were

to be included in this study. However, the scope of the master's study with its short period of data collection and analysis did not allow for this specific third sample set.

A fourth limitation is the fact that only the discussion section of the master's dissertations was analysed for authorial voice. The discussion section was chosen for analysis, as the writer has to merge and critically evaluate the literature review content, the methodology and the results of the study (Basturkmen, 2009). A more comprehensive perspective of the master's writer's use of authorial voice would be gained from an analysis of entire dissertations.

Finally, another limitation for this study is the fact that no examiners' reports were used for data analysis. The examiners' reports would have added a rich, nuanced understanding of the use of authorial voice from a more objective perspective. However, there are significant reasons for not considering the examiners' reports for analysis. Firstly, being privy to examiners' reports may result in a violation of privacy. Also, there would have been significant ethical considerations involved for access to the highly confidential reviewers' reports. Additionally, if the researcher had been successful in gaining access to the examiners' reports, much administration of the reports would have had to be undertaken before they could be released for research purposes.

## **5.5 Recommendations for further research**

Where further scholarship is concerned, I suggest the following.

In this study, I focused only on the master's dissertations of one department in a higher education institution. It is suggested that a larger number of dissertations from more disciplines be considered over a greater number of years, which will enable a deeper level of analysis. Findings from such a study would aid language instructors and supervisors in guiding students in developing discipline-specific authorial voices.

In this study, I analysed master's dissertation writing and responses from the semi-structured interviews with the master's writers. I would suggest that a deeper understanding of the master's writer's development of voice might be gained if master's supervisors, examiners and language editors were also interviewed on their experiences of and suggestions for developing voice in dissertation writing.

Additionally, I would suggest that a study be conducted where different drafts of the master's dissertation be analysed together with more engagement with individual participants to examine authorial voice development. The pre-edited first draft, the feedback draft from language editors and mentors, as well as the final edited submission should be analysed to

gain a clearer impression of the master's dissertation writers' real journey in developing authorial voice.

Finally, it would be useful to gain access to the marks that the analysed master's dissertations were awarded. In this way, the researcher would be able to examine whether the final marks attained reflected the extent and type of authorial voice reflected in the analysed master's dissertations.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This research study emphasises the value and importance of authorial voice for master's dissertation writing. The main purpose of this study was to explore how voice was navigated in the discussion sections of master's dissertations. This study contributes towards understanding the impact of academic writing on master's dissertation writing. Through the qualitative analyses, the findings indicate that the writers did manage to create a credible authorial voice. These findings support the literature on voice in emphasising that voice is multifaceted in nature and that it is both individually and socially constructed. Through the strong voice types constructed in the analysed texts, it is evident that the master's writers were novice agents of their authorial voice in the construction of their dissertations, and that they had begun the journey to becoming academic discourse insiders. The main purpose of this investigation was to examine how master's dissertation writers negotiated authorial voice in their writing. The qualitative analyses show that the writers did manage to construct appropriate voice types in their writing through different means.

## **5.7 Reflections**

This dissertation forms part of the wider dialogue on authorial voice in the academic community. I believe that it can only prompt further research studies based on authorial voice, identity and academic literacy among scholars. Through this dissertation journey, I have gained a better understanding of authorial voice. While my academic writing voice may not be fully-fledged, similar to the voices of the participants in this study, I know that my voice will develop and evolve with continuous reading and writing. As Hyland (2013) states, I have found that voice is a slippery, many-layered concept. I have experienced many versions of voice through the literature, the participants in this study and my academic community. Oftentimes, just when I thought I was beginning to experience the burgeoning of my own voice, it would

slip through elusively, trout-like from an amateur tickler's grasp, especially if I did not consistently exercise the patience to read, write, and write again.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Abasi, A. R., Akbari, N., & Graves, B. (2006). Discourse appropriation, construction of identities, and the complex issue of plagiarism: ESL students writing in graduate school. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15(2), 102-117.
- Albertyn, R. M., Kapp, C. A., & Bitzer, E. M. (2008). Profiling exiting postgraduate students' performance and experiences. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 22(4), 749-772.
- Allison, D. (2018). Voicing the academy. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1(3), 102-117.
- Andrews, R. (2015). Critical thinking and/or argumentation in higher education. In M. Davies & B. Ronald (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Archer, A. (2010). Challenges and potentials for writing centres in South African tertiary institutions. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(4), 495-510.
- Atkinson, D. (1997). A critical approach to critical thinking in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(1), 71-94.
- Atkinson, D., & Ramanathan, V. (1995). Cultures of writing: an ethnographic comparison of L1 and L2 university writing/language programs. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(3), 539-568.
- Babbie, E. R. (2010). *The practice of social research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: four essays*. (M. Holquist, Ed.) Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. (C. Emerson, M. Holquist, Eds., & V. W. McGee, Trans.) Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Basturkmen, H. (2009). Commenting on results in published research articles and masters dissertations in language teaching. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 8, 241-251.
- Basturkmen, H. (2012). A genre-based investigation of discussion sections of research articles in dentistry and disciplinary variation. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(2), 134-144.
- Bertrand, C., & Bourdeau, L. (2010). Research interviews by Skype: a new data collection method. In *Proceedings of the 9th European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies*. Madrid, Spain.
- Bitchener, J., & Basturkmen, H. (2006). Perceptions of the difficulties of postgraduate L2 thesis students writing the discussion section. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5(1), 4-18.

- Bitzer, E. (2013). MPhil module on research foundations. Department of Curriculum Studies: Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Blommaert, J. (2008). Bernstein and poetics revisited: Voice, globalization and education. *Discourse and Society*, 19, 425-451.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. (J. B. Thompson, Ed.), Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Bowden, D. (1995). The rise of a metaphor: "Voice" in composition pedagogy. *Rhetoric Review*, 14(1), 173-188.
- Brook, R. (1988). Modelling a writer's identity: Reading and imitation in the writing classroom. *College Composition and Communication*, 39(1), 23-41.
- Bruce, C. S. (1994). Research students' early experiences of the dissertation literature review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 19(2), 217-229.
- Butler, G. (2011). Supervisor perceptions of the academic literacy requirements of postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 45(1), 7-22.
- Butler-Adam, J. (2018). The fourth industrial revolution and education. *South African Journal of Science*, 114(5-6), 1.
- Cadman, K. (1994). Thesis writing for international students: A question of identity. *English for Specific Purposes*, 16(1), 3-14.
- Cameron, J., Nairn, K., & Higgins, J. (2009). Demystifying academic writing: Reflections on emotions, know-how and academic identity. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 33(2), 269-284.
- Can, G. (2009). *A model for doctoral students' perceptions and attitudes toward written feedback for academic writing* (Doctoral thesis). Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
- Canagarajah, S. A. (2015). "Blessed in my own way": Pedagogical affordances for dialogical voice construction in multilingual student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 27(1), 122-139.
- Carrol, J. (2015). *Tools for teaching in an educationally mobile world*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. London, Macmillan.
- Casanave, C. P. (2002). *Writing games: multicultural case studies of academic literacy practices in higher education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cassim, L. (2011). *Who supervises the supervisor?* Retrieved from <https://mg.co.za/article/2011-04-29-who-supervises-the-supervisor>
- Council on Higher Education. (2009). *Postgraduate studies in South Africa: A statistical profile*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

- Clark, R., & Ivanič, R. (2013). *The politics of writing*. London: Routledge.
- Cloete, N. (2014). The South African higher education system: performance and policy. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(8), 1355-1368.
- Coffin, C., Curry, M. J., Goodman, S., Hewings, A., Lillis, T. M., & Swann, J. (2003). *Teaching academic writing: A toolkit for higher education*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cotterall, S. (2011). Doctoral students' writing: Where's the pedagogy? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(4), 413-425.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Qualitative inquiry research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.
- Davies, M., & Bartlett, R. (2015). *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Jager, L. (2012). *Misunderstanding in second language instructional communication* (Doctoral thesis). University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Dell, S. (2010). South Africa: Decline in PhD numbers a major problem. *University World News*.
- Department of Higher Education. (2014). *Report of the ministerial committee for the review of the funding of universities*. Pretoria: Government Printing Works.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2016). *Statistics on post-school education and training in South Africa: 2014*. Pretoria: Government Printing Works.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2020). *The language policy framework for public higher education institutions*. Retrieved from [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/202011/43860gon1160.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202011/43860gon1160.pdf)
- Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without teachers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Elbow, P. (1981). *Writing with power: Techniques for mastering the writing process*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Elbow, P. (1994). What do we mean when we talk about voice in texts? In K. Yancey (Ed.), *Voices on voice: Perspectives, definitions and inquiry* (pp. 1-35). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Elbow, P. (2007). Voice in writing again: Embracing contraries. *College English*, 7(1), pp. 168-188.
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 4(1), pp. 1-10.  
<https://doi:10.1177/2158244014522633>
- Fink, A. (2010). *Conducting research literature reviews: from the internet to paper* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Geng, Y., & Wharton, S. (2017). Evaluative language in discussion sections of doctoral theses: similarities and differences between L1 Chinese L1 English writers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 22(1), 80-91.
- Gibbons, M. (1998). Higher education relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guerin, C. (2012). Try it on: Voice, concordancing and text-matching in doctoral writing. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 8(2), 34-35.
- Guinda, C. S., & Hyland, K. (2012). Introduction: A context-sensitive approach to stance and voice. In K. Hyland, & C. S. Guinda (Eds.), *Stance and voice in written academic genres*. (pp. 1-11). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Halliday, M. A. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Hart, C. (2018). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the research imagination* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Sage.
- Helms-Park, R., & Stapleton, P. (2003). Questioning the importance of individualized voice in undergraduate L2 argumentative writing: An empirical study with pedagogical implications. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(3), 245-265.
- Hirvela, A., & Belcher, D. (2001). Coming back to voice: The multiple voices and identities of mature, multilingual writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(1-2), 83-106.
- Howard, R. M. (1995). Plagiarisms, authorships, and the academic death penalty. *College English*, 57(7), 788-806.
- Hunston, S. (2007). Semantic prosody revisited. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 12(2), 249-268.
- Hunston, S., & Thompson, G. (2001). Evaluation: An introduction. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of*

- discourses*. (pp. 1-27). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hyland, K. (1999). Disciplinary discourses: Writer stance in research articles. In C. Candlin & K. Hyland (Eds.), *Writing: texts, processes and practices* (pp. 99-121). London: Longman.
- Hyland, K. (2002a). Authority and invisibility: Authorial identity in academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34(8), 1091-1112.
- Hyland, K. (2002b). Options of identity in academic writing. *ELT Journal*, 56(4), 351-358.
- Hyland, K. (2009). *Teaching and researching writing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Harrow: Longman.
- Hyland, K. (2013). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Irvin, L. L. (2010). What is "academic" writing? In C. Lowe & P. Zemliansky (Eds.), *Writing spaces: Readings on writing* (pp. 3-17). West Lafayette, Indiana: Parlor Press.
- Ivanič, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discursual construction of identity in academic writing*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Ivanič, R. (2005). The discursual construction of writer identity. In R. Beach, J. Green, M. Kamil & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on literacy research* (pp. 391-416). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Ivanič, R., & Camps, D. (2001). I am how I sound: Voice as self-representation in L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(2001), 3-33.
- Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). Foundations and approaches to mixed methods research. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Jansen, J. D. (2011). The quality of doctoral education in South Africa: A question of significance. *Perspectives in Education*, 29(3), 139-146.
- Jones, A. (2005). Culture and context: Critical thinking and student learning in introductory macroeconomics. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(3), 339-354.
- Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2014). *Helping doctoral students write*. London: Routledge.
- Kowal, S., & O'Connell, D. C. (2013). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data*. London: Sage.
- Krouwel, M., Jolly, K., & Greenfield, S. (2019). Comparing Skype (video calling) and in-person qualitative interview modes in a study of people with irritable bowel syndrome – An exploratory comparative analysis. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 19(219). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0867-9>
- Kruger, H., & Bevan-Dye, A. (2013). The language editor's role in postgraduate research: A survey of supervisors' perceptions. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27(4), 875-899.

- Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners*. London: Sage.
- Lea, M. R. (2004). Academic literacies: A pedagogy for course design. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(6), 739-756.
- Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(2), 157-171.
- Lee, A. (2011). Finding voice: Appreciating audience. In T. S. Rocco & T. Hatcher (Eds.), *The handbook of scholarly writing and publishing* (pp. 102-114). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lieberman, P. (Writer) & Blitz, J (Director). (2009). Stress Relief. [Television series episode]. In G Daniels (Executive Producer), *The Office*. New York, NY: NBC Universal Television.
- Lillis, T., & Scott, M. (2007). Defining academic literacies research: Issues of epistemology, ideology and strategy. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 5-32.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.
- Linneberg, S. M., & Korsgaard, S. (2019). Coding qualitative data: A synthesis guiding the novice. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 19(3), 259-270. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-12-2018-0012>
- Lofland, J., Snow, D. A., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analyzing social settings: A Guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Macbeth, K. P. (2010). Deliberate false provisions: The use and usefulness of models in learning academic writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(1), 33-48.
- Mack, L. (2010). The philosophical underpinnings of educational research. *Polyglossia*, 19(1), 1-7. Retrieved from [https://www.apu.ac.jp/rcaps/uploads/fckeditor/publications/polyglossia/Polyglossia\\_V19\\_Lindsay.pdf](https://www.apu.ac.jp/rcaps/uploads/fckeditor/publications/polyglossia/Polyglossia_V19_Lindsay.pdf)
- Malan, R., Erwee, R., Van Rensburg, H., & Danaher, P. (2012). Cultural diversity: Impact on the doctoral candidate-supervisor relationship. *International Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 17(1), 1-14.
- Maree, K. (2007). *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Maree, K., & Van der Westhuizen, C. (2007). Planning a research proposal. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 23-45). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2001). Voice in Japanese written discourse: Implications for second language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(1-2), 35-53.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2015). Identity in written discourse. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35(1), 140-159. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000178>

- Matsuda, P. K., & Tardy, C. (2007). Voice in academic writing: The rhetorical construction of author identity in blind manuscript review. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26(2), 235-249.
- McCambridge, J., Kypri, K., & Elbourne, D. (2014). In randomization we trust? There are overlooked problems in experimenting with people in behavioural intervention trials. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 67(1), 247-253.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mertens, D. M. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Sage.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, M. A., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Monaghan, C. H. (2007). Communities of Practice: Modeling lifelong learning skills. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 55(2), 10-16.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07377366.2007.10400116>
- Mouton, J. (2001). *How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Mouton, J. (2007). Post-graduate studies in South Africa: Myths, misconceptions and challenges. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 21(8), 1078-1090.
- Mouton, J. (2011). Doctoral production in South Africa: Statistics, challenges and responses. *Perspectives in Education*, 29(1), 13-29.
- National Planning Commission. (2012). *National development plan 2030: Our future – make it work*. Pretoria: Government Printing Works.
- Nelson, N., & Castelló, M. (2012). Academic writing and authorial voice. In M. Castelló & C. Donahue (Eds.), *University writing: selves and texts in academic societies* (Vol. 24, pp. 33-51). Bradford: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2007a). Introducing qualitative research. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 47-68). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2007b). Qualitative research designs and data gathering techniques. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 69-97). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2007c). Analysing qualitative data. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 98-122). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- O'Driscoll, J. (2001). A face model of language choice. *Multilingua*, 20(3), 245-268.
- Olivier, A., & Carstens, A. (2018). A heuristic framework for voice instruction at the doctoral level. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus*, 55(1), 7-26.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.
- Petrić, B. (2010). Students' conceptions of voice in academic writing. In R. Lorés-Sanz, P. Mur-Dueñas & E. Lafuente-Millán (Eds.), *Constructing interpersonal: multiple perspectives and applications to written academic Genres* (pp. 325-336). Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Petrić, B. (2012). Legitimate textual borrowing: Direct quotation in L2 student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21(2), 102-117.
- Plowright, D. (2011). *Using mixed methods. Frameworks for an integrated methodology*. London: Sage.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2006). Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept "thick description". *The Qualitative Report*, 11(3), 538-549. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR11-3/ponterotto.pdf>
- Prior, P. (2001). Voice in text, mind, and society: Sociohistoric accounts of discourse acquisition and use. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(1-2), 55-81.
- Raimes, A., & Zamel, V. (1997). Response to Ramanathan and Kaplan. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 6(1), 79-81.
- Ramanathan, V., & Kaplan, R. B. (1996). Audience and voice in current composition texts: Some implications for ESL student writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 5(1), 21-34.
- Roulston, K. J. (2013). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.
- Rule, P., & John, V. (2011). *Your guide to case study research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: Sage.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: Sage.
- Schulze, S. (2008). Academic research at a South African higher education institution: Quality issues. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 22(3), 644-661.
- Schulze, S., & Lemmer, E. (2017). Supporting the development of postgraduate academic writing skills in South Africa. *Per Linguam*, 33(1), 54-66. <https://doi.org/10.5785/33-1-702>
- Seitz, S. (2016). Pixilated partnerships in overcoming obstacles in qualitative interviews via Skype: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 16(2), 229–235.
- Sibomana, E. (2016). "We know what to say, we know what to do, but we don't know how": the challenges of becoming academically literate in a new linguistic and socio-cultural space. *Education as Change*, 20(2), 23-24. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17159/1947->

9417/2016/747

- Snape, D., & Spencer, L. (2003). The foundations of qualitative research. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- South African Qualifications Authority. (2013). *Publication of the general and further education and training qualifications and sub-framework and higher education qualifications sub-framework of the national qualifications framework*. Government Gazette. Retrieved from [https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/pol/2013/gfetqs\\_heqsf.pdf](https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/pol/2013/gfetqs_heqsf.pdf)
- Sperling, M., & Appleman, D. (2011). Voice in the context of literacy studies. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 46(1), 70-84.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 443-466). London: Sage.
- Stapleton, P. (2002). Critiquing voice as a viable pedagogical tool in L2 writing: Returning the spotlight to ideas. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 11(3), 177–190.
- Stewart, D. (2010). *Semantic prosody: A critical evaluation*. London: Routledge.
- Stock, I., & Eik-Nes, N. L. (2016). Voice Features in academic texts – A review of empirical studies. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 24(1), 89-99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2015.12.006>
- Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2012). *Academic writing for graduate students*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Tang, R., & John, S. (1999). The 'I' in identity: exploring writer identity in student academic writing through the first person pronoun. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(1), 23-39.
- Tardy, C. M. (2005). "It's like a story": Rhetorical knowledge development in advanced academic literacy. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4(4), 325-338.
- Tardy, C. M., & Matsuda, P. K. (2009). The construction of author voice by editorial board members. (2009). *Written Communication*, 26(1), 32-52.
- Taylor, P. C., & Medina, M. N. (2013). Educational research paradigms: From positivism to multiparadigmatic. *Journal for Meaning-Centered Education*, 1(1), 1-16. Retrieved from <http://www.meaningcentered.org/journal/volume-01/educational-research-paradigms-from-positivism-to-multiparadigmatic/>
- The Task Force on Higher Education and Society. (2000). *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Thesen, L. (2013). Risk in postgraduate writing: Voice, discourse and edgework. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, 1(1), 103-122.

- Thompson, C. (2005). Authority is everything: A study in the politics of textual ownership and knowledge in the formation of student writer identities. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 1(1), 1-12.
- Thompson, P., & Kamler, B. (2013). *Writing for peer reviewed journals: Strategies for getting published*. London: Routledge.
- University of Cape Town. (2014). *Master's and PhD students: A handbook*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- University of Pretoria. (2012). *2012 research report*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Van der Bank, C. M., & Nkadimeng, M. R. (2014). Exploring funding in higher education to eliminate poverty in South Africa. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(1), 353-357.
- Vivian, B., & Fourie, R. (2016). Non-curricular postgraduate writing interventions at South African universities. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 50(1), 145-165.
- Voegele, J., & Stevens, D. D. (2017). Communities of practice in higher education: Transformative dialogues toward a productive academic writing practice. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, 10(1), 1-8. Retrieved from <http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/24558>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walters, M. M. (2013). The nature of social science research. In M. M. Walter (Ed.), *Social research methods* (pp. 3-24). Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2010). Communities of practice and social learning systems: The career of a concept. In C. Blackmoor (Ed.), *Social learning systems and communities of practice*. (pp. 179-198). London: Springer.
- Williams, S. (2012). Finding a voice: Writing narrative in the early stages of a doctoral thesis. *Journal of Academic Writing*, 2(1), 24-34. <https://doi.org/10.18552/joaw.v2i1.71>
- Wingate, U. (2012). Argument! Helping students understand what essay writing is about. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(1), 145-154.
- Wu, S.Y., & Rubin, D. L. (2000). Evaluating the impact of collectivism and individualism on argumentative writing by Chinese and North American college students. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 35(2), 148-178.
- Yancey, K. B. (1994). Introduction. In K. B. Yancey (Ed.), *Voices on voice: Perspectives, definitions, inquiry*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Zhang, F., & Zhan, J. (2020). Understanding voice in Chinese students' English writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 45(1), 100844. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1475158519301134?via%3Dihub#kwrds0010>
- Zhao, C. G., & Llosa, L. (2008). Voice in high-stakes L1 academic writing assessment: Implications for L2 writing instruction. *Assessing Writing*, 13(3), 153-170.

## ADDENDA

### Addendum A: Request for permission to conduct research



Faculty of Education

15 October 2019

The Head of Department  
Department of Humanities Education  
Faculty of Education  
Groenkloof Campus  
University of Pretoria

#### **Request for permission to conduct research with master's students from the Faculty of Education: Department of Humanities Education**

Dear Professor Wassermann

I am a registered student at the University of Pretoria in the Faculty of Education, Department of Humanities Education, who is engaged with a Masters in Education degree. The topic of the dissertation for this master's degree is **Authorial voice in master's dissertations**. I hereby request permission to conduct research for this Masters in Education degree that will involve previous master's students from the Department of Humanities Education. These students will be identified through the selected dissertations drawn from the university repository. Permission is necessary to contact these students and invite them to be interviewed for this study.

This study is significant because the writing of a dissertation requires interpretation, analysis, and argumentation, which are evident through the construction of a credible authorial voice. In my study, I will analyse how masters' students understand and express authorial voice in their dissertations, by analysing both the dissertations and interviews with the writers of the dissertations.

This qualitative case study will proceed in the following manner. First, a purposive selection of dissertations from the Department of Education Humanities published in 2018 in the University of Pretoria repository will be made. Thereafter, a thematic, content analysis will be conducted to analyse the selected dissertations. Lastly, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with those writers of the selected dissertations who consent to be interviewed.

This study will have significant output. The results of this study will be the completion of a master's dissertation which will include pedagogical implications for master's dissertation writing, with suggestions for both students and supervisors on how master's students could use authorial voice in their writing to gain membership to their particular academic communities. Also, at least one article will be published from this study.

---

Faculty of Education  
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Lefapha la Thuto

An application will be made to the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education. On approval, participants will be invited to sign consent forms for the interview process. All information will be confidential and anonymous. No costs will be incurred by any party involved in this process.

Your approval and support to conduct the interviews with the selected students will be highly appreciated. Also, both my supervisor, Dr Lizette de Jager, and I are available to discuss any queries related to this research. If permission is granted, please sign in the section provided below.

Yours sincerely

Junitha Naidoo  
 MEd Student  
 04558732  
[junitha.naidoo@up.ac.za](mailto:junitha.naidoo@up.ac.za)  
 0834574589

Signature:



**Supervisor**  
 Dr L J De Jager  
[lizette.dejager@up.ac.za](mailto:lizette.dejager@up.ac.za)  
 0124205527

Signature:

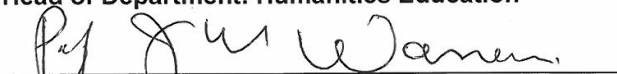


**Consent to conduct research**

If consent is granted, kindly sign below. Alternately, kindly write and sign a letter of consent acknowledging permission for this study to be conducted at this institution.

**Approved by the Head of Department: Humanities Education**

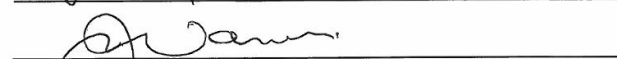
Title and name:



Date:

15/10/19

Signature:



**Approved by the Dean: Faculty of Education**

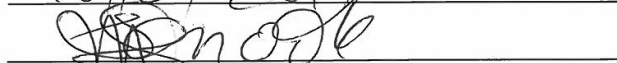
Title and name:

Prof. C. F. Schoor

Date:

16/10/2019

Signature:



## Addendum B: Approval by Ethics Committee

Ethics Committee  
27 November 2019

Ms Junitha Naidoo

Dear Ms Naidoo

REFERENCE: HU 19/11/01

We received proof that you have met the conditions outlined. Your application is thus approved, and you may start with your fieldwork. The decision covers the entire research process, until completion of the study report, and not only the days that data will be collected. The approval is valid for two years for a Masters and three for Doctorate.

The approval by the Ethics Committee is subject to the following conditions being met:

1. The research will be conducted as stipulated on the application form submitted to the Ethics Committee with the supporting documents.
2. Proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research must be submitted where relevant.
3. In the event that the research protocol changed for whatever reason the Ethics Committee must be notified thereof by submitting an amendment to the application (Section E), together with all the supporting documentation that will be used for data collection namely; questionnaires, interview schedules and observation schedules, for further approval before data can be collected. **Non-compliance implies that the Committee's approval is null and void.** The changes may include the following but are not limited to:
  - Change of Investigator,
  - Research methods any other aspect therefore and,
  - Participants.

The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education does not accept any liability for research misconduct, of whatsoever nature, committed by the researcher(s) in the implementation of the approved protocol.

Upon completion of your research you will need to submit the following documentations to the Ethics Committee for your

Clearance Certificate:

- Integrated Declaration Form (Form D08),
- Initial Ethics Approval letter and,
- Approval of Title.

Please quote the reference number HU 19/11/01 in any communication with the Ethics Committee.

Best wishes



Prof Liesel Ebersöhn  
Chair, Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Education

Room 3-3, Level 3, Building 10  
University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20  
Hatfield 0028, South Africa  
Tel +27 (0)12 420 1234  
Fax +27 (0)12 420 5690  
Email [martha.leask@up.ac.za](mailto:martha.leask@up.ac.za)  
[www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)

Faculty of Education  
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Lefapha la Thuto

## Addendum C: Letter of informed consent



Faculty of Education

Ms Junitha Naidoo  
University of Pretoria  
Tel +27 (0)12 842 3485  
[Junitha.Naidoo@up.ac.za](mailto:Junitha.Naidoo@up.ac.za)

Dear master's graduate

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Dissertation: Authorial voice in master's dissertation writing

You are invited to take part in a master's research study which will contribute towards a Master's in Education degree in Humanities Education.

Your participation will take the form of an individual semi-structured interview based on the concept of authorial voice in your own dissertation writing. These interviews, together with the analysis of the discussion section of selected master's dissertations, will form the research study of authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. This study will contribute towards the body of knowledge on academic writing and authorial voice in master's dissertation writing.

Your written and spoken contributions to this study will be recorded for verification. This data will be archived for fifteen years as per international requirements. Please be assured that your participation in this study does not involve any risk and will not disadvantage you in any way. It is possible that you may benefit from this research in your future studies. Also know that you may withdraw your participation at any time during the research process and that any data you may have provided will be destroyed. After the interviews have been transcribed, you may be contacted to verify data.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the section below as a declaration of your consent: that you participate in this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw from the research project at any time. Under no circumstances will the identity of interview participants be made known to any parties or organisations that may be involved in the research process. If you would like to know more about this research study and your involvement, please email me.

---

Faculty of Education  
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Lefapha la Thuto

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

I have read the information included in the above letter, and I agree that my responses may be used for research purposes.

Name and surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

Kind regards

Junitha Naidoo  
[Junitha.Naidoo@up.ac.za](mailto:Junitha.Naidoo@up.ac.za)  
+27834574589



Researcher

Dr Lizette de Jager  
[lizette.dejager@up.ac.za](mailto:lizette.dejager@up.ac.za)  
+27124205527

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor

## Addendum D: Semi-structured interview schedule

### Semi-structured interview schedule

Master's in Education Dissertation: Authorial voice in master's dissertations

6 November 2019

This is a master's study on authorial voice in master's dissertation writing. As part of the research methodology, I wish to conduct semi-structured interviews with selected master's graduates. During the interview, I would like to determine your understanding and views on authorial voice. Please be as honest and as detailed as possible in your answers.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | How did you decide on the topic for your research study?                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 2.  | Were you helped in any way in your master's studies? Please explain.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 3.  | Did you and your supervisor have different opinions about the way in which you organised and wrote your dissertation? Please explain.                                                                                                                   |
| 4.  | Did your supervisor encourage you to express yourself and be original in your dissertation? Please explain.                                                                                                                                             |
| 5a  | What are the qualities of a good dissertation?                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 5b  | From where did you get these ideas?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 6.  | Is English your mother tongue? If not, how long have you been using it as an academic language?                                                                                                                                                         |
| 7a  | Do you feel that you would have been more confident in expressing yourself if you had written your dissertation in your mother-tongue? Why do you say so?<br>Were you confident in the type of English you used for writing your dissertation? Explain. |
| 7b  | Please give examples of the difficulties you may have experienced.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 8.  | Do you believe that a master's dissertation is a place for a student to share his/her personal beliefs based on his/her research findings? Please explain.                                                                                              |
| 9.  | What do you understand by the term "voice"?                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 10. | Is your voice evident in your dissertation? Please explain.                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 11. | Are there other voices evident in your dissertation? If yes, please explain.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 12. | Did you try to create a specific type of voice in your writing?                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 13. | How did you combine your research with your own voice?                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 14. | Has your supervisor or any other academic reader ever asked you about your academic voice? (E.g. Where is your voice?). Please explain if you were asked this question.                                                                                 |

|     |                                                                                                                                    |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15. | Did you receive any help with academic writing from your supervisor, a writing centre, writing workshops, a language editor, etc.? |
| 16. | Did you have a specific reader in mind during your writing?                                                                        |
| 17. | How did you try to engage or draw your reader in?                                                                                  |
| 18. | Do you think that voice for dissertation writing can be taught?                                                                    |

I am grateful for your time in helping me in my own master's study. I wish you well in your future academic ventures.

Junitha Naidoo

Lizette De Jager

**MEd Student: 04558732**

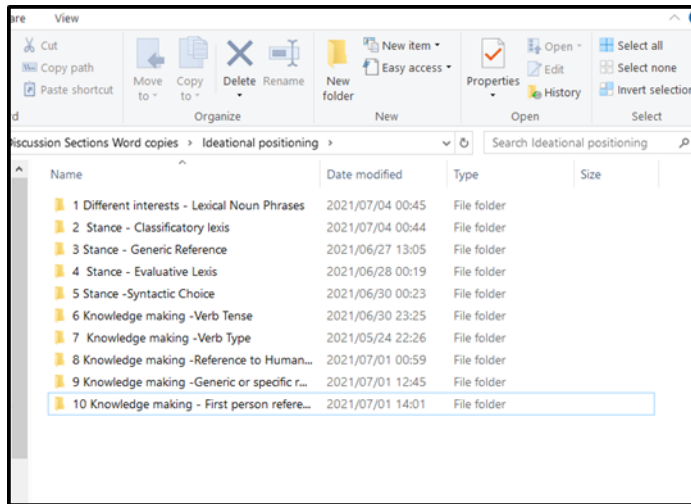
**Supervisor**

[Junitha.Naidoo@up.ac.za](mailto:Junitha.Naidoo@up.ac.za)

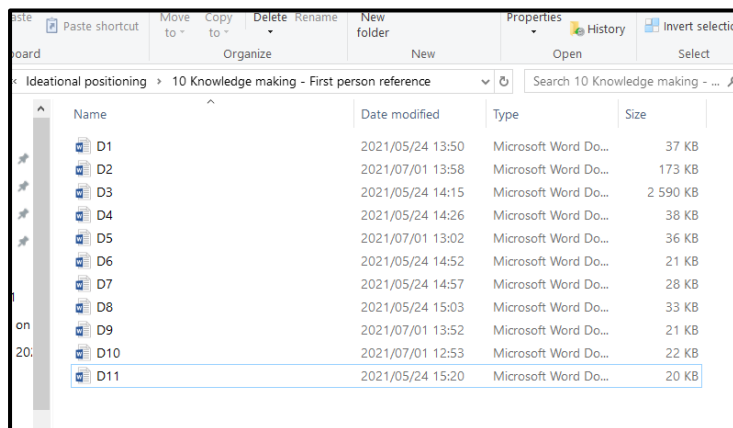
[lizette.dejager@up.ac.za](mailto:lizette.dejager@up.ac.za)

## Addendum E: Data organisation for text analysis

### Example of organisation of folders for text analysis



### Example of organisation of 11 discussion sections per linguistic construct



## Addendum F: Initial coding for thematic analysis

### Initial coding for thematic analysis

|    | Interview Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Main Themes                                          | Sub-themes                                                                       |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | How did you decide on the topic for your research study?                                                                                                                                                                                                | Your dissertation                                    | Choice of topic<br>Your decisions and ideas for the dissertation                 |
| 2. | Were you helped in any way in your master's studies? Please explain.                                                                                                                                                                                    | You and your academic community                      | Other academic support                                                           |
| 3. | Did you and your supervisor have different opinions about the way in which you organised and wrote your dissertation? Please explain.                                                                                                                   | You and your academic community/<br>Authorial voice  | Academic relationship with supervisor                                            |
| 4. | Did your supervisor encourage you to express yourself and be original in your dissertation? Please explain.                                                                                                                                             | Authorial voice /<br>You and your academic community | Academic relationship with supervisor                                            |
| 5a | What are the qualities of a good dissertation?                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Your dissertation</b>                             | Qualities of a good dissertation                                                 |
| 5b | From where did you get these ideas?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Your dissertation<br>You and your academic community | Qualities of a good dissertation                                                 |
| 6. | Is English your mother tongue? If not, how long have you been using it as an academic language?                                                                                                                                                         | Academic writing                                     | Academic English proficiency<br>language<br>difference/language of communication |
| 7a | Do you feel that you would have been more confident in expressing yourself if you had written your dissertation in your mother-tongue? Why do you say so?<br>Were you confident in the type of English you used for writing your dissertation? Explain. | Academic writing/<br>Authorial voice                 | Academic English proficiency<br>Creating voice                                   |
| 7b | Please give examples of the difficulties you may have experienced.                                                                                                                                                                                      | Academic writing                                     | Academic English challenges                                                      |
| 8. | Do you believe that a master's dissertation is a place for a student to share his/her personal beliefs based on                                                                                                                                         | Your dissertation<br>Authorial voice                 | Personal belief in research<br>Understanding voice                               |

|     |                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                    |                                           |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
|     | his/her research findings? Please explain.                                                                                                                              |                                                    |                                           |
| 9.  | What do you understand by the term “voice”?                                                                                                                             | Authorial voice                                    | Understanding voice                       |
| 10. | Is your voice evident in your dissertation? Please explain.                                                                                                             | Authorial voice                                    | Types of voices                           |
| 11. | Are there other voices evident in your dissertation? If yes, please explain.                                                                                            | Authorial voice<br>You and your academic community | Types of voices<br>Other academic support |
| 12. | Did you try to create a specific type of voice in your writing?                                                                                                         | Authorial voice                                    | Creating voice                            |
| 13. | How did you combine your research with your own voice?                                                                                                                  | Authorial voice                                    | Creating voice                            |
| 14. | Has your supervisor or any other academic reader ever asked you about your academic voice? (E.g. Where is your voice?). Please explain if you were asked this question. | Authorial voice                                    | Understanding voice                       |
| 15. | Did you receive any help with academic writing from your supervisor, a writing centre, writing workshops, a language editor, etc.?                                      | Academic writing                                   | Academic English challenges               |
| 16. | Did you have a specific reader in mind during your writing?                                                                                                             | Authorial voice                                    | Creating voice                            |
| 17. | How did you try to engage or draw your reader in?                                                                                                                       | Authorial voice                                    | Creating voice                            |
| 18. | Do you think that voice for dissertation writing can be taught?                                                                                                         | Authorial voice                                    | Creating voice                            |