Participants in the Writing Development Study (WDS) were asked complex questions during interviews about their writing experiences and beliefs, including their views of “good” writing and of their identities and goals as writers. Understandably, many stumbled through their explanations, often drawing on slippery terms such as “style” and “voice” in the process. Consider Tim’s responses to the question, “How would you describe yourself as a writer?” These were recorded approximately two years apart, the first around the end of his sophomore year and the second during his senior year.

- Obviously, in college, you get exposed to a lot of different styles; English creatives [sic], professional, and stuff like that, so you have to adopt [...] like different voices as you write. In general, the kind of writing that I tend to do is very informal in style, and just kind of personable, as opposed to a very academic style, or big words and stuff like that.
- Writing has always been a strength of mine through all of school; middle school, high school, stuff like that. I kind of have a creative, like, informal voice, but my writing has always been very solid. That’s always been my strength.

Such interview comments illustrate the complex ways many WDS participants used the terms *style* and *voice* to articulate their conceptions of writing. For Tim, the terms appear to be at once interchangeable and polysemous. In one breath, he refers to his exposure to “a lot of different styles” and the need to “adopt different voices” in writing, suggesting that styles and voices are multiple and vary by context. In the very next breath, he refers to the kind of writing he “tend[s] to do” as
“very informal [and personable] in style,” in contrast to a “very academic style,” which is a view of style akin to what linguists call register. Two years later, Tim refers to his individual voice (the voice “I kind of have”) as “informal” and “creative.” For Tim, then, it seems that voice/style is both something one personally “has”—and can learn to express in writing—and something one can choose to “adopt” depending on the rhetorical context.

Tim’s complex uses of style and voice recall long-standing debates in writing studies, especially those centered on voice (see overviews by Matsuda; Tardy). As I discuss in greater detail below, Tim’s reference to “different voices” suggests a social-constructivist view, which sees voices as multiple and as constructed within social contexts. In contrast, his reference to voice in individualized terms (e.g., “I kind of have a creative . . . voice”) is more in line with an expressivist view, or what I will call here an individualist view, which sees voice as an expression of one’s authentic self. Similar distinctions have been made with regard to style (see, e.g., Johnson and Pace; Olinger). As shorthand, we may refer to these two conceptions as individualist and social. What is especially noteworthy about Tim’s responses is that they suggest he sees voice and style in both their individual and social dimensions. Does this mean he is confused? Or does it mean the individualist/social dichotomy is limited? Or might it point to the unevenness and messiness of writers’ developing conceptions about writing?

Inspired by these questions, this chapter examines interview data in the WDS study to explore both quantitatively and qualitatively how the participants’ beliefs about writing are illuminated through their uses of two constructs, style and voice. It examines every instance of students’ explicit use of these terms in all 131 WDS interviews. In so doing, it pays special attention to the potential impact of the writing minor curriculum on students’ articulations by comparing the minors’ and nonminors’ implicit definitions of voice and style at two stages in their development, just as they were setting out on their major and minor concentrations (around their second year) and then as they were preparing to graduate.

In pursuing this investigation, this chapter raises questions about trajectories of development in students’ underlying views of style and voice, and about the kinds of assignments and activities that may aid in that development. In this way, it approaches writing development in terms of language-level discussions about writing—that is, the language we use to talk about writing and the concepts that underlie that talk. A great deal of scholarship in both writing studies and linguistics has begun to explore writers’ explicit knowledge about writing, from discussions of threshold concepts, to pedagogical approaches to enhancing students’ explicit awareness of language use, to frameworks for studying meta-awareness and meta-
cognition. Following in this tradition, this chapter explores the extent to which students’ views of style and voice align with current conceptualizations of these constructs in writing studies, as seen in research by Paul Kei Matsuda, Christine Tardy, Andrea Olinger, Ken Hyland, and others. If writing is understood “as a social and rhetorical activity” and one that “enacts and creates identities and ideologies” (Adler-Kassner and Wardle), then we might expect that students, especially those who have chosen an interdisciplinary writing minor, would come to see voices and styles in increasingly social and rhetorical terms. What this chapter shows, however, is that just as students’ performances of writing do not develop neatly and linearly over time, neither do their metalinguistic capacities to discuss their writing. Metalinguistic development, like writing development generally, is uneven and sporadic, happening in fits and starts. But, as this chapter also shows, it is a dimension of writing development that may be especially responsive to opportunities to engage in explicit dialogue about writing.

**Voice and Style: Individual and Social Conceptions**

To probe students’ conceptions of style and voice, it is necessary to understand how these constructs have been conceptualized in writing studies. Regarding voice, the individualist-social division is a reductive but useful starting point for gauging the range of perspectives. The individualist view regards voice as the writer’s expression of her unique inner self, whether understood as her personal opinions, passions, and commitments, as her distinct ways of using language, or both. This conception is suggested in advice to express, find, or own your voice, and it is the view that seems to be most frequently articulated in US-based composition textbooks, as shown by Vai Ramanathan and Robert Kaplan, and by high school English teachers still today, as Jill Jeffery shows. The individualist view has also been juxtaposed with “academic writing” generally, which is often perceived as dull, lifeless, and voiceless. With enough skill and willpower, according to this view, the writer may be able to infuse voice into her otherwise dry and stuffy research article. Understood this way, voice is a quality of language use that can be “allowed” or “injected” into academic discourse. As Christine Tardy notes, this individualist view is frequently wrapped up with notions of strength, commitment, ownership, and authenticity.

Writing scholars have challenged the individualist perspective of voice on a number of fronts. In addition to overlooking the ways writers vary their authorial self-representations depending on audience and genre (see, e.g., Ivanič), it reflects cultural assumptions about writing and selfhood that not all students share.
In particular, many students who are raised outside dominant US cultures or who write in English as an additional language may find advice that they should project a strong, individualized voice to be inaccessible or objectionable (Ramathan and Kaplan). This is partly because such advice elevates the “I” above the “we” (see, e.g., Shen), which is an understanding of the self that can confuse and marginalize students who come from cultures with different understandings of the self and who have less extensive experience with genres of writing that foreground an individual voice.

Partly as a response to such critiques, social views argue that voices are rooted (and shaped and reinforced) in specific social contexts, including academic discourse communities. From this view, the voice projected in a text is “a language performance—always social, mediated by experience, and culturally embedded” (Sperling and Appleman 71). Charles Bazerman suggests such a view when he points out that college writers are expected to “learn to speak with voices recognizable as legitimate, warrantable and powerful within the disciplines” (25). This sense of voice is closely associated with communities and genres. A scientist reading a fellow scientist’s research article, a genre often thought to be voiceless, would recognize and identify with a certain kind of scientific voice projected by the text, one that carries authority within the specialist community.

From a social view of voice, then, it is not simply that a writer can or cannot (or should or should not) express her voice in writing; it is rather that all writing, because it is embedded within communities of readers and writers, responds to and reflects a socially based voice for those readers, whether or not the writer consciously aims for a certain kind of voice. In this sense, voice has been seen as an inevitable quality of discourse, coconstructed between writer and reader in specific discursive interactions. Matsuda’s definition captures these points. Voice, he argues, 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” (40). And that amalgamative rhetorical effect, interpreted as “voice,” is “successful” if it is recognized and valued by members of the community where the writing is taking place.

Despite these sharp differences in conceptions, the individualist/social dichotomy does not hold firm for very long if pressed. Peter Elbow, for instance, who has frequently been identified with individualist views of voice, has acknowledged that voice is not limited to the individual or to only certain kinds of prose. “The voice” in a piece of writing, he suggests, “can be blah, impersonal, bureaucratic, or even computer-speak, but there’s always a voice” (“Voice in Writing Again” 178). He has also argued that students need to develop a variety of voices in their writing be-
cause, as he explains, “selves tend to evolve, change, take on new voices and assimilate them” (“What Do We Mean” 5).

Conversely, scholars more closely associated with social views have acknowledged the importance of writers’ individual perspectives. In his recent work (“Undergraduate Understandings”), Ken Hyland has teased apart “stance” from “voice,” arguing that the former is writer-oriented and the latter reader-oriented. In this framework, it is stance that individual writers express when they mark their presence as authors and signal their attitudes, judgments, and feelings. It is, in contrast, the community-oriented voice they are creating that allows for their stances to be heard in the first place. If writers want their stances to be heard, that is, they must create a “voice” for their texts that resounds with “the authorized ways of speaking as a community member” (134). Of course, this is a very different perspective on voice from the individualist one. But it is still the case for Hyland that academic writers express their individual views, attitudes, and feelings. Philosophers or historians may do this more prominently than engineers or physicists, but all academic writers do it to one degree or another.

Even closer to the individualist notion is Roz Ivanič’s concept of the writer’s “autobiographical self.” In her theorization of identity in writing, Ivanič distinguishes between, on the one hand, the writer’s sense of her own roots, including her personal history, values, and motivations (i.e., who she “really” is), and, on the other, how the writer uses language to project an authorial presence in the text. Ivanič terms the first dimension autobiographical self and the second discoursal self. These two dimensions do not always align, of course, and Ivanič is especially interested in exposing how writers may resist or accommodate to certain discoursal selves.

A point on which Hyland, Ivanič, and Elbow (among others) would probably agree is that voice is best understood in dialogic terms, as negotiated through specific discoursal interactions. Stretches of discourse can also be viewed for the ways they weave multiple voices together: the writer’s, other scholars’, putative readers’, and the social voices that are implied by the writer’s choice of genre. Seeing voice from this perspective suggests Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia, or multi-voicedness. Linguists working in the tradition of systemic functional linguistics, furthermore, have drawn on Bakhtin’s work to model how developing writers learn to use resources in the language to move from a position of monogloss, or single-voicedness, in their course-work writing, to a more heteroglossic position marked by dialogic diversity (see, e.g., Coffin; Hood). Such research emphasizes the linguistic resources that writers draw on to construct community-valued voices. Other traditions have focused more on the role of readers and how they interpret and evaluate voices based on linguistic cues (see, e.g., Matsuda and Tardy).
The scholarship on style is far too enormous and diverse to do it justice here. I would remark, however, that the perspectives on voice just sketched out are applicable to style as well. For instance, literary conceptualizations of style have focused on prose qualities that are unique to an individual author—qualities recognizable as his or her personal stamp or linguistic signature. On the other hand, discussions of linguistic resources used to construct an “academic style” overlap significantly with social views of voice. Mary Hiatt acknowledged this split in 1978:

Some stylisticians hold that style is totally a matter of one individual’s writing . . . others take an opposing view and maintain that it is possible to describe the characteristics of a group of writers or of writers in a certain era. Stylisticians further differ on whether style is the sum total of the characteristics of the writing or whether it describes in what way the writing departs from the norm . . . . The state of the theory itself is therefore conflicting and confusing. (222)

As suggested here, “style” may be thought of as an extraordinary use of language, that which “departs from the norm.” But it may also be thought of as synonymous with what linguists call register, defined by Douglas Biber and Susan Conrad as “a variety [of language use] associated with a particular situation of use” (6). If style is seen as purposeful, situated language variety, we can talk about “styles of writing” such as journalistic, legal, and academic styles—a very different concept from “my style” or “her style.”

Individual and social views of language use do not have to be mutually exclusive, especially as dialogic views offer a bridge between the two. So, how did the study participants use the terms style and voice? What shifts, if any, are evident in their uses of these constructs between entry and exit interviews? And finally, what might these shifts suggest about learners’ metalinguistic development?

The Study: Exploring Students’ Conceptions of Style and Voice

To explore these questions, I examined every instance of style and voice in the 131 interviews conducted as part of this study. While there are many related terms worthy of investigation, including tone, ethos, persona, identity, language, and grammar, my aim was to better understand students’ conceptions of style and voice in particular. As scholars such as Roz Ivanič, Rebecca Nowacek, and Mary Soliday have argued, attending closely to students’ talk about writing—including the spe-
specific terms they use—can help to illuminate their attitudes and beliefs about writing, which often run below their fully conscious awareness.

To aid my analysis, I converted all the interview transcripts to plain text files and examined them through AntConc (Anthony). Unlike Aull's analysis in this volume, mine did not require sophisticated corpus searches. I used the software mainly to retrieve all uses of the two terms, which I then examined and sorted into categories. In addition to ensuring that I did not overlook any instances, the software enabled me to perform basic analyses of collocations. These included the pronouns my and your, as in my/your voice and my/your (own) style, and verbs such as have, find, and own, which indicate something about how students understand the two constructs. Through these basic tools, I was able to retrieve quantitative information that informed my approach to the qualitative analysis.

In total, the corpus search retrieved 454 related uses of style(s) and voice(s). I pasted these into an Excel spreadsheet, and for each instance I included the surrounding co-text—typically several turns in the interview—to interpret how participants were using the terms; in some cases, I referred to larger sections of the transcript. I also compared individual students’ uses of style and voice within single interviews and, where applicable, across entry and exit interviews.

Participants’ Conceptions of Style and Voice: A Quantitative Overview

At the most general level, the corpus results show that the term style was used more frequently than voice. Approximately 70 percent of the participants used style in at least one of their interviews, while just 50 percent used voice. This difference points to the greater variety of meanings that participants used the term style to articulate, as I explore below.

Table 6.1 shows the percentages of interviews where the respective terms were used. For example, the top row shows that, among the 34 entry interviews conducted with the writing minors, 21 minors (61.8 percent) used the term voice while 23 (67.7 percent) used the term style. Table 6.1 also shows differences between the minors and nonminors. Primarily, the term voice was used by more minors than nonminors, in both entry and exit interviews, while the term style was used by more nonminors than minors. The difference in references to voice was especially large in the entry interviews, where 61.8 percent of the minors use the term compared to just 26.5 percent of the nonminors. This percentage did increase for the nonminors by their exit interviews, when nearly half (48.3 percent) referred to voice.
Developing Writers in Higher Education

Students’ Uses of Style

To explain the greater use of style, my analysis uncovered four recurring references. As illustrated in Table 6.2, these are: style as individual language use, style as register, style as genre, and style as usage conventions. Style as individual language use is akin to the notion of individual voice, in that it concerns the writer’s expressions of her distinct ways of using language. Under this category, I placed all references to my (writing) style and your/their style, as well as explicit mentions of unique, individual, and my personal style. Style as register refers to variation in language use by situational context. Under this category, I grouped mentions of formality/informality in style and descriptions of specific styles, such as academic, magazine, and journalistic. I also included references that were less specific but still suggestive of style as multiple, including phases such as that style. Style as genre refers to recognizable types, forms, purposes, or modes of writing, such as research paper style, narrative style, essay style, and memo-style. Whereas I considered “business style” and “academic style” to refer to register, because many genres fall within these registers, I considered references to “cover letter style,” “memo style,” and “essay-type style” to refer to genre. Finally, style as usage conventions covers all references to specific citation conventions (e.g., APA, MLA), and to style as usage rules.

Table 6.3 shows how these four references were distributed across the transcripts. The distributions are presented as raw instances (n) and percentages among participants who used the term. For example, the top row shows that 13 of the writing minors referred to style as individual language use in their entry interviews, which was 32.5 percent of all references to style in this group. Table 6.3 also shows differences between the writing minors and nonminors. Most importantly, it shows that a higher percentage of minors referenced style as register—both in entry and exit interviews. Furthermore, whereas references to individual style increased among the nonminors, they decreased among the minors. Relatedly, the minors’ references
to *style as register* and *style as genre* both increased from entry to exit interviews. The latter two trends suggest that the minors’ underlying views of *style* became more congruent with current theoretical conceptualizations—that is, more focused on the social and less on the individual.

To be clear, the differences shown in table 6.3 are not huge. But they do point to a consistent pattern. More of the minors used the term *style* when discussing the various types of writing they experienced, as seen in example 1 below, or when explaining how they approached a piece of writing in light of their audience, as seen in 2.

1. You don’t do one style of writing the entire time. It’s all sorts of things.
2. If you’re writing towards a younger audience, you have to use a style that they’re gonna understand.

Table 6.2. References for “Style”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Style as individual language use | • My writing style is mainly descriptive. (Dan, Exit)  
• You have to think about your own individual style. (Grace, Exit) |
| Style as register               | • . . . when you’re writing journalistic style . . . (Brian, Exit)        
• . . . like a more concise, concrete, direct style of writing. (Lisa, Exit) |
| Style as genre                  | • Memo-style was huge [in the business school]. Then cover letter like I said. (Madeleine, Exit)  
• Almost like a research report. Almost like a—not interview style, but like a column on a certain topic. (Teresa, Exit) |
| Style as usage conventions      | • He has a lot of grammar-style things. (Dan, Exit)  
• When you do social science you do APA. When you do this, you do *Chicago*-style. (Lisa, Exit) |

Table 6.3. Distributions of Style References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Style as Individual</th>
<th>Style as Register</th>
<th>Style as Genre</th>
<th>Style as Usage Conventions</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minors (Entry)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonminors (Entry)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minors (Exit)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonminors (Exit)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In contrast, more of the nonminors used the term *style* as a substitute for *individual voice*, as seen in 3 and 4.

3. I don’t know how to describe [voice], I guess, outside of being able to recognize and identify a certain person’s style.
4. I think if I continued to do more [blogging] . . . it would help find my own voice as a writer and the style and personality that my writing would show through. Because I think on a blog you can feel like you can just really be yourself.

**Students’ Uses of Voice**

My analysis of *voice* revealed fewer gradations in meaning. The three categories that emerged are *social*, *individualist*, and *unclear*. As discussed above, *social* views include references to voices as multiple and rooted in contexts, as seen in 5 and 6.

5. Besides that it was a very different voice because it was so research based.
6. A quick text message kind of voice.

In contrast, *individualist conceptions* are reflected in references to personal voices, as seen in 7 and 8. These capture the notion of autobiographical self, or “who you really are.”

7. I think you need to have a voice for yourself that expresses who you are.
8. Also, just being persuasive and having your own writing voice.

Table 6.4 shows the distributions of these references across the interviews. Starting with the top row, we see that 61.9 percent of writing minors who referenced *voice* in their entry interviews expressed individualist views; in contrast, just 23.8 percent expressed social views. Overall, the table shows that just 29.9 percent of students who referenced *voice* expressed social views, which suggests that participants used *style* more than *voice* in a social-constructionist sense. Importantly, for both minors and nonminors, individualist conceptions of voice decreased from entry to exit while social conceptions increased. However, for the minors, the ratio of individual to social views is nearly even in the exit interviews (47.8 percent to 43.5 percent), while this ratio for the nonminors still tilts heavily toward individualist conceptions (57.1 percent to 28.6 percent). Again, the differences are not large. Whereas five mi-
nors articulated social views of voice in their entry interview, ten did so in their exit interviews. For the nonminors, the increase was from one to four students.

In sum, the quantitative analysis revealed three apparent shifts in participants’ conceptions of style and voice, especially among the writing minors. First, the minors’ references to individual style decreased while their references to style as register and style as genre both increased—suggesting that they developed a more social conception of this construct. Second, more minors than nonminors referred to voice in both rounds of interviews, suggesting that this construct entered more into their “discursive consciousness,” or capacity to articulate explicitly. And third, more minors than nonminors expressed social views of voice, and these references increased from entry to exit interviews. It is important to reiterate, though, that this metalinguistic development was by no means even or linear. My analysis of individual participants’ talk about style and voice revealed a great deal of messiness, including apparent contradictions in conceptions. What I aim to show in the next section is that examining this messiness can help to illuminate the kinds of writing and reflective tasks that may push students toward individual or social conceptions of style and voice.

Complexity in Students’ Views

The primary kind of complexity that emerged in participants’ interviews was a slipping back and forth between individualist and social conceptions of writing, and this often followed a distinct pattern. Individualist conceptions tended to surface as participants spoke in general terms about writing principles and goals, while social conceptions surfaced as they turned to specific assignments or specific strategies they used in a piece of writing.

Consider, for example, Kaitlin, who majored in English and communication

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<th>Table 6.4. Distributions of Voice References</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individualist Views</td>
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<td>Minors (Entry)</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Minors (Exit)</td>
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<td>Nonminors (Exit)</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
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studies and minored in writing. In her entry interview, Kaitlin lumps style and voice together (along with “tone”) when referring in general to the positive value that journaling had on her writing development. In her entry interview she explained that journaling “really forced me to hone [my writing] and work on my own personal style and tone and voice.” She elaborated by equating style explicitly with personality: “Maybe it’s more like a shift in my personality, than in my style, but I think the style reflects your personality.” Kaitlin also used voice to articulate a similar point about personality, as seen here when referring to the impact of the Gateway course on her writing development.

I think maybe it’s [ ] helped me see it’s okay to have a personality when you write. A lot of times when you’re writing a lit analysis or you’re writing a research paper, it’s easy to forget that you’re allowed to have a voice, whereas in the minor, [my instructor] really encouraged that.

In this articulation, “voice,” like “style” and “personality,” is a quality that a piece of writing does or does not “have.” Some writing has it; other writing doesn’t.

Later in the same interview, however, Kaitlin referred to specific research papers she wrote in her communications major as a “style of writing,” one where “you present your findings and tables and charts and then your results, which is kind of a fun style of writing.” This reference to style as genre departs sharply from her view of style as personality. Kaitlin also complicated the concept of individual voice when discussing her remediation assignment in her minor Gateway course. As she explained,

By the end [of the assignment] I’d taken a lit analysis that I’d written on this book about cultural diaspora, and then turned it into a conversation about sexual hegemony. It was something that I really cared about and [my instructor] helped me find Bitch Magazine and so that helped me write it in that voice where it was just . . .

Here, Kaitlin’s pronoun shifts from “my voice” to “that voice,” suggesting that there are multiple voices from which to choose. Kaitlin did not continue to describe “that voice” or how she learned to construct it. Rather, she switched gears in mid-sentence to return to a more individualist take-away about writing; the quote continues:

I think that the Gateway course really helped me realize that, “Oh, I am allowed to write from my perspective and have my tone and my flavor and help put the ‘me’ in my writing.”
Kaitlin, then, expressed individualist views of style and voice when speaking about writing in general and social views when reflecting on specific writing projects.

Like Kaitlin, Mariana appeared to hold an individualist perspective of both style and voice when speaking generally about writing. Commenting in her entry interview on decisions she made for her eportfolio, she explained that she “wanted to make sure that it fit me and my style of writing the best.” And on her future goals as a writer, she explained that, “I still wanna continue to find my own voice and to be able to put it into writing.” However, commenting on specific papers she wrote, Mariana noted that “I’ve had a lot of different projects here, and that’s the thing that I like about the writing classes here, is that it’s—you don’t do one style of writing the entire time.” In this latter reference, style is not personal but situational.

As just shown, developing writers such as Kaitlin and Mariana slip back and forth between individual and social conceptions of writing. They do so, furthermore, depending on the level of writing they are speaking about. Very few students articulated overtly social conceptions of voice or style when discussing general writing principles or goals. Overt talk, that is, about “adapting,” “constructing,” or “varying” voices was highly unusual. Far more frequent was overt talk about “finding,” “owning,” or “expressing” one’s own voice. This is probably because these individualist conceptions circulate more widely in public discourses about writing—as a quick Google search of “writing and voice” confirms. But the more social conceptions did leak through as participants began to explain the specific assignments and texts they had written.

Another illustration of this general-specific split can be seen in Jon’s interview comments. An English major and writing minor, Jon invoked a clearly individualist notion of selfhood and writing in his exit interview when responding to an abstract question about what it means to “write well” at the university level. As he explained, “If you’re writing well, you’re accurately representing what you actually think about whatever you’re writing on [. . . ] like you are accurately representing you on the page.” Note that this idea of “you on the page” is akin to Ivanič’s autobiographical self; it is the representation of one’s lived experiences, beliefs, and stances. Jon articulated the same perspective in his entry interview two years earlier in response to a question about what is “most important in learning how to write.” As he explained,

Having a good understanding of yourself is really strong [sic] because voice is one of those things that I think can make or break a paper. You can have the strongest argument or whatever. All the evidence, all the analysis, but if you don't have—if you're not in it, I'm not going to care.
Jon articulated a different view of voice, however, in his exit interview when asked to discuss his uses of reflective writing. As a part of his response, he explained that “voice” became a useful concept for him:

There were some words [about writing] that came up all the time [in my reflections], and there were just writing terms like “voice” and I have a much clearer understanding of what I typically want my voice to be like, depending on audience or how to approach something, and what level of detail based on scope or—again, audience. I don’t know, “scope,” “voice” and “audience” come up a lot.

Here, Jon refers to voice as a kind of discursive performance (“what I typically want my voice to be like”), which can or should vary “depending on audience” and strategy, or “how to approach something.” To be clear, then, Jon articulated a view of voice as both autobiographical self and discursive self, and these two views surfaced at different levels of talk about writing—whether he was talking generally or more specifically about his writing strategies.

There were exceptions to this trend. Some students did talk about voice in overtly social-constructionist terms, even when discussing writing in the abstract. Consider, for example, Angela’s explanation in her exit interview of social voice and context.

I definitely use a different writing voice when I’m writing for online than [when] I’m writing an academic paper. I mean, online I’ve been things [sic] from witty to sometimes a little snarky, I admit it, to more fun and upbeat. I mean, I recently completed an internship at—I don’t know if you’ve heard of this magazine, *Tiger Beat*? It’s for thirteen-year-old teen girls about celebrities. Obviously, I wasn’t snarky there. I was peppy and energetic. I don’t know. You have to adapt your voice to the situation.

Angela is explaining here, in overtly social terms, how she adapted her voice for online situations—making it sometimes “snarky” and sometimes “peppy and energetic”—concluding that, “You have to adapt your voice to the situation.” This comment suggests that Angela values her ability to craft different voices for different contexts, to write with dexterity across a range of genres, as Ryan McCarty’s analysis in chapter 4 reveals with regard to other students in this study. However, it is also important to point out that Angela is responding to a very specific interview question (“How would you describe your voice?”), and that this question is a follow-up to Angela’s earlier remark that, to write well in college, “you have to have your own specific voice.” That is, with one pointed follow-up question, Angela’s use
of the term “voice” shifted from an individualist to a social-constructionist perspective. This shows how developing writers—certainly alongside many experts as well (cf. Olinger)—may hold apparently contradictory conceptions about writing simultaneously, and when gently pressed, can shift between them. For Angela, and many other participants, social conceptions of voice and style do not lie far below the surface of more individualist ones that may be more on the tip of their tongues.

Angela was not a writing minor, and therefore she probably did not participate as consistently as did the minors in the kinds of explicit personal reflections on writing that many of the tasks in the writing minor required. The interview itself encouraged her to reflect explicitly on her writing, however, and in the process Angela drew on voice as a metalinguistic construct. Therefore, the fact that the writing minors did undergo this deep reflection consistently may help to explain why so many more of them articulated social concepts of language in writing, both as voice and style.

In general, the WDS participants’ talk about style and voice points to complex and shifting views about selfhood and writing. Participants referred to individual voices/styles and social voices/styles simultaneously, even within the same interview. On this basis, it seems clear that students’ beliefs about writing are neither settled nor simple, but shifting and flexible, even in spite of what appear to be strongly held convictions, such as Jon’s statement that “if you’re not in it, I’m not going to care.” Writing instructors and researchers would therefore be wise to listen carefully to students’ talk about writing and create opportunities for them to reflect explicitly on specific writing experiences and projects.

Note that the WDS interviews were not primarily text-based, or designed to probe participants’ tacit knowledge about writing by querying them about their own rhetorical and linguistic choices. However, we can pause to consider what a detailed linguistic analysis of students’ written texts might further contribute to our understanding of their views of voice or style. What, in other words, might an investigation of their performances of writing reveal about their underlying conceptions of these constructs?

Investigating Students’ Performances of Voice in Writing

This question about the relationship between students’ writing performances and explicit beliefs—including their metalinguistic awareness—is a complex one, as McCarty explores in his chapter. On the one hand, many researchers agree that successful production of written texts does not require full metalinguistic aware-
ness (see, e.g., Devitt; Nowacek; Olinger), as writers frequently develop tacit knowledge of the genres they use (Giltrow and Valiquette). As McCarty’s chapter shows, a writer like Jonah may be adept at deploying linguistic features of disciplinary genres without having explicit language-level terms for those features. On the other hand, we do have research that reveals that students who command a robust meta-language about writing may be better able to adopt a critical distance from their writing and thus monitor and evaluate their strategies with a heightened awareness of their rhetorical choices (see, e.g., Cheng and Steffensen; Concha and Paratore). As McCarty shows with regard to another student, Kris, developing writers who are able to speak in detail and with rhetorical understanding of specific genre features (such as why dense noun phrases are used in scientific prose) may also learn to make more strategic choices with regard to whether, and how, they deploy or modify those features. Based on findings like this, it is reasonable to ask whether students who express social-constructionist understandings of language use in writing may be better positioned to notice, create, and adapt written voices in their own writing. This question, of course, is not fully answerable here, yet it will be helpful to show some potential areas where linguistic analysis of students’ texts could be useful for probing their writing development.

As one case in point, consider again Angela, who was just quoted above as saying, “I definitely use a different writing voice when I’m writing for online than [when] I’m writing an academic paper.” Because such a comment betrays a conscious metalinguistic awareness of voice in writing, it is reasonable to expect that Angela is especially adept at creating contextually appropriate voices in the texts she produces.

One of the pieces Angela submitted for the study is a political science research paper entitled “The Transition of One-Party States into Multi-Party States: A Case Study of Mexico and the Demise of PRI.” This paper is a formal research study that examines the history of Mexico’s contemporary political landscape. Here is a part of her introductory paragraph. Wordings that I comment on are italicized and underlined.

. . . But in the 2000 presidential election when PAN’s candidate Vicente Fox beat out PRI’s Francisco Labistida, it became clear that Mexico had transitioned into a multi-party state. This transition did not occur over night, however. But what events had led to the demise of PRI’s dominance in Mexico? And more broadly, what factors make one-party states transition into becoming multi-party states?

This is the exact question that I addressed in this study. Understanding the shift from one-party dominance to multi-party competition will allow us to have a more complete view of a country’s current political circumstances.
In this excerpt I have marked several categories of language that Ken Hyland and others have connected to issues of voice in academic prose. While Angela did not contribute pieces of online writing that we could compare to this one, points can still be made. We might start by asking, first, what kind of voice is created in this stretch of text, and second, how is this voice created through specific linguistic choices.

I would venture to characterize the voice created here, and in the paper as a whole, as at once commanding and engaging. How is this voice created? For starters, there is a clear authorial presence constructed through an overt self-mention (I addressed) and referential metadiscourse (in this study). Furthermore, the epistemic meanings are confident and assertive (This is the exact question; it became clear that). In addition to establishing this presence and certainty, Angela chose to direct and involve her reader in several ways. She posed two questions (what events . . . ? what factors . . . ?), while also using metadiscourse to characterize the second question in relation to the first (more broadly). She used an inclusive pronoun (will allow us) to mark the reader and writer as working jointly in the same enterprise. Further, the inclusive pronoun was selected within the larger move of making a promise to the reader that the analysis will indeed have a payoff (a more complete view of a country's current political circumstances). In addition to these reader engagement devices, Angela created a conversational voice by beginning sentences with But and And, which perhaps she knows might offend a hypothetical hardline prescriptivist reader, but she then elevates the voice with long and dense noun phrases characteristic of academic prose (the demise of PRI’s dominance in Mexico; the shift from one-party dominance to multi-party competition). Taken together, these various choices in language work together to mark the writer as a competent and engaging empirical guide, which is very likely an identity and voice that Angela would know to adjust when writing online pieces for “thirteen-year-old teen girls about celebrities,” as she puts it.

More generally, we can see these bits of language as traces of a writer making rhetorical choices to create both a writerly self-image (as confident and affable) and a role for the reader (as inquisitive and collaborative). It is the confident and affable presence that enables her to take a stance, and it is the reader-engaged uses of language that enable her to create a credible, persuasive voice.

For Ken Hyland, the voice constructed in any text is “reader-oriented.” A recognizable “voice” in formal academic prose, that is, is established by interacting with readers in expected ways and guiding them through the ongoing argument. These include wordings used to identify readers and writer as taking part in a collaborative effort (“As we know, . . .”), to direct readers (“Consider the following”), and to raise questions (“But what would happen if. . .?”), among many other moves. What additional choices in language might Angela—in an office hour appointment, say—
identify as those she selected to create a certain kind of voice? To what extent would she agree that the textual voice she created is a discursive performance and separate from her sense of her autobiographical self? These are all questions that could assist Angela to further build her metalanguage for reflecting on the details of language in discourse.

Presumably, a student like Angela might engage with these queries differently from a student who embraces a view of voice as individualized self-expression. Let’s consider now the case of Jon, who, as explained above, invoked the individualist notion of voice as authentic self-expression: “If you’re writing well, you’re accurately representing what you actually think about whatever you’re writing on [. . .] you are accurately representing you on the page.” What’s important about this statement is that it does not account for the ways that Jon used language in his literature analysis essays to achieve an authoritative **disciplinary voice**. In particular, one of the papers he submitted as a part of his Capstone eportfolio was an argumentative essay that he wrote for an upper-level course in medieval and Renaissance literature on John Gower’s poem *Vox Clamantis*. In this essay, Jon takes what I understand to be a contrarian stance, which is that the rebels depicted in the poem “paint a positive portrait of the very group [Gowers] aims to deface.” To make this argument, he deploys a number of rhetorical strategies for building a reader-in-the text with whom he can negotiate claims and position his argument authoritatively.

Hyland examines two of these dialogic strategies as reader-oriented pronouns and directives. While reader pronouns are used to “signal community understandings with the reader” (6), directives are used to call the reader to some action or understanding and thus establish a peer-to-peer writer/reader relationship. Consider how reader pronouns, directives, and other positioning devices enable Jon to create an authoritative voice:

- By examining Gower’s text and depiction of the rebels alongside what is arguably one of the most important events in the Bible, we can understand better what Gower was trying to do, but also just how greatly he misunderstood both his source material and the events he meant to relay. **Make no mistake**, the rebels were violent and sometimes ruthless, **but never** without good purpose—they were **not** evil in an absolute sense, **but rather** committed acts of destruction as a reaction to the wrongs perpetrated against them.

Such rhetorical devices direct and involve the reader in the unfolding argument, creating a readerly role as insider and keen collaborator. In student papers, these devices contribute toward the voice of an advanced, engaged student.
Jon also used more discipline-specific voicing strategies in this same essay. In particular, he used a rhetorical strategy that Laura Wilder identified in successful student essays in English literature, which she dubs, following Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor, the “appearance/reality” topos. This topos works first by invoking the “apparent” meaning of a text before arguing for the “real” meaning, thus signaling critical engagement with community-based ideas. Wilder found that high-rated student essays used this topos more frequently and effectively than lower-rated ones. This strategy is apparent in a number of key moments in Jon’s essay, as seen here.

- This comparison **may seem, at first glance** perfectly valid, and perhaps even convincing; after all, both Satan and those involved with the rising of 1381 were rebels acting out against the pugnant estate and God, respectively **[appearance]**. **However**, this reading of the events of 1381 and of Satan’s role in Christian theology **fails to present** a complete portrait of either, which manages to not only discredit Gower’s claims in Vox Clamantis but also creates an interpretative reversal that contradicts Gower’s attempt to vilify the rebels through his usage of demonic imagery **[reality]**.

These highlighted uses of language are not unique to Jon’s individual voice. Rather, as identified by Wilder, they are recurring rhetorical devices closely associated with the field and genre Jon is participating in, an interpretative argument about English literature. To be sure, a more comprehensive analysis of Jon’s writing might reveal idiosyncratic patterns of language choices that point to a unique linguistic signature. However, even if this were the case, the point is that what we recognize as the “voice” constructed in Jon’s writing is the “amalgamative effect” of functional devices for interacting with the imagined reader.

When we consider these sophisticated positioning strategies in Jon’s performance of disciplinary writing, it becomes clear that his definition of voice stated earlier as “representing what you actually think” is just one side of the coin. In terms of his development as a writer, it seems plain just from this limited examination that he has also learned how to craft a community-based voice that is valued in interpretative-analytical essays in English. Further examination may reveal that, when writing in other genres and fields, he is equally adept at constructing appropriate and effective social voices. But since this capacity is probably one that Jon is not consciously aware of, does not have the metalanguage to articulate, or does not value as a developing writer (nowhere in his interview does he discuss “good” writing about literature), a linguistic examination of his writing can help fill in gaps left in his self-reports.
Conclusion

This chapter has argued that attending closely to students’ talk about writing—including the specific terms they use—can help to illuminate their beliefs about writing, ones that often run below their fully conscious awareness. My analysis has revealed both complex and shifting views of style and voice among the WDS participants, most prominently the writing minors. The first time I read the interview transcripts, I was initially struck by the overtly individualist, expressive views students articulated. Statements such as “good writing is when you are accurately representing you on the page” and “style reflects your personality” colored my impression of students’ views of writing in general, which I initially read as rhetorical and even romantic. Such comments stand in sharp contrast to the social and dialogic conceptions of voice and style that are made explicit in the scholarly literature. However, on more systematic analysis, it became clear that many of the participants held both social and individualist views simultaneously. Further, based on linguistic analysis of select papers, it became clear that even students like Jon, who articulated quintessentially individualist views of voice, are quite adept at performing through the texts they produce the kinds of social voices that are valued in student course-work writing. Put simply, students’ metalanguage about stance and voice reveals interesting and fruitful contradictions, both within their talk about writing and between their talk and rhetorical performances. Such contradictions only become evident through attentiveness to language-level features in student writing.

Ongoing theorization of voice and style should take these apparent contradictions seriously, considering how they may reveal students’ developing views of writing. For instance, when a student like Tim speaks in one breath about learning to “adopt many voices” in writing and then in the next about “his own voice,” he is expressing two different conceptions of voice. But this does not necessarily mean he is confused or that the two conceptions are incompatible. His views are not incommensurate with Ken Hyland’s view that, to write successfully in the disciplines (or any social context), writers must learn to express stance in an authoritative “social voice” that is valued. Tim, that is, can learn to project the voice of a scholar in the field of communication, while still expressing through his writing an individualized discursive identity. Likewise, drawing attention to the fact that students like Jon may project an engaging and authoritative disciplinary voice in their course-work writing does not need to challenge their beliefs that good writing expresses an “authentic” personal voice. The “me” Jon wants to “represent on the page,” to use his phrase, can be projected through a commanding disciplinary voice, one that is recognizable to other literature scholars who are reading his paper.
Finally, if we do wish for students to come to think of style and voice as social and dialogic, it makes good sense to create assignments that encourage them to reflect deeply on the kinds of authorial self-representations that are effective when writing to particular audiences in particular genres. Without those opportunities to reflect, students might be slower to grasp the multiplicity of voices they are already learning to control and weave together in their own writing. Accelerating this capacity, and drawing students’ explicit attention to it, could be a more liberating idea for many students than the more static one of “finding their voice.”

NOTES
1. Of course, other conceptions of style are relevant to college-level writing—for example, “the plain style” tradition still popular in handbooks such as Strunk and White’s The Elements of Style.
2. This number does not include unrelated uses of the terms. I excluded, for instance, references to “voice-over” work, teachers’ classroom voices, styles of music, film, and teaching. I also excluded the many references to passive/active voice when these were used in a clearly grammatical sense.
3. It is beyond the scope of this paper to tease apart register from genre as theoretical constructs, because these have been used in different ways even among linguists and writing scholars (see Biber and Conrad).
4. Janet Giltrow and Michele Valiquette use these terms (after Anthony Giddens) to distinguish between what we know how to do through experience tacitly, that is, our practical consciousness, and what we are able to articulate explicitly about our knowledge, that is, our discursive consciousness.

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