SMART QUESTIONS FOR INCLUSIVE TUTORING

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Founded upon the ideas of the postcolonial writing center, specifically Gloria Anzaldúa's "border culture" and "mestiza consciousness," this article proposes the SMART questions as a tool that writing center tutors may use to advance inclusivity in their tutorials and restrain the acculturative effects of academic vernacular as a power structure.

This research conducted self-observations and interviews to test and compare the proposed SMART questions for writing tutorials (mimicking the existing tutoring practices, e.g., agenda-setting) in three ways: as a protocol, a list of non-consecutive questions, and a heuristic. Each use of the SMART questions was applied to three self-observations, which were followed by one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants from each observation.

Three main markers provide the basis for analysis of observation results: verbal engagement, agency, and code-switching. While the protocol participants had the most balanced engagement in the tutoring session, the heuristic exhibited the strongest agency and purposeful code-switching. Results of the interviews revealed varying levels of tutee self-identification with the academic vernacular, with the protocol participant being the least, and the heuristic participant being the most supportive of total separation of one's personal style from the conventions of academic writing.

Study concludes that the heuristic SMART intervention is most suitable for the facilitation of mestiza consciousness and the spread of awareness of acculturation among writing center tutees. SMART questions can be a helpful tool for further inclusivity research in the writing center.

INTRODUCTION

Writing centers (WC) have long stood as sites where diverse identities and discourses intersect. Given the inevitable convergences of different cultures, languages, and values within this space, it is unsurprising that WC scholars (e.g., Severino and others) frequently invoke concepts like Anzaldúa's "borderlands" and Pratt's "contact zone" to frame its dynamics. Both concepts reframe the center as a site of interaction, where dominant academic discourses encounter marginalized ("othered") voices. Such encounters produce tensions that permeate the routine practices of tutoring. For instance, tutors often find themselves facing a dilemma. They either help the clients meet the requirements of their assignments or focus on preserving their unique writing choices.

The former risks imposing academic discourse norms onto writers' self-expression and identities, while the latter fails to recognize the institutional standards by which student work is assessed thus potentially jeopardizing writers' academic success. It might appear, then, that tutors can only reinforce the hegemonic power of academic discourse by guiding their clients towards full adherence to academic writing conventions, or by rejecting them entirely, further marginalizing themselves and their clients. However, spaces like the WC tend to resist such reductive dichotomies by welcoming ambiguity and embracing alternative solutions. This dynamic is best discussed on a foundation of common terms.

A REVIEW OF TERMS

Three distinct terms frame the need, methodology, and application addressed in this study. These are: Borderlands, Mestiza Consciousness, and Acculturation. Gloria Anzaldúa first introduced the concept of *borderlands* in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), to represent a third place in a constant state of transition, i.e., "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (3). It is a place where border culture blooms, and where dualistic paradigms are rejected because of the convergence of diverse cultures. Borderlands (e.g., WC) are by nature susceptible to mestiza consciousness.

*Mestiza Consciousnes*s (MC) is a concept that emerges from the border culture inhabiting Anzaldúa's borderlands—a physical embodiment of the breakage of hegemonic dualistic paradigms. Anzaldúa uses "mestiza" as a powerful rejoinder to the Chicano movement's reclaimed "mestizaje," a much more inclusive and multitudinal interpretation of the theory of Chicano identity (Marez 158-9; Yarbro-Bejarano 12). It represents "a new, shifting subjectivity capable of reconfiguring and recentering itself" (Yarbro-Bejarano 11), an alternative strategy that allows one to recognize and critically assess the social roles of cultures and their discourses, and to navigate them comprehensively.

Acculturation is understood here as a force "driven by an essentialist and hegemonic pedagogical imperative that academic discourses are universal and empowering" (Bawarshi and Pelkowski 42). It manifests in the writers' unpremeditated adherence to academic writing conventions as the only appropriate discourse. Although this paper understands acculturation as an approach opposite to MC in effectiveness, it does not insist on the complete rejection of the former. A certain neutrality towards acculturation is necessary to wield various discourses at once, and MC creates this ambivalent stance by providing an inclusive approach. Acculturation and MC are not mutually exclusive: either can exist while the other is present. However, acculturation is characterized by its pull towards the extreme, while MC maintains a balance and an openness to new discourses. MC, then, can be understood as an improvement on acculturation, not a complete rejection of it.

THE PROJECT

Mestiza Consciousness recommends itself as one solution to addressing language conventions in the borderland space of the WC. Bawarshi and Pelkowski, WC scholars who

first applied MC to tutoring, characterize it as "a consciousness marked by the ability to negotiate multiple, even contradictory, subject positions while rooted in dominant discourse" (52). When effectively employed, MC enables an awareness of the differences between academic conventions and the client's own personal writing style without framing the latter as inadequate. It is inclusive of all knowledge at the writers' disposal and empowers them to navigate and shift between discourses with intentionality and agency.

Although previous scholarship has established MC as a potentially effective approach to navigating the clash of diverse discourses, little scholarship addresses its practical application to writing tutorials. Addressing that gap, this study uses an action research framework to develop, test, and validate a tool for writing tutorials (mimicking the existing tutoring practices, e.g., agenda-setting) that would afford student writers the freedom to express their identities even with the use of the academic vernacular. Using SMART criteria – first introduced by Doran in

Management Review (1981) and later adapted by Haney (2020) to support mentorship practices at the WC – this research develops a set of tutorial questions aligned with the principles of MC.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity is an important element of WC pedagogy, given that writing is often considered to be deeply personal. Adler-Kassner and Wardle suggest that writing exposes, or enacts, our identities and individualities, just as our identities affect our writing (48). Identity and writing find themselves in a constant feedback loop, where a change in one invariably alters the other to some degree. Hence, to favor one way of expressing ideas over others is to affect the way writers understand and communicate their identities. This issue is often obscured in mainstream educational spaces, where students are encouraged to adopt and internalize the writing conventions prioritized by academic discourse without much consideration of their own personal styles. This tradition of emphasis placed on standard academic writing structures results in some individuals facing barriers within their own discourse communities. For example, terms that hold specific or layered meaning in a non-dominant discourse community, might be disregarded as flattened slang in academic English. When such language connects with identity directly, these individuals experience more than a struggle to fit in; they experience a communication gap that contributes to erasure of their unique identities.

Linguistic erasure and identity acculturation has been problematized by scholars advocating for the interest of historically marginalized communities in WC work. Acculturation typically results from a meeting between cultures and is characterized by the ensuing cultural and psychological changes (Sam and Berry 472). While not inherently harmful in all contexts, acculturation has come to represent the colonialist polemic in WC scholarship. The most notable use of this term is found in Bawarshi and Pelkowski's critique of Stephen North's process-based pedagogy in "The Idea of a Writing Center." North's colonial language, they suggest, normalizes the disruption of students' writing rituals as an element of

tutoring practice, ultimately revealing "the acculturative and…hegemonic agendas of much basic writing pedagogy" (45-6). In other words, the authors' concern is that in making "better" writers, we enable acculturation – a process insensitive to tensions among discourses.

The issue of acculturation of "othered" voices has also been repeatedly raised by second-language acquisition (L2), feminist, and queer studies. According to Raimes, a particular issue for the L2 teaching community at the turn of the 20th century was whether marginalized groups should adapt to the academic discourse vernacular—this concern is echoed by Johns, who warns that students may be "surrendering their own language and mode of thought to the requirements of the target community" (33). Woolbright, writing from a feminist perspective, contends that academic feminists already recognize the need to navigate the "deeply-seated patriarchal academy" from within, without viewing either feminism or the patriarchy as the ultimate answer (17). Conversely, Denny, representing queer theory in the WC studies, argues that despite the efforts of underrepresented communities to navigate and adapt to the academic discourse, they will remain marginalized (102). However, it seems that the members of marginalized communities are not left with much of a choice, as openly defying the conventions of academic discourse or adopting a "counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed… both are reduced to a common denominator of violence…[which] is not a way in life" (Anzaldúa 100). WC pedagogy is an ever-renewed attempt to navigate this apparent dilemma and explore, together with tutees, a third way between acculturation and a counter-stance that flatly rejects academic discourse norms.

This third way is addressed here through Anzaldúa's MC. In the context of writing, MC allows an agent to consciously and inclusively use various adopted discourse styles. Anzaldúa herself refers to it as a "third element," which synthesizes the two "opposing powers" of acculturation into, and resistance to, academic discourse, and "keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (101-2). Unlike acculturation, MC is highly sensitive to tensions between discourses and identities, allowing the writer who wields it to not only recognize, but navigate different (often opposing) subject positions and vernaculars. Bawarshi and Pelkowski demonstrate MC in action through their discussion of "postcolonial writers who choose self-consciously to write in the language of the colonizing country" to offset the effects of "colonial (or neocolonial) situation of the marginalized writer" (51-52). Though these writers may maintain stylistic traditions of the dominant discourse in their works, they do so with an acute consciousness of the way this and other discourses function rhetorically and socially. MC thus offers writers a freedom that neither acculturation nor outright rejection of academic discourse allows — an especially valuable perspective in multicultural contexts. For this project, based in Kazakhstan, where the legacy of Russian colonialism and the rise of neo-colonial Englishization intersect, MC provides a crucial solution to move beyond binary thinking.

What this paper proposes is an actual tool — a set of questions that the WC can use to help its clients achieve MC. These questions, adapted from SMART criteria, are redesigned to fit the WC context and to provide clear inclusivity-driven guidelines. First proposed by Doran in *Management Review* as **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ssignable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-related, SMART criteria were a "combination of an objective and an action plan" for business management (36). Haney, in her article "Collaborative Practices to Increase Representation in the Writing Center," adapts the updated version of SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-bound) to meet the needs of WC directors in their inclusivity and diversity practices. Thus, SMART seemed to enter the WC space as both a typical agenda-setting (action-planning) tool and a vehicle for promoting inclusivity and collaboration. Having been reconceptualized as a list of questions by Haney, SMART could readily be redesigned and repurposed in the way that was needed for this research – as a tool to increase engagement and collaboration in writers in the *tutorials* themselves. The *new* SMART questions (later referred to simply as SMART questions) introduced here may offer a supportive foundation for cultivating MC in tutors and writers. The main purpose of this research is to trial the effectiveness of SMART questions in increasing inclusivity during tutoring sessions.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted as part of the Writing Fellowship program at a research-intensive university in Kazakhstan, where English is the main medium of instruction, and most of the students speak two or more languages. The Writing Fellowship program allows writing fellows (peer tutors in training) to gain practical experience by embedding them in introductory courses at the university, where they assist students with two assignments per semester. Accordingly, the participants in this study were students enrolled in an introductory political science course at the time of recruitment. The course included a group project, so each fellow met with three students per session. This project uses these sessions as sites for data collection.

This study, which follows an action research framework, aims to provide a tool that allows writing tutors and their clients to be mindful of acculturation during a writing consultation, and to employ MC as a way of navigating different discourses inclusively. SMART questions were designed with the specific goal of welcoming student writer input and control, explicitly citing academic vernacular not as the default, but as one style of expression available to writers. Each question is designed to acknowledge the tutees' identities and personal writing styles, distancing them from, and hence minimizing their internalization of, the academic discourse by openly questioning and objectivizing it (*for a detailed rationale behind each question, see Appendix A*). This study practically applies SMART questions to determine their most effective use - first as a list of consecutive questions (protocol), then as a list of non-consecutive questions, and finally as a set of questions used only depending on the context of the discussion (heuristic). To test each

variation of the SMART questions, this research uses three independent self-observations involving group tutoring sessions. The effects of each self-observation are then validated in a series of interviews with participants of these observations.

Each self-observation involved one of the three SMART question approaches (protocol, non-consecutive questioning, heuristic) to evaluate its specific effectiveness. The observations were overt, and the acquired data was recorded, then transcribed and coded for such markers as initiation of conversation, direction of the session, intra-group verbal engagement, code-switching, etc. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were then conducted with one participant from each self-observation to solicit personal perceptions regarding the use of SMART questions and their effectiveness. The questions were designed to obtain concrete opinions from the participants on their relationship with the academic vernacular, focusing on markers of acculturation and MC (see Appendix B).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

OBSERVATIONS

The data collection process yielded approximately 166 minutes of recording time, of which about 120 minutes were acquired as a result of the observations. The following sections of the study adopt a labeling system for all observation participants, using two-letter codes: the first letter denotes the SMART approach applied to the tutoring session ("P" for protocol, "N" for non-consecutive, and "H" for heuristic) and the second letter represents the participant's level of engagement ("H" for high, "M" for moderate, and "L" for low engagement). Thus, on average, each observed group contained one active participant with higher contribution to the duration of the session (participants PH, NH and HH), one member with moderate engagement (participants PM, NM, HM), and one member with low contribution to the discussion in comparison to their groupmates (participants PL, NL, HL). Each participant is henceforth referred to by their code.

VERBAL ENGAGEMENT RATIOS

Participants' verbal contribution in each tutoring session may provide some clarity on the overall effectiveness of SMART questioning in increasing student engagement. The verbal contribution assessment demonstrates that the heuristic session yielded the highest engagement time per participant, while the protocol has the most balanced engagement among tutees (see Fig. 1).

As depicted in fig. 1, for participants in the same engagement category across all three observations, the low-engagement participants showed the largest dissimilarity in time in terms of verbal contribution. Although PL's contribution is significantly shorter in comparison to PH, it is still more than twice the duration of the engagement of NL and HL. The largest disparity across engagement categories is between the contributions of HH and HL: HH's contribution is 11.9 times as long as HL's, as opposed to 8.5 times for NH and NL, and 2.6 times for PH and PL, respectively. Therefore, it might be inferred that statistically, the

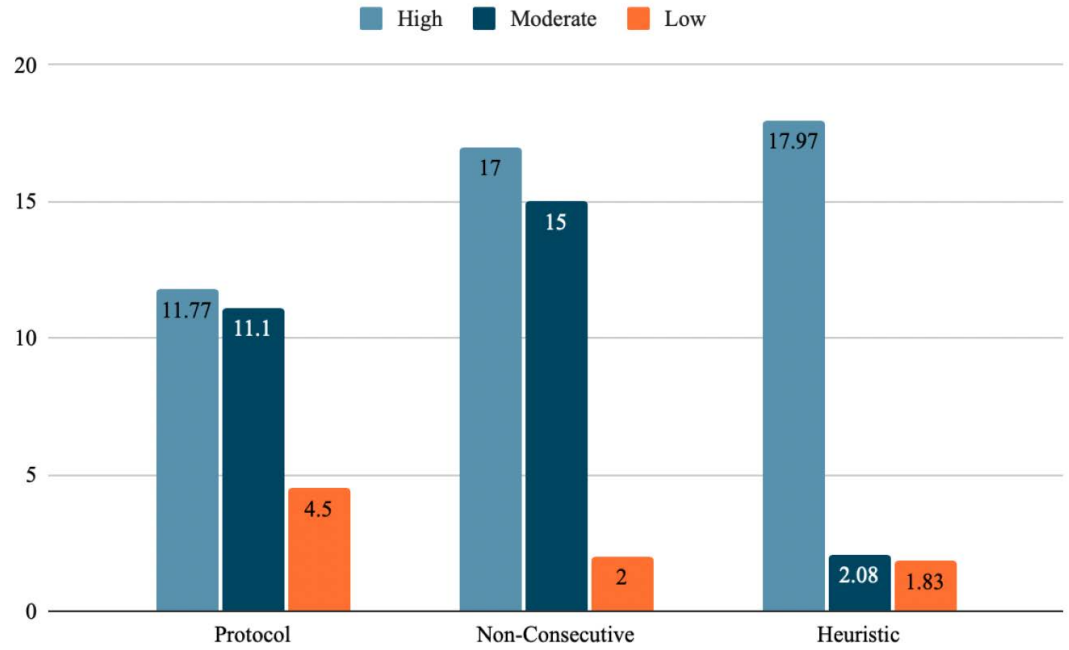

Fig. 1. The relative engagement of participants across all tutoring sessions in minutes.

protocol session yielded the most evenly distributed verbal engagement of all participants, whereas the heuristic showed the most skewed results.

These findings are important in understanding the relationship between tutee engagement and the navigation of academic discourse in the context of a WC tutorial. As Harry Denny explains, WC pedagogy promotes a "dialogic, collaborative, and process-oriented interaction between tutors and students" (101), which "does not just facilitate collaborative learning about concrete issues [but] also aids students' integration within academic communities; ideally with a critical sensibility to the process" (117). Consequently, a higher verbal engagement on the part of the student can be taken to indicate successful establishment of a dialogic relation between them and the tutor and that the student, by actively participating in the session, enacts academic rituals and practices (e.g., feedback) facilitating their integration into an academic community and their navigation of the academic discourse. If the substance of the student's verbal engagement also demonstrates a "critical sensibility to the process," as Denny notes, then perhaps it can be inferred that the student has achieved a kind of awareness akin to MC. Therefore, since the protocol yielded

the most balanced verbal engagement across all participants, it would be tempting to see it as coming the closest to fostering MC among all sessions.

That said, the engagement-awareness nexus might not be as unequivocal and unambiguous as it may seem, especially when the student writer belongs to a marginalized group. For example, as Felten et al. note, "students of color may find it difficult to get involved in campus activities," so other factors, "including socio-economic status and sexual orientation,

[may be] important to consider" in determining the reasons for lower student engagement (66). People who are marginalized via a hegemonic power structure, and are aware of it, are commonly less willing to contribute to a discussion, especially in a setting that enacts this structure. Denny parallels a scenario where a tutee might not feel comfortable disclosing information about their writing (here he is drawing a parallel between the vulnerability of disclosing one's sexual identity – "coming out" – and sharing one's academic experience), in which case he advises the tutor to model vulnerability and share their own experiences of joining the academic discourse (118). Thus, verbal engagement is helpful but not sufficient in understanding the effectiveness of a tutoring session in general, or the effect of this study's intervention in particular. To expand on the latter point, in the non-consecutive questioning session, the paper draft that formed the basis of the tutorial had been partially generated by an AI tool, which meant that the tutor and the students had to review the course policy on integrity for five more minutes at the beginning of the session. Evidently, this not only lengthened the duration of the session, but also might have significantly impacted the conduct of the participants for the remainder of the observation. The length of the heuristic session was also largely dictated by the participants' prior commitments, not the SMART intervention. Thus, additional qualitative factors are needed to help contextualize these findings. Two such factors emerged from the analysis of the observational data: agency and code-switching.

AGENCY AND SOLICITING BEHAVIORS

One of the common themes that arises from the analysis of observational data is tutee agency, which manifests in tutees taking over the conversation, planning the course of action, assuming an authoritative position and having intra-group conversations – in short, tutees exercising "[their] ability to define and act on their own goals" (Vaughn 63). It is clear that verbal engagement is necessary for tutee agency, but it is only a part of the equation. According to Barnes, student agency has the following components: "goal setting, intentional action, reflection and self-direction, and internalizing self-efficacy" (789). These components are not consecutive, especially in a group tutoring session, where each participant engages in the discussion at their own pace. However, the discernment of some of these steps does provide some insight into the ability of the tutees to take charge. Insofar as the tutees are the ones to dictate the development of the conversation, it can be suggested that their agency indicates

a higher level of MC. This connection can be understood by recognizing that agency is a necessary prerequisite for MC, whereas in the case of acculturation it is not required. Thus, high levels of agency might point towards the most effective SMART intervention.

The protocol observation had the highest number of instances where the participants expressed a concern regarding the suitability of their country's position paper, appealing to the tutor's opinion and advice. This can be set in contrast to its relatively high index of verbal engagement, which further confirms that verbal contribution is not the sole factor to consider in evaluating the effects of the protocol. The soliciting behavior can be seen in the beginning of the session, when the participants are presented with an opportunity to set the agenda for the tutoring session:

> Tutor: What's your goal for the consultation?
>
> PM: To get some advice [on] how to proceed with our paper. What should be… changed, what should be kept.
>
> Tutor: So…structure mostly, or?
>
> PM: I guess the structure, the language.

As this dialogue suggests, the tutees are ready to give up some of their agency in an attempt to write the most "correct" position paper possible. They assume that the tutor would have all the right suggestions for improvement and defer to her for ideas on a possible course of action, which they promptly accept as their own. Notice how it is only after hearing a suggestion from the tutor ("structure") that PM offers something of their own, namely, "the language." This instance can be interpreted as a sign of acculturation, though one can also argue that this is a moment of re-claiming agency, where the tutees are strategically navigating the received directions. At a different point during the consultation, PH also solicits the tutor's opinion by asking whether she "[liked] the introduction." Similar soliciting and/or unassertive behaviors were repeated by PH and PM, though both participants also introduced instances of intra-group discussions, which excluded the tutor. PL engaged differently, only answering when addressed by the tutor, but expressing a stronger conviction of the satisfactory quality of their paper in comparison to the other two participants.

In the non-consecutive session, tutee confidence and agency varied throughout, with participants actively taking part in agenda-setting and engaging with the tutor in the first half of the consultation but becoming less assured towards the end of the session. Participants tried to formulate an action-plan for the consultation almost immediately after the second SMART question was posed, chronologically, during the first half of the tutoring session*. NH clearly identified their main writing issue, was "aware of the construction" of the assignment, but expressed difficulty "[joining] the ideas together," and suggested they "read each part" of

* Note that the non-consecutive order of the SMART questions was determined by the context of the conversation, with questions 1, 2 and 4 appearing in the first ten minutes of the session, and questions 3 and 5 asked in the last ten minutes.

the paper as the first step of the consultation. NH continued to lead the session, inquiring into the tutor's familiarity with the assignment topic, which was mirrored by NM later in the session. NL remained inactive through most of the consultation, only suggesting ideas towards the end. In the second half of the session, however, all participants seemed less interested in directing the session, as they conversed on topics not related to the assignment.

The non-consecutive questioning session was also the only one to introduce subtle instances of resistance. NM repeatedly ignored or interrupted the tutor, mostly posing questions as though to check her credentials, while NL stated that they were "not very interested," when asked about their ideas regarding the assignment. While an open act of resistance may be taken as a sign of heightened rather than lowered agency, it can be counterproductive, as has been established earlier by Anzaldúa's point about opposing forces being permanently locked in the positions of oppressor and oppressed (100). By rejecting or resisting a tutor's suggestions, a tutee is more likely to opt out of the process instead of directing it, potentially lowering the chance of achieving MC. As Gorzelsky notes, for agency to develop, students need to step outside of the rejection-acceptance dichotomy and recognize that rejection is just as unsatisfactory a response to the tutor's ideas as complete uncritical acceptance. Rather, "[digesting] others' ideas" is the desirable, third approach that would allow students to step outside of this counterproductive dynamic and strategically navigate academic conventions (66). Likewise, MC offers another way of designating this middle road or "contact zone" between dominating and dominated discourses (Pratt 34).

Despite the imbalanced verbal engagement among tutees, the heuristic session had the highest level of tutee confidence and non-verbal engagement across all sessions. One of its distinct characteristics was its relative lack of structure in comparison to the other two consultations. This was explicitly pointed out by HH, who at one point said, "can we please talk about the solution? Because I have no time and I want to discuss the solutions more." In redirecting the conversation towards solving this issue, HH demonstrated agency as an "ability to define and act on their own goals" (Vaughn 63). Although HH was the most verbally active member of their group, the tutor's questions often resulted in a flurry of answers from all three participants and side talk (self-direction). If HH started replying to a question posed by the tutor, the other two participants would add to the answer in the midst of HH's speech, continuing the conversation independently. The findings of all three observations suggest that for group sessions, agency must be interpreted situationally taking into account the session's features and the ways in which tutees can communicate with each other. Although relevant to the discussion, agency nonetheless demands contextual evidence to be used as a marker of effectiveness of SMART interventions.

CODE-SWITCHING

Another important theme that emerged in the data analysis process is code-switching, which most commonly refers to the racial code-switch-

ing performed by marginalized speech communities (e.g., AAVE) to adjust one's "self-presentation to receive desirable outcomes… through mirroring the norms, behaviors, and attributes of the dominant group" (McCluney et. al. 1). However, this project occurred in an environment with all participants representing the dominant racial group in Kazakhstan and speaking English and Russian. Hence, for this project's purposes, only the traditional linguistic definition of code-switching for bilinguals, defined by Einar Haugen simply as "the alternate use of two languages," is considered (Schach 141).

The heuristic and the non-consecutive questioning sessions had the most extensive cases of code-switching, where two of the participants would almost completely switch to Russian (i.e., *first* language, though some participants showed signs of having Kazakh as their actual first language outside of the observations), unless someone introduced English (i.e., *second* language, though in actuality it is likely the participants' third language) back into the conversation.

Although the exact psycholinguistic reasons for switching languages mid-sentence are complex (Heredia and Altarriba 167), a general explanation can be found in the way we use language in context. For instance, Altarriba and Santiago-Rivera recognized a pattern in counseling sessions, where bilingual speakers would switch to their second language to "address issues that would be upsetting when discussed in first language" (391). In both the non-consecutive and heuristic sessions, code-switching from English to Russian occurred during the discussion of formatting and submission guidelines. Such discussions involved heightened intra-group engagement, where the participants conversed with each other without the involvement of the tutor. For instance, HH noted to their groupmates in Russian, that "when [they] used direct quotations in [their] EAP course… [their]…tutor said it [was] okay, but [could cost] marks" (my translation). This remark was followed by an intra-group discussion of the use of direct quotations in the paper. It can be suggested, therefore, that code-switching had a positive impact on overall tutee engagement, and academic vernacular had the least emotional impact on them out of all discussed topics, i.e., it was a factor completely detached from personal ideation and therefore safer to discuss in Russian. This interpretation is justified by reverse "distancing," in Altarriba and Santiago-Rivera's terms, referring not to language that is emotionally distant, but rather to the language that is most cognitively distant from the writing, itself (given that all papers in the tutorials were written in English). Reverse "distancing" could explain why code-switching occurred almost exclusively in (meta) discussions of academic writing conventions as requirements of the professor of the course, or other members of the academic institutions. A lesser emotional involvement of the tutees in the discussion of the academic vernacular, thus, could indicate higher levels of MC, and it would, indeed, be in the style of MC to enable discussions of dominant writing conventions in non-dominant languages and terms. Still, the interpretation of these findings would depend on the

understanding of code-switching as a psycholinguistic phenomenon and thus could yield different conclusions. Considering the pattern discerned through the survey of code-switching, however, it seems that the non-consecutive intervention, and even more prominently the heuristic one, are suitable for the facilitation of MC and the spread of awareness of acculturation among WC tutees.

INTERVIEWS

All three post-observation interviews yielded the remaining 46 minutes 41 seconds of data. PH, NH, HM agreed to take part in the second research procedure, and were interviewed with a set of open-ended questions, designed to solicit perceptions on the effectiveness of the SMART questioning techniques used in each tutoring session (see Appendix B). Unlike the observations, the interviews revealed a slightly bigger difference in duration, with the heuristic interview lasting for only about half as long as the non-consecutive interview (see Fig. 2). That said, the overall pattern seen in the observations appeared to persist: the non-consecutive interview was once again the longest, followed by the protocol, while the heuristic remained the shortest.

It might be suggested that the shortness of an interview negatively affects the quality of collected data, which means that the heuristic interview may lack reliability. However, the precise nature of the speed-quality relationship in research interviews appears to not have been fully determined yet (Loosveldt and Beullens 78), so this research will treat all three interviews equally. Despite the differences in duration, all three procedures exhibited numerous common themes, the most major of which is

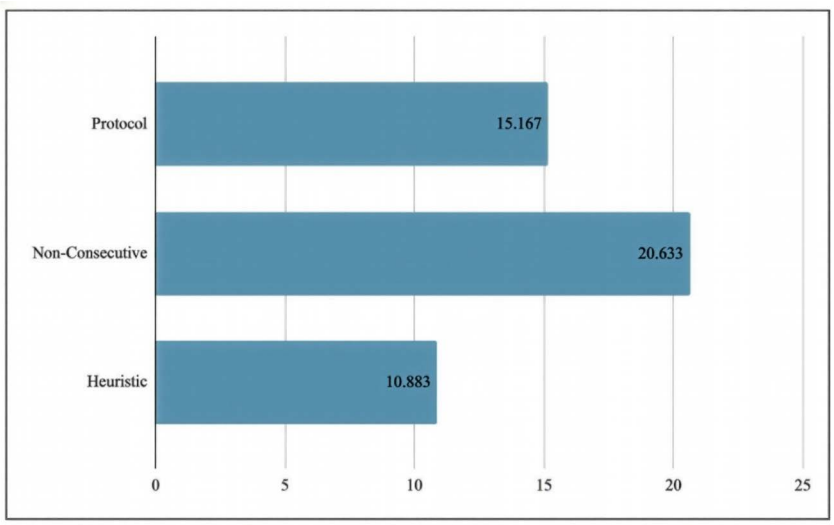

Fig. 2. The duration in minutes of each interview is based on the SMART questioning approach used in the respective tutoring session.

self-identification in relation to the academic writing vernacular.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION

PH, who was interviewed shortly after the protocol observation, expressed a strong sense of personal identification with the academic vernacular. Because of their declared personal association with academic writing, PH contended to have no issues with writing academically, as seen in the following example:

> Tutor: Do you feel like [academic writing] is more of an imposition on your personal style, or is it something else for you?
>
> PH: No, it's my own position, just written with academic conventions…my personal voice.

Moreover, when the interviewer suggested the possibility of expressing one's ideas with several discourse vernaculars, "tools," including academic writing, the interviewee highlighted the "appropriateness" of expression as a function of academic writing conventions:

> Tutor: You express your ideas all the time, except with different tools, right?
>
> PH: Yes. . . [these are] my ideas, my opinion, but just expressed in the appropriate way.

PH used similar language repeatedly, mostly referring to the "appropriacy" of academic language or writing in their personal voice not being "the right thing" for academic purposes. Although it could be argued that PH exhibited agency in deciding which writing conventions to use for a specific purpose, and thus may have, in principle, exercised their MC, there was little indication of actual critical navigation between discourses, or any recognition of this being a possibility.

PH's point of view is completely understandable, however, considering the fact that standardized English, and academic English by proxy, is often described in such suggestive (and *a priori* exclusive) terms as "appropriate" or "suitable." Alim and Smitherman contextualize this phenomenon in *Articulate While Black*, claiming that "it is the language and communicative norms of those in power, in any society, that tend to be labeled as 'standard,' 'official,' 'normal,' 'appropriate,' 'respectful'" (171). It is thus easy to see the connection between the use of "appropriate" in this case with Bawarshi and Pelkowski's definition of acculturation as "a means not only of precluding the Other, but also of validating the academic culture itself," which "becomes legitimized when it is made to appear as if it were based on certain natural, common-sensical principles" (43). Acculturation, in other words, is what ensures that the status of academic vernacular as "the language of power" appears natural to its users (Alim and Smitherman 171). PH seems to blindly accept this definition of academic discourse vernacular, suggesting that the protocol session failed to create the environment for MC-like ideation.

The non-consecutive and the heuristic interviewees, on the other hand, strongly supported the idea of total separation of one's

personal style from the conventions of academic writing. For instance, at one point in the interview, NH said that academic writing is something that comes "from the side," instead of being a feature of their personal writing, though they then retracted by claiming inexperience and relative non-acquaintance with the topic of our discussion. As a result of this hedging, little was said about the use of specific language or writing conventions, but NH did specify a personal distinction between what they call "formulaic" and "exciting" writing. "Formulaic" writing for them is an overall "not really" creative endeavor because of its "strict conditions." The "exciting" writing, however, causes them to "reach [a]…flow" that moves them to continue to process information even after the deadline for an academic assignment has already passed. Ideation for NH, thus, seems to be distinct from the expectations of academic discourse vernacular, and this distinction itself already signals a higher awareness of different ways of self-expression. A similar conclusion can be reached with the results of the heuristic interview. In comparison to the previous interviews, HM's opinions were less ambiguous in their partiality to personal writing style:

> Tutor: Which [writing style] do you like better?
>
> HM: I'm interested in [writing] like myself.
>
> Tutor: Is [academic writing] different from…[your] personal style?
>
> HM: Yes, it's really different…[at first, it was] really hard to change my own style of writing…using "children" instead of "kids" and getting rid of informal language.

In showing a preference to personal style, PH showcases conscious separation of discourse vernaculars, even mentioning certain terms in their language that are considered "informal" in academia. Demonstrating acute awareness of discourse dynamics, namely the hegemony of academic language, they explicitly say that it was difficult to "*change*" their style upon their first encounter with academic writing conventions. Although they never mentioned the term "acculturation" in connection to said "change," they did agree on the imposing nature of this process. That said, there was no evidence in HM's responses that suggested overt resistance to academic vernacular, either. When asked whether the consultation was helpful, they simply acknowledged the usefulness of academic writing as an exercise:

> HM: "I guess it was really helpful to understand how to write exactly…technically… and also improve our brains."

The lack of resistance in this interview creates a helpful contrast to the non-consecutive self-observation, where cases of resistance were observed, suggesting a slight comparative edge of the heuristic as a SMART intervention. Considering that neither NH, nor HM ever explicitly discussed the relationship and navigation between discourse vernaculars, it might be too soon to suggest that they operate with MC. However, their responses may indicate a

certain advantage in effectiveness of their respective SMART questioning uses.

CONCLUSION

Tutoring sessions are a site of contact for many discourses, where dominant conventions may oftentimes drown out "othered" voices. This study shows that recognizing the writing center (WC) as a borderland, creates an opportunity to apply mestiza consciousness (MC) to tutoring practice. The application of the principles of MC, in turn, allows tutees to critically navigate all acquired discourse styles without the risk of falling victim to acculturation of, or resistance to, the academic vernacular. To that purpose, this research pioneers a tool, SMART questions, that could help make MC more practically accessible to tutors and their tutees. Self-observations and follow-up interviews applied the tool, yielding four main criteria for differences in tutee behavior among the sessions: verbal engagement, agency, use of code-switching, and self-identification with academic writing style. Though verbal engagement suggests the effectiveness of the protocol session, agency and code-switching, along with self-identification, indicate non-consecutive questioning and heuristic as more effective in facilitating MC. Of the three sessions in this study, the most effective use of the SMART intervention is apparent in the heuristic session, as no signs of participant resistance are presented.

Though this study offers tutors and WC scholars the SMART questions as a promising new tool, certain limitations suggest that more research is needed in defining the exact practical conditions and effects of MC. It was mentioned before that the length of two of the three sessions was artificially adjusted to the circumstances of the tutees. There were also some instances of resistance, which might have occurred because of the unfamiliarity of tutees with group work or with the format of the writing session itself. Group sessions as the primary setting of this research, therefore, may have introduced confounding factors to testing SMART questions, influencing the results. Given the limitations imposed on this study and its non-conventional tutoring dynamics, future research could benefit from an examination of literature on group tutoring, especially in multilingual contexts, with medium of instruction serving as an additional variable used to further improve the design of inquiry. Although this study recruited first-year undergraduate students, it might be advisable to diversify the pool of participants or to conduct a longitudinal survey of the same participants each year of their studies.

The practical contribution of this research, i.e., the SMART intervention itself, could meanwhile be used by tutors in training to familiarize themselves with the intricacies of discourse dynamics and the importance of inclusivity in WC consultations. Because this tool draws from traditional WC procedures, i.e., agenda-setting, tutors may potentially use it for the benefit of their tutoring practice.

APPENDIX A: SMART QUESTIONS

1. **Specific**: "What goals do you set for this consultation? What do you want to achieve by the end of it?" The purpose of these questions is to explicitly acknowledge the tutee and affirm their agency regarding the course of the session.
2. **Measurable**: "What is expected of you in this assignment? What is expected of you by the people who assigned this task?" In these questions, the verbalizing of the expectations of tasks and assignments, as well as the people who assign them, helps objectivize academic discourse and view this project as an entity separate from the student's personal writing and identity.
3. **Attainable**: "What aspects of your writing do you want to improve? Why?" These questions help raise the awareness of, and thus distance the writers from, academic discourse, and direct them toward the longer-view plan for improvement. By objectively viewing the successes and failures as steps towards the application of academic writing, a minimized internalization of its conventions can be achieved.
4. **Realistic**: "What resources do you need to ensure your success?" This question equips the writer for further independent learning of the academic discourse and its conventions without marginalizing the writer's ideas. In this instance, the writing conventions are not personified through the tutor but merely seen as a rule book.
5. **Time-bound**: "Will you be able to apply these revisions in the time frame that we have? Will you be able to implement this conversation in time for the deadline?" These questions have an overt function of evoking the idea of deadlines, but they also covertly remind the writer that a writing tutorial only may influence them for a short amount of time, which could prove important if the writer is subjected to any prescriptive tutoring strategies.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Do you feel like someone else when writing something "academically" in English? Do you like how you feel when you write in English?
2. How do you view the experience of writing academically in your second/third language?
3. Did you have the chance to ask all of the questions you had during a tutoring session?
4. Did you feel in control of the direction that the tutoring session was taking? Did you have the chance to state what you wanted to get out of this session?
5. Did you feel heard during the consultation?
6. Did you feel like your input was valued?

7. Did you feel satisfied with your writing *before* coming to the tutoring session? What about *after* the consultation?
8. Do you feel that you need to follow academic writing conventions in order to succeed with your writing? After the consultation, did you get the sense that you had more freedom in choosing which academic writing conventions to use, and how to use them?
9. Did the talk of academic writing conventions feel like an imposition on your own personal writing style?
10. During the consultation, were you able to interpret the assignment in the way that you wanted? Did you feel comfortable talking the way you usually talk during the consultation?
11. Did you feel like you were sufficiently assisted with navigating the academic writing conventions? Was the tutoring session helpful to you? Why/why not?
12. Did you feel confident in your success by the end of the session?

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