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A doctoral student of physics writing for publication: A sociopolitically-oriented case study

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1. Introduction

Casanave (2003) has called for more sociopolitically-oriented case study research in L2 writing scholarship, i.e., situating L2 writing research “in more complex and nuanced sociopolitical contexts than in the past” (p. 86). Previous research that took a sociopolitical perspective on L2 writing has looked at nonnative speaker of English (NNSE) undergraduate or graduate students fulfilling coursework or exams (Johns, 1991, Leki, 2001 and Spack, 1997), but such a perspective has rarely been taken to examine the international publication effort of NNSE graduate students. In the case of NNSE graduate student novice scholars writing for international publication, the sociopolitical implications of their publication process can be profound, with their status of potentially being “less powerful” at multiple levels, in relation to the more powerful institutional authority (where the rule of “publish or perish” takes various forms), to the senior academics such as their supervisors (who possess the level of expertise the novices are still striving for), and to the gatekeepers of their target journals in the Centre of the English-dominant international academia.¹

The present study describes the writing-for-publication experience of an NNSE doctoral student of physics from a sociopolitical perspective. The study is situated broadly within an argument that is increasingly receiving endorsement in the literature of L2 writing, i.e., written texts are sociopolitical artifacts, *social* by being “material objects fashioned by people”, and *political* by being “produced in power-infused settings such as classrooms and discourse communities” and “used to further political as well as intellectual and instructional agendas” (Casanave, 2003, p. 87). Specifically concerned with a case of writing for scholarly publication, this study further draws from two theoretical conceptions: the social constructionist perspective on research writing (e.g., Bazerman, 1988), and the notion of “legitimate peripheral participation” (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991).