

8-2017

Understanding Discourse Transition

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Understanding Discourse Transition

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

by

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University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2015

August 2017
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

This work is intended to explore and analyze the process of transition from one discourse to another different discourse.

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Introduction

When we consider our students' discourse, veterans have a whole language and style all their own. Military discourse is intentionally crafted to minimize any confusion, once a person becomes intimate with the discourse. This language use brings us to our central issue for this research, understanding how this discourse transition happens. If a discourse can be changed slightly over time, is it the same discourse that person first learned as a child? Additionally, if we do indeed change any small parts of our discourse over time, then can we replace the initial discourse we learned as children with a completely new discourse or has it become a strong dominant secondary discourse? For this research, we will see how the military discourse resembles a primary discourse. One aspect of veterans' military discourse is the unique words they have in their vocabulary. For an example, the use of words such as *head*, *gee dunk*, and *deck* are examples of the lexis of military discourse. Some of these can be easily understood by nonveterans, with a bit of critical thinking. The word *head* to a naval sailor means bathroom. *Gee dunk* is a place that sells candy, soda, etc. A more popular word for *gee dunk* would be concession stand. The last word, *deck*, means the floor which is probably the easiest to infer of the three words. Now the question most of my readers are probably asking themselves and asking me is "why do these words matter?" These specific words may never come up in a conversation with a student veteran. However, other words that may be just as odd sounding to a nonveteran will almost always come into play. These three words are a good example of a military discourse. Another aspect of this discourse is the tendency for veterans to write in a concise straight-to-the-point style. Additionally, most of the student veteran participants have a tendency to use absolute thinking. Absolute thinking being a statement that lacks connection when drawing a conclusion. For those who use absolute thinking, there is very little middle

ground for ideas and concepts. As new veteran college student begins their academic career, they quickly realize that the way they speak and write is different than both their peers and their instructors. They may not consider it in terms of discourse, but they do realize that they are socializing differently. To try and understand the transition, they need to first understand the different discourses around them both in their writings and socially. Otherwise, they will quickly be labeled as “other.” Most student veterans will most likely focus on understanding and mastering the discourse of writing an academic paper, and put less emphasis on learning the social discourse of their classmates at first, if at all. It is the veterans’ need to master academic writing that helps to focus many veterans to negotiate their current discourse with a more traditional academic writing discourse.

Throughout boot camp, the military discourse language begins to replace the recruits’ (a term used for a person who is in and has not completed boot camp) initial discourse languages, much so that if someone is resisting any part of this process by keeping parts of his or her old discourse, those who resist the transition are good naturedly teased for sounding different than the others in his or her unit. This playful banter serves to reinforce the need for recruits to use the military discourse at all times.

One important aspect of boot camp, in relation to discourse, is to get the new recruits to see each other as being the same, by using the same discourse. Everyone does the same things, wears the same clothes, and talks the same. However, while this sameness is important in the military for cohesion, once a service member exits the military, everyone around him or her is striving to find their own uniqueness within their social discourse. They all do different things, wear different clothes, and talk very differently.

Now, after exiting the military, veterans face the problem of trying to understand their place in this “new” world; that universal discourse and language use is replaced by a sea of different discourses. There is no longer the uniformity they are used to in the military. Now the veteran must adapt to this new challenge of transitioning elements of his or her discourse. It is for this reason why we should try and better understand the concept of first-year students’ social language transition from their current discourse to their new college discourse.

My hypothesis about discourse transition has characteristics that differ from the current model used for understanding a student’s social language use. In regard to the theory that each person has a primary and secondary discourse, if a primary discourse is the very first social language we learn, and everything else that follows is only a secondary language, then what about those who use a dominant secondary language so long that when they hear their initial discourse, it sounds foreign? For most military personnel, this is a situation they face at some point. As you read this, ask yourself, how much of your initial discourse remains? One way to think about this is like the process of baking cookies. Depending on the recipe, you can make different cookies. Like a person’s discourse, we all learn at least one way to make cookies when we are children. As we develop our social language, we sometimes add things to our primary discourse. As with baking cookies, if we add any new element to our cookie recipe, we have changed our cookie recipe. No matter what we added to our cookie recipe, we will not make the same type of cookie that we learned how to make when we were children. The same holds true with our primary discourse, once we add anything to our discourse recipe, we have changed that recipe. Have you changed any part(s) of it, or even replaced your initial discourse altogether?

James Paul Gee argues that as we develop more dominant and nondominant secondary discourses we can add aspects of those secondary discourses to our primary discourse. If this

happens, does our initial discourse remain the same initial discourse after the additions from aspects of a secondary discourse?

The purpose of this study is to understand the process of discourse transition. This study of discourse transition has two parts. The first is to evaluate the idea of changing and replacing a discourse through the lens of veteran college students. The second is to evaluate the findings, regardless of the outcome, to create a methodology for any students to help them transition from one discourse to a more traditional college discourse.

Understanding the transition process from military discourse social language to a more academic and civilian discourse can be applied to other types of students' discourse transition process. The process of discourse transition isn't something many instructors think about, but it is another technique we should use to help our students. While most discourses form naturally, the military discourse is purposely ingrained into each and every service member. Again, in boot camp there is a focus on replacing the person's current discourse language with the military discourse.

My research on better understanding of discourse transition is ultimately inspired by the idea of social language, that is how we use language to help identify who others are as well as ourselves. We must now establish what criteria is needed when identifying a persons' primary discourse. To help do this, I turn to James Paul Gee's theory of Big "D" little "d" discourse. In his theory, there are four important elements of discourse to consider: Primary Discourse, secondary discourse, dominant discourse, and nondominant discourse. I will elaborate on these definitions in the pedagogy review chapter.

There are two themes that I predicted would most likely emerge during this study: 1) A high use of military discourse language, 2) a relation of prior military history to current class assignments. It is important to understand that in college there are three main types of veterans. The first category are veterans who entered the military knowing they would use their GI Bill after their service was complete. Of the three types, this type of veteran will be the most likely to make the transition most quickly and be the most accepting of the change in their discourse. They realize that to succeed in this new discourse community, they must adapt and become a part of it, especially their written language.

The second type of veteran is similar to the first. However, this type of veteran did not willingly separate from the military. These veterans were discharged before their contracts were complete due to circumstances beyond their control, such as injury. Many of these veterans still want to be in the military. Although they may have had every intention to go to college after their service was complete, they hold on to their military discourse the longest of the three. Simply put, because they weren't ready to separate from the military.

The third type of veteran is those who have retired from the military. In most cases these veterans have done at least twenty years in the military. Although these veterans are not as resistant to the new discourse of college, they have been a part of the military discourse for so long social language change will most likely take some time. This group will most likely be the ones who can identify key patterns in social language to be the most successful at communicating with non-veterans initially.

The practical good of this research is to create a usable pedagogical theory for discourse transition, so more students will be able to quickly adapt to a new discourse and we can find a

way to help improve retention rates. Although this study focuses on veterans, it is intended that this theory will be able to be applied to any student.

Hypothesis

By using the data I have collected, we can better understand the process of a student's discourse transition. My reasoning for this is as follows: if a person can change any aspect of his or her initial discourse, then that initial discourse has been changed to become a new discourse. My central question is this: "Can we make an argument the military discourse is very strong, dominant secondary discourse, and the degree to which it might be as strong as a primary discourse?" Specifically, can thing change happen in the context of student veterans transitioning from the military to college. I have included texts that are written by experts, addressing social language discourse and writing strategies for college students. My two associated sub-questions are: 1) Can we see a veteran college student's discourse change from a military discourse to a more traditional college student discourse and will it be a new discourse? 2) How can we apply the results to other first-year college students? These questions are intended to help focus my hypothesis that we can better understand this discourse transition. Additionally, I want to address three further questions: 1) What issues do first-year college student veterans face with transitioning between secondary discourses? 2) What can first-year college student veterans do to make their transition easier? 3) How can all first-year college students use the answers to the previous two questions to make the transition easier?

Research and Pedagogy about Discourse Transitions: A Reflective Review

My research on veterans transitioning from a military discourse to a college secondary discourse is ultimately inspired by James Paul Gee's work in social linguistics, and his theory of how we use language to help identify ourselves to others. He outlines his idea for what makes a person's discourse. In Gee's theory, there are four important elements of discourse to consider: Primary Discourse, secondary discourse, dominant discourse, and nondominant discourse. The first discourse is what Gee refers to as Big "D" Discourse. Gee defines this Discourse as follows:

The initial Discourse, which I call our *primary Discourse*, is the one we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others. Our primary Discourse constitutes our original and home-based sense of identity... We acquire this primary Discourse, not by overt instruction, but by being a member of a primary socializing group (family, clan, peer group). Further, aspects and pieces of the primary Discourse become a "carrier" or "foundation" for Discourses acquired later in life. Primary Discourses differ significantly across various social (cultural, ethnic, regional, and economic) groups in the United States. (7-8)

The second aspect of Gee's theory is little "d" discourse. He defines this as follows:

After our initial socialization in our home community, each of us interacts with various non-home-based social institutions – institutions in the public sphere, beyond the family and immediate kin and peer group. These may be local stores and churches, schools, community groups, state and national businesses, agencies and organizations, and so forth. Each of these social institutions commands and demands one or more Discourses and we acquire these fluently to the extent that we are given access to these institutions and are allowed apprenticeships within them. (8)

Within the confines of the secondary discourse Gees writes that two additional aspects of secondary discourse exist, and he labels them dominant and nondominant discourses (8).

Dominant discourses are secondary discourses the mastery of which, at a particular place and time, brings with it the (potential) acquisition of social goods (Gee 8). Next, nondominant Discourses are secondary discourses the mastery of which often brings solidarity with a particular social network, but not wider status and social goods in the society at large (Gee 8).

Gee also address that these types of discourses, even our primary discourse, undergo a

negotiation process as we move through life. At times, we adopt some aspects and disregard other aspects of secondary discourses.

Although Gee sets our stage with a solid foundation to expand our understanding of students use of language, simply knowing Gee's theory will not help us better understand the process of discourse transition all of our students go through. To begin, using Gee's theory, we must find a way to bring his theory into the classroom. For this I will address Richard Fulkerson's taxonomy of composition pedagogies. In Fulkerson's article "Composition at the Turn of the Century," he argues that to build a composition course, we must first answer certain questions: the axiological question, the process question, and the pedagogical question. The axiological question is, not what is good writing, but what theories do we use to teach what good writing is. Fulkerson lists three theories that are used to teach students writing: critical/cultural studies, expressionism, and procedural rhetoric. Secondly, the process question can be addressed by understanding the different ways students use various writing techniques. Next, the pedagogical question can be addressed by understanding numerous teaching theories that Fulkerson points out: by taking the time to understand how our students best learn, we can better teach them. By understanding these questions, I hope to help new students understand the transition of their dominant discourses.

As students move from one discourse to another, they must renegotiate what they consider to be good writing. Fulkerson also discusses the idea of what good writing is: writing which is rhetorically effective for an audience and situations (655). The idea of what good writing is relates back to Gee's view of social linguistics. Fulkerson addresses three divergent theories for composition: critical/cultural studies, expressionism, and procedural rhetoric. Fulkerson stresses that critical/cultural studies courses are not designed to "improve writing" but

to cause a “liberation” from dominant discourse (660). Considering Fulkerson’s view of this theory, if the course is built to liberate the students reading of texts and not built around improving writing, is it still a composition course? In *Relations Locations Positions Composition Theory for Writing Teachers*, Peter Vandenberg, Sue Hum, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon warn that as teachers we need to consider teaching students not simply *the* way to write but the rich implications of context (6). I will say that one can use cultural studies to teach composition. However, the focus of the course should still be about teaching students writing. For first year composition students, the writing assignments are based on how to write an academic paper. Therefore, the readings that students do should be, for the majority, articles from academic journals. As we teach these articles, we should consider relating the aspect of cultural studies to the student’s own primary discourse. To do this I suggest studying a variety of cultures in first-year composition courses.

When transitioning discourses, one must first be able to identify oneself in that new discourse. The second theory Fulkerson addresses is expressionism. Chris Burnham defines expressivism in his article, “Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice.” Burnham states, “Expressivism pedagogy employs free writing, journal keeping, reflective writing... [It] encourages, even insists upon, a sense of writer presence even in research-based writing” (19). Fulkerson sees this as “knowing thyself” and not as improving written communication or encouraging critical thinking (667). I, however, view expressionism as an additional tool to traditional methods for teaching English composition classes. When we use this theory, we consider the students’ attempt at using a new dominate discourse. For example, at the end of each major writing assignment I give to students, I have the students write a reflection about how the writing has impacted them outside of the class, if at all. This part of the assignment is not

graded for its grammar, but for how it reflects the student's critical thinking within the content of both the topic of the assignment and how it impacts the student's life.

Additionally, Eli Goldblatt's article, "Don't Call It Expressivism: Legacies of a 'Tacit Tradition'" addresses the way we understand this term: expressivism. Goldblatt explains:

Why I am suggesting is that when we focus so much on professional and theoretical understandings of writing instruction – especially in the context of higher education budget cuts, larger class sizes, and more calls for standardized quantitative assessments – we can forget the importance of two impulses that compel writers: the desire to speak out of your most intimate experiences and to connect with communities in need. (Goldblatt 442)

I agree with Goldblatt on the two points of the desire to speak out and connecting with communities. One their own, I see them as important points. But, considering discourse transition (DT), I think it is important for students to be able to verbalize their experiences as they make their DT. As for connecting with communities, I believe this to be one of the central themes of a discourse. A primary discourse cannot exist without the community it belongs to. Goldblatt also addresses the need for expressivism regarding not allowing an author's voice to become lost. He argues:

Both personal expression and community engagement have a place in current conversations over college literacies, but the aspirations of individual authors within their home communities can get lost in public debates that foreground disciplinary knowledge and preparation for remunerative work. (Goldblatt 442).

Additionally, if we can better understand the process of DT than we may be better able to educate our students on the elements of not allowing their voices to become lost.

The last theory Fulkerson discusses, procedural rhetoric, is intended to focus on "the process of writing." Many first-year veteran students' writing process is more concrete than their traditional student peers. Fulkerson notes that this theory could become confused with the previous two theories because they address the steps or moves an author make. Although

procedural rhetoric does not focus on helping a student improve their writing, that is become more rhetorically effective for an audience and situation, it does help students to engage more with what they are doing. It also allows for in-depth thought on how their writing is changing during college.

Additionally, Fulkerson addresses what the Council of Writing Programs Administrators gives as a minimal standard for a first-year writing course. “The document, officially approved by the organization... lists broad desired outcomes under four headings: Rhetorical knowledge, Critical Thinking, Processes, and Knowledge, Critical Thinking, Processes, and knowledge of Conventions” (670). Because the definition is so broad, he addresses an important issue. “[W]e differ on what topics [the students] should argue about, on how explicitly to ‘teach’ argument, over how to assess it, and over the role of ‘logic,’ either formal or informal, in such a course” (674). In addition, I must now ask the following question: is teaching our students, the “correct” way of academic writing, as we the teachers see it, truly the best thing for the students? Composition courses that teach students how to write across the disciplines, at this time, seem to be on the rise. With a high percentage of students changing their majors before they graduate, teaching them to identify their discourse and its conventions can be helpful.

Once we establish our criteria of how to construct our first-year composition courses, we need to consider, in my opinion, the most prevalent problem students face in their first year of college, “writer’s block.” When we are learning our primary discourse, we develop our problem-solving process. In first-year composition classrooms, there seem to always be those who struggle with writing their essays and those who writing seems to come to more naturally. For this, Mike Rose’s article “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer’s Block” addresses the reason why some students struggle and

some do not. He refers to those students who struggle as “blockers” and to those who do not struggle as “non-blockers.” He argues that “blockers” who struggle more with writing use fixed plans. These plans are self-established, and in the view of the student, unchangeable, and it is impossible for the student to deviate from that plan. On the other hand, those who are “non-blockers” use malleable plans and can change their plans as needed to finish their writing.

To help students in transition, I keep Rose’s article in mind. I began by asking students I have taught about their prewriting process. Like most students presumably, they grew up learning the five-paragraph essay in high school. These students feel that to be successful college writers, they cannot deviate from this writing process. Rose points out that there are two types of problem solving methods for student writers, algorithms and heuristics. Specifically, “Algorithms are precise rules that will always result in a specific answer... mathematical rules,” whereas “Heuristics are guidelines that allow varying degrees of flexibility when approaching problems” (536). The students that felt they could only use the five-paragraph essay format were using an algorithm to write their papers. However, I explained to my students how writing can be more flexible, in contrast to working a math problem. We can extend this further by trying to understand the primary Discourse and dominate discourse and relating each discourse back to the students’ writing processes.

Similarly, Anne Lamott’s article, “Shitty First Drafts,” closely relates to Mike Rose’s idea of “blockers” and “non-blockers” and can help many veterans in their discourse transition. We can teach not only veteran students, but each student, it is okay to have a draft that isn’t perfect and they don’t need to write a perfect draft the first time. Lamott’s article on writing a first draft is one of the texts I teach that most helps “blockers” to overcome their negative writing habits. Most students enjoy reading and discussing this text in class. A first, they find it

entertaining that they get to read an article with a curse word in the title. However, their initial snickering quickly turns to genuine interest. Lamott's writing style is much more accessible for most students. Her view point is easier for blockers to use in their own writings. So too, like writing, mastery of a new discourse takes time and practice. Just because some people didn't get it perfect on the first try does not mean they cannot become a part of said discourse. It means they must continue to try, until they do master it. This allows us to show students that revision is a critical part of writing.

However, once we establish if our students are blockers or non-blockers and have helped them to understand that it is acceptable to write an imperfect rough draft, we need to show them how to revise that rough draft into a more conventional academic paper. With that said, it is my opinion that students cannot truly begin to become invested in their own revision process until they fully understand what the word revision means and how to properly revise their papers. Like with Rose, how we teach writing strategies in relation to discourse transition, may require the student to revisit their primary discourse's problem-solving process to improve his or her revision strategies. In Nancy Sommers' article "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," she gives insight on how to better help each student understand how to work through his or her papers. By illustrating the difference between, "student writers" and "experienced writers," Sommers illustrates why students seem to only do the minimal amount of revision for their papers. For this explanation, Sommers has coded four changes that are made to someone's writing: deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering (579). For a student writer with little or no experience with academic writing, the revision process is only a rewording activity (580). The student is focused on only the idea that a word change could improve his or her paper. For example, one student writes, "Reviewing means just using better words and

eliminating words that are not needed, I go over and change words around” (580). On the other hand, experienced writers tend to focus on the argument in its entirety and ask themselves if their audience will be able to fully understand what they are saying. Sommers’ ideas on student versus experienced writers is important when I consider my own students. As a teacher, I need to ask myself, “Do my students truly understand what I want them to do when I give them their papers back?” Like most students, the highest priority for them is to get the highest grade possible. It is crucial to find a way to have the students who are invested in their work get their desired grade.

When we are showing our students how to craft their essays, we must be mindful of our comments on each writing assignment. We must not overwhelm them, but at the same time we must give them a helpful critique so that they may improve their writing. As the teacher, I could instruct my students all semester on how to write, but unless I find a way to help them truly care about what they are writing, what good am I actually doing? In Michael Bunn’s article, “Motivation and Connection: Teaching Reading (and Writing) in the Composition Classroom,” one student echoed countless others when he says, “I am not very motivated to read for this course because I never really know what to look for in the reading” (Bunn 208). It is critical for me as a teacher to explain how the readings relate to the students’ own writing. Bunn also points out that instructors who create their reading lists for their classes without considering how they will connect to the writing assignments will leave students asking, “Why am I reading this?” (512). When picking each of my reading assignments, I need to outline detailed examples in the text of what is important and what the author is doing that is correct. Then when it is time to teach that source the students will understand why I want them to read this particular work. This will give the students a better idea of why each text is important and more importantly, it will help them by giving them a list of examples they can use in their own writing assignments. By

showing them a good example in their reading and illustrating how it can be used in the students' writings, I hope to remind them that their writing plans can and should be flexible, and to challenge the students to take more risks and become better writers. If the student can self-identify his or her primary discourse, we can help show the student how to willingly become invested by relating the assignment to his or her own discourse. All of these articles can be used as tools by instructors and students to help them understand and identify the students' primary discourse.

Focusing in Particular on veterans and Discourse Transition

The issue that sparked my decision to start this research was that I wanted to create a veteran-specific first-year composition classroom. This class would, theoretically, help instruct student veterans on the language of academia, but it would also help them transition from the military to civilian life. Similarly, Marilyn Valentino, in her article, “Serving Those Who Have Served: Preparing for Student Veterans in our Writing Programs, Classes and Writing Centers,” writes:

One way to ease the transition from combat to the classroom is to create a cohort group of veterans who take their first term classes altogether. Cleveland State University’s SERV program did just that, with the University of Arizona, Eastern Kentucky University, Youngstown State University and others following. In particular, veterans-only writing classes have been developed by many institutions, perhaps your own. (Valentino 169-170)

This idea works under the assumption that all veterans are combat veterans. However, not all veterans are combat veterans. So, we should move away from this line of thinking immediately. Additionally, the more research I did on the subject of a veteran specific class, the more I realized that creating this type of class environment for veterans was not the best course of action to help veterans make the transition from a military discourse to a new dominate secondary discourse. In the end, I concluded that if we did establish this type of course, it would do more harm overall for veterans making a current discourse transition. If each person in the class were veterans, the students would be able to clearly discuss any class discussion or assignment being given in a more familiar military discourse. This would in fact slow down the veterans’ discourse transition. They would most likely become more frustrated in other classes for not being able to use their military discourse so freely. Any student making a discourse transition should be around people from other discourses, who too are also making the transition to a college

discourse. The following is how I understand discourse transition to occur in veterans transitioning to a college discourse:

Initial Discourse (ID)

Current Discourse (CD)

Dominant Secondary Discourse (D2D)

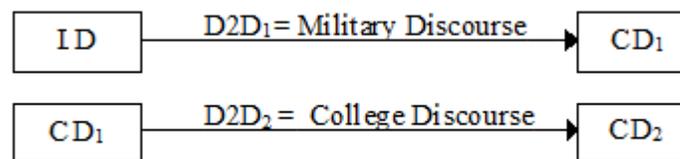


Figure 1: Current Discourse Transition Process

This chart is intended to give a visual representation of how I understand DT. The starting point for our discourse transition is the initial discourse box. The line with “dominant secondary discourse₁ of Military Discourse” represents the progression of time that an initial discourse is influenced a dominant secondary discourse. Once, enough changes happen to the initial discourse it can become a current discourse, and in this case, a military discourse. This remains the discourse until a new considerable influence occurs. The CD₁ over time is influenced by the dominant secondary discourse₂ and the current discourse₁ becomes the new discourse, current discourse₂. My understanding of how people transition from one discourse to another discourse differs from James Paul Gee’s understanding of discourse. I argue that as we add elements of an important dominant secondary discourse, the combination of the two discourses creates a whole new current discourse. Gee writes:

The various Discourses which constitute each of us as persons are changing and often are not fully consistent with each other; there is often conflict and tension between the values, beliefs, attitudes, interactional styles, uses of language, and ways of being in the world which two or more Discourses represent. Thus, there is no real sense in which we humans are consistent or well-integrated creatures from a cognitive or social viewpoint, though, in fact, most Discourses assume that we are (and thus we do too, while we are in them).

All of us, through our primary socialization early in life in the home and peer group, acquire (at least) one initial Discourse. This initial Discourse, which I call our primary Discourse, is the one we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others. Our primary Discourse constitutes our original and home-based sense of identity, and, I believe, it can be seen whenever we are interacting with “intimates” in totally casual (unmonitored) social interaction. We acquire this primary Discourse, not by overt instruction group. Further, aspects and pieces of the primary Discourse become a “carrier” or “foundation” for Discourses acquired later in life. Primary Discourses differ significantly across various social (cultural, ethnic, regional, and economic) groups in the United States.

After our initial socialization in our home community, each of us interacts with various non-home-based social institutions – institutions in the public sphere, beyond the family and immediate kin and peer group. These may be local stores and churches, schools, community groups, state and national businesses, agencies and organizations, and so forth. Each of these social institutions commands and demands one or more Discourses and we acquire these fluently to the extent that we are given access to these institutions and are allowed apprenticeships within them. Such Discourses I call secondary Discourses. (Gee 7-8)

We see that Gee’s theory suggests that a person’s primary discourse is what we learn when we are children and that this discourse is *always* our primary discourse in contrast to my understanding. To study discourse transition, we need to look at veterans’ interactions within the classroom. But how can we even know which of our students are veterans? Do they look or act a certain way? Well, yes. If you’ve been in the service, you can most likely spot a student veteran. However, if you have not been a part of the military discourse, the student veteran may simply look like any other nontraditional student. According to Valentino, there are two basic types of veterans in a classroom. The first group will sit right up front in class, and they will openly identify themselves (Valentino 165). These veterans may tell stories about their time in the service. It is worth noting that they’re not doing this to boast. They do this to establish their

understanding of what the instructor is asking the student to do, when relating the information back to the instructor. Then they ask their question about the assignment or class topic in reference to their military story. I can remember doing this myself when I first started college, almost every time I received instructions for a major assignment. And if I am being honest, I still do it from time to time. The military discourse or military way of thinking is still my baseline for understanding the world around me. It's one of the main reasons I dress the way I do. It's my civilian uniform. The second group of student veterans will most likely sit in the back like any other nontraditional non-eighteen-year-old student. Many may not even attempt to ask their questions in class. Many will see interrupting their professor as rude or antagonistic.

Thanks to sources like Hollywood, the view of veterans is that they are all somehow injured physically and/or mentally. We should try to ignore most of the information about veterans being a liability from sources such as Hollywood. Valentino also addresses this topic of the stereotyping what and who combat veterans are:

The realm of disabilities, we know, is not specific to veterans. Not all [veterans] are a liability. In fact, they often possess positive traits we welcome in any class. According to the American Council on Education, they demonstrate 'a degree of maturity, experience with leadership, familiarity with diversity, and a mission-focused orientation that exceed those of nearly all their peers. (Valentino 167)

Focusing on the mission is extremely important for many veterans. Each participant in this project expressed a concern about being "mission-focused" and treats school as if it were his or her full-time job. More than one participant gave an instance of being in class listening to the traditional students talk about how "hard" their life is and letting this life "problem" distract them from doing their school work. From my own experience with this, in my second year of undergraduate studies, even while the professor was lecturing, I could overhear a traditional student talking behind me with another classmate. This student was explaining that her

allowance had just been reduced. At the time, I naturally, in my opinion, assumed that the student's family had undergone some type of financial problem. But then, I heard her say that she would have to make due with only 200 dollars a week. Because the student's dad had said 500 dollars was too much "fun" money for just one week. To her, her world had been turned upside down. But from my point of view, her world turning problem sounded like the greatest problem to have. And if that was one of her "big" distractions then it should have been easy for her to stay "mission focused" on her school work. But to be fair to the traditional students, just like time, the concept of how "hard" life is, is relative. Whenever a veteran talks about hearing or being a part of this type of situation for the first time in the VRIC, we the staff try to remind the student veteran that to someone just out of high school, these problems are a very real distraction. Most of the time after we talk the veteran just smiles and chuckles in agreement.

Although the example above I gave is harmless, there are certain things, that if discussed in class, could be frustrating for a veteran. For example, let's discuss a hypothetical scenario, that hopefully never happens: The United States government has just declared war. Moments after the declaration of war, the media coverage begins, "U.S. military unleashes countless..." In this scenario, you are teaching class and may have a student veteran, and he or she may even openly talk about his or her time in service most class days. You should still avoid asking the veteran his or her thoughts on any aspect of the current situation. This is one of those times to let the student start that type of conversation. If you are conducting a group discussion for class, and another student asks the veteran about his or her view on the situation in this the hypothetical scenario, I advise quickly running interference for the student veteran and deflecting as best you can. If the veteran is comfortable about discussing his or her opinion in a group discussion, he or she will bring it up, in a presumably colorful way. Additionally, Valentino also addresses the fact that

there are some areas to be mindful of when we find a transitioning veteran in our class. She writes, “What we can do, then, is to be alert for at-risk veterans, and provide appropriate, respectful, empowering environments to ease their transition” (165). Of course, we want to be courteous to each of our student.

Additionally, I think being respectful is something that every instructor does with each and every student. However, being respectful of our topic choices as instructors is just as important as being respectful to our students. For example, if you had a nontraditional student who was open about being in Vietnam, you wouldn’t make the class discussion about the total dead of that war or Vietnam War tactics. That of course is an easy mistake not to make. However, asking a veteran in class about his or her thoughts on the politics of the War on Terrorism would be just as bad. Unfortunately, the latter example happens more often than we would want. One veteran, whom I call Allister, spoke about how he wished he could get through just one semester without a professor asking him his thoughts, as a veteran, about politics. Additionally, asking a student veteran if he or she has ever killed someone or about the violent reality of war and how it compares to videogames are also at the top of the list of questions most veterans don’t want to hear. But do. Therefore, it is important that we be mindful of asking questions that may potentially cause a student to remember something tragic. Valentino correctly writes, “I must stress at the outset that all veterans are not the same. Not all need or want special attention. Despite the ‘damaged soldier’ or ‘Rambo’ types spotlighted in the media, the vast majority are indistinguishable from other college students” (Valentino 165). Even though both I and Valentino are describing things to avoid or consider carefully in the classroom, this doesn’t mean veterans want to be treated “special.” What we mean is, if you can, carefully consider who

is in your class when asking students questions. Many veterans want to be treated the same as other students, and they enjoy working hard and having that hard work reflected in their writing.

Now that we have established the basic types of veterans in our classroom and some of the interactions that may happen, we need to focus on how we communicate with our students. It was reported that, in general, veterans have weaker skill levels: 20% had “C+” averages or lower. Writing, of course, demands that cognitive areas are functioning properly (Valentino 166). For example, Valentino describes one of the students she included in her research, who she refers to as Joe. “He (Joe) probably had a learning disability before the service, but after a poor essay grade, I asked him to check with our Special Needs Office. He had never heard of it, but he returned with the realization that he needed and was entitled to accommodations” (Valentino 167). Quickly, let me say that this example should not reflect that being a “C+ average” student or being a veteran, means that the student has some form of disability. What this example best illustrates is that many veterans don’t know how to, or who to, ask for help outside of the military. In the military, it is easy to know who to ask a question to. Whoever is above you in your chain of command, then that’s who you ask your question to. If they don’t know the answer, then you ask the person above them. You simply repeat this process until you get your answer. This process is very much a part of many veterans’ current discourse. Especially in academia, it’s hard to gauge who is even in your “chain of command.”

Regardless of which branch of the military a service member was a part of, one idea is universal: If you do your job right, the person beside you will do his or her job right. You begin to develop a level of trust in those around you that most people will never know or understand. While this idea in itself is poetically beautiful, it also can come with catastrophic effects on a veteran in college, if they don’t know who to ask for help in college. Because this level of trust

has been reinforced time and again, many veterans don't know how or don't like asking for help. Also, "Many veterans simply want to blend in and do the work" (Valentino 170). Some veterans may see their classmates are completing each assignment without help. This may lead some veterans to ask, "Why should I ask for help, if everyone else doesn't need help, neither do I." But as we know, that's not true. Most of the other students belong to some type of organization or group on campus. In this type of social interaction, the other students are able to easily ask a friend for help, without the pressure of the classroom. Also, asking for help isn't in itself a bad thing.

Methodology

After the traditional application for IRB approval, I verbally announced at the University of Arkansas' Veterans Resource & Information Center that I was doing my master's thesis research on veteran writing patterns and how to help veterans make the transition from the military to civilian life easier. I asked for anyone that was willing to help me with my research to please contact me. My only restriction was that all of the participants must be veterans. Therefore, no active duty service members, guard members, or the dependents of a service member were asked to volunteer. I informed each person that inquired about volunteering that I would be collecting any writings that they were willing to give me to use for my research. Once I had reviewed each volunteers' writing, I contacted them to set up a meeting where I would give them an eight-question survey, focusing on their military language history and current language use. I received six student veteran volunteers, four males and two females. Out of the four males, three were soldiers, one is marine, one was a sailor. First is Allister a is 33 years old army veteran, and he was medically separated at the end of his service. Next, James is a 24-year-old marine, and he separated under normal conditions. Next, is Samuel, our other sailor who is 27 years old, and separated under normal conditions. The last male, Cody, a 25-year-old, medically retired marine. Next, the females, one is Roxy, a 24-year-old marine, and Roxy separated under normal conditions at the end of her service. Heather, is 56-year-old retired army veteran. It is interesting to note now that almost all Marine veterans use the phrase "I'm a Marine" to identify themselves regardless of how long they have been out of the military. "Once a Marine, always a Marine," as they say. Whereas, other branches refer to their service in the past tense.

The Essays

I collected the volunteers' essays that were written at the University of Arkansas. I first read over each essay without looking for any specific signals of veteran status. I simply read then and tried to understand what the participants were saying and why. Once I had gone over each essay, I went back and looked for any common themes that might emerge in his or her writings as well as the other participants' writings. There are two themes I thought would be prevalent in this study. The first is a heavy use of military discourse language and the second is comparing prior military experiences with their assignment topics.

First, the theme of military discourse language in the participants' writings should be addressed. The participants use words that reflect their time in service that are still part of their current discourse lexis. For example, Samuel, uses words such as "odyssey" in his writing which reflects his Navy service. Additionally, Samuel discussed his first time on "the boat." Because he was the newest person aboard, he was called the "New-fish." That is until a new more junior person joined the crew. Likewise, James uses words such as "executed" and "buff" in his writings. The word executed used by James doesn't mean "to kill," it means to "carry out" or "complete." Additionally, in a military discourse "buff" doesn't mean to polish something; it means "everything will be fine." I was personally pleased that one of the participants used the word "buff" in his or her writings. This is a good example of military discourse language. Personally, I use the phrase, "It'll buff" on an almost daily bases. I use the phrase in the same way as the participant. For me, as an aircraft mechanic in the Navy, this was a common term when we accidentally damaged the aircraft. Once I had the misfortune of drilling through the wing of the aircraft, and my supervisor was with me. He asked me what I was going to do now, and I just told him, "It'll buff." However, in a military discourse, these words are imbedded into

all aspects of the language use. Another example of military discourse, is Samuel's account of how he kept himself motivated while "underway" or "out to sea." He writes:

Like everyone else, I have good days and bad days. I just try not to allow my emotions to surface in the work environment when it might have an adverse affect, or be undesired by my peers. For example; being on a submarine, unable to communicate with your family becomes a multiplier in losing morale next to; no sunlight, limited privacy and the list goes on. When we get into negative slumps, I would put on a fake smile and wear it with cheer and HOOYAH, until it became legitimate happiness. My motto was, 'Fake it to make it!' (Samuel).

I love this example for a few reasons. The first is loud random motivational bursts are extremely common. However, if you are unfamiliar with this discourse, the subtleties become lost.

"HOOYAH" is something like the Southern "bless your heart." The Southern United States discourse is one discourse I am familiar with, so that's why I am comparing these two phrases. For those of you who are not from the southern part of the United States or do not have any close family from that location, allow me to explain. The term "bless your heart" has three very distinct meanings. The first, and most often used, is in the context of calling someone stupid but in a more polite way. The second, is when something negative happens, such as getting the flu, and "bless your heart" is used for the sick person. This second way is meant with true concern "I feel bad for you." The third is commonly used by more elderly people. When an elderly Southern woman looks at you with a straight face and says "bless your heart," she is in every way saying, "fuck you." The Navy's term "HOOYAH" works in similar ways, and also has three distinct meanings. The first is true excitement about something. The second is a way of saying "this is bullshit." And the third is a way to say "fuck you" to a superior officer without any written repercussions. However, he will probably know what you are "really" saying and you will be working double time. As a In an essay about the secondary education's grading policy, Samuel stated, "Easily attainable high grades too, as grading rubrics layout what's asked of us. In the

military, we call these kind of points, 'low hanging fruit' (Samuel). It is interesting that he is using the pronoun "we" to describe both the military discourse and his own current discourse. We can see that he still views himself as a part of that world. Additionally, he is relating his essay topic to the military, but at the time of this essay, we can easily deduce that Samuel is at the first beginning of his discourse transition.

However, Samuel isn't the only one to make these types of connections between previous events from the military and his academic writing assignments. Another theme is how the participants seem to be comparing the topic of their assignments to their time in the military. Samuel, weaves in a variety of military related knowledge into each of his first-year English composition course assignments. The first example, is a moment of personal reflection, in Samuel's essay titled, "Sailing to Adulthood." He writes:

I've gone through the process of: enlisting in the United States Navy, experiencing great difficulties in the military and finally the arduous sea duty leading to my end of service. It's through these processes that I've become independent and strengthened my skills as a leader, maturing from an adolescent teenager to a young adult. (Samuel)

The participant is, unknowingly, describing his journey from one discourse to another. He even gives an account of the first time the Navy recruiter came to his home to speak with his parents. "I saw the First Class Petty Officer, decorated with an impressive rack of ribbons covering his upper left breast, marching smartly and prideful, toward the front door of our home" (Samuel). He then describes his reaction to the Navy recruiter's spiel, "Travel and see the world! Recruiters would utter these words as if casting a spell, with the swiping pass of a hand in the air" (Samuel). This example is not just showing us how the student started his transition into a new discourse. He is also showing us the effects carefully crafted discourse rhetoric can achieve. And in this case, it is inspiring and life changing for Samuel.

Additionally, one of Samuel's essays from his Composition II class focuses on understanding discourse. He writes:

I've learned just recently, during my speech class over the summer, that some writers actually write their introduction last; after the paper is written. This technique can be very useful in that the writer is free to write whatever he/she needs to in order to get their point across without always being reminded that they must stick to their thesis topics. (Samuel).

This is a good sign that at this point in college, Samuel is starting to understand that the military way of thinking isn't going to work all of the time in college. He is starting to make the transition from his current military discourse to a college discourse. Understanding that there is more than one way to write a good paper is an important step. The student is moving away from the military view of there being only one right way. Although this is a great step forward for Samuel, we can also see in his writings that the transition isn't always easy. In this writing he relates his own experiences to that of another student discussed in his composition textbook:

Me being a student myself, I completely understand the limitations that "Janet" felt she was constrained by. She learned certain rules/guidelines for constructing her papers, somewhere in her educational career, but she is unable to break those habits when they conflict with different style of writing; synthesizing her own view and joining a discussion. (Samuel)

Unlike Samuel, Roxy, a marine veteran, relates assignment topics to the military differently, and it is worth noting. Out of all of our veteran participants, Roxy's data is an outlier. Roxy's writing shows the most progress of transitioning from her military discourse to her soon-to-be current musical education discourse. She doesn't relate the assignment topic to her military experience as much as Samuel. Instead, she is mainly creating hypothetical situations she thinks will relate to her future as a music instructor. For example, she writes:

I personally know that music had the power to can change, or even save, lives. I confidently say this because it has changed my life and given me the desire to do whatever it takes to be able to effectively teach (hopefully) young adults the same thing.

All of these reasons have affected my decision to pursue a degree in vocal music education, and form my ideal philosophy. (Roxy)

We can easily see that compared to the previous writing examples, Roxy is closer to the end of her discourse transition. This suggests that she wanted to have a D2D of a music teacher and is attempting to use this D2D, more than her military D2D. This suggests that our other participants in time may too decide to use a different D2D in lieu of the military D2D. We can see this attempt in action in another text by Roxy. She writes:

Being a Marine has prepared me for a job in music education, because it taught me to improvise, adapt, and overcome adversities. Once I become a music education professional in an impoverished school district, I will assess the situation, formulate a plan, put the plan in motion, acknowledge when a plan does not work, adapt a new plan to the situation when needed, and overcome all adversities to accomplish the goal. I know myself and my weaknesses, and knowing where to improve is over half the battle. I will take the time to know my students and their abilities. I will be the best role model I can for each and every student I meet. (Roxy)

In this example, the fact that she is a Marine played a big part of her abilities to become a music education professional. Then with her credentials established, she expresses her forward thinking of her future discourse.

One theme I didn't predict would occur is the use of absolute thinking. However, in retrospect this should have been a theme I predicted. When Samuel presents his opinions, there seems to be only two sides of an issue instead of a spectrum between those ideas. To Samuel you are either right or wrong. Which makes sense considering his military background. In the military, there is either a right way of doing something or wrong way. There is very rarely any middle ground. Additionally, regardless of what your job is in the military, you are a single piece of a much larger machine. If even one of these "pieces" doesn't do his or her job exactly as ordered, it can have devastating results. With that little bit of background knowledge, let's try to understand why Samuel may have this chronic writing pattern. One example is, "Some of these

teachings, guidelines, or conceptions are just plain wrong” (Samuel). For Samuel, this may be a truism. However, as educators we know that any teaching, guideline, or conception may have flaws. But that doesn’t mean that those teaching, guidelines, or conceptions are completely incorrect. Samuel isn’t the only one to write this way. James, a Marine veteran, also uses absolute thinking in his writings. He writes, “Being involved in the educational system students can come to conclusion that the ideal paper just is not physically possible” (James). In the essay James is writing about the concept of good writing. Obviously, James is frustrated with the fact that each class and each professor has a different understanding of what good writing is. In this paper he sees academic writing as a kind of no-win situation. The reason this pattern occurs is that both veterans are focused on concrete and exact understanding of ideas, and less so on the abstract concepts that go with their truism in their writings.

As for how this idea also applies to my hypothesis of discourse transition, we can see in the examples of absolute thinking that these participants still consider things in an either or style. Both Samuel and James submitted essays from their University of Arkansas’ Composition II class. For those who are unfamiliar with this class’ core concept focus, it is on teaching first-year students the theories of why they write the way they do. The class is intended to teach students to analyze and construct theories of why writers in certain discourse communities write the way they do. To summarize, the use of abstract thought in relation to how the students communicate with people. Both Samuel and James are viewing their understanding of writing as being either right or wrong. And as we know, there is no “wrong” way to write. In academia, we teach students how to write within certain conventions, but not what good writing is which I personally believe does far more harm than good for all of our students. Both of these students are trying to understand the “correct” way to write. We can see that this aspect of transition, their current

military discourse and future discourse of college are at odds. Their current discourse tells them that for every question, there is a right and a wrong answer. In college, it is common to teach students that the correct answer is “It’s depends.” In a military environment “it depends” is rarely an acceptable answer. To make the transition to the discourse of college, these veterans have to learn to consider other aspects than just the one question they are being asked, and those aspects will change from assignment to assignment and class to class.

Questionnaire & Interviews

After reviewing the data from the participants’ essays, I set up a time with them to have them fill out the questionnaire. The eight parts of the questionnaire are as follows: 1. Why did you join the military? 2. Describe your time in the military. 3. Why did you leave the military? 4. What types of communication styles did you experience when you got out of the military? 5. What was it like being a student veteran in a college class? 6. How was the language different in the military compared to college? 7. What communication differences did you notice that were different from your branch of service and other branches of service? 8. Describe your transition to college regarding communication in college. While filling out the questionnaire, some of the participants treated each question as if it were a final for one of their classes. They took time to fully consider each question and its meaning and then methodically responded. One participant, Jackson, took 75 minutes to answer the eight parts of the questionnaire. He wanted to make sure that his answers would and could be read clearly by anyone who might read his responses. On the other hand, some of the participant, took only ten minutes to answer the whole questionnaire. The ones that quickly responded all considered clarity and concise language use at the top of their problems with communication in college. One theme that didn’t become fully evident until

the questionnaire was that almost every participant focused on wanting clarity with concise language use. Some wanted concise language from their instructors and others wanted to use concise language with other students in class. The following are the responses for part four of the questionnaire, “What types of communication styles did you experience when you got out of the military?” For example:

Samuel’s Response: Following the military, communication issues that I have difficulties with primarily reside in people’s lack of communication. Still to this day, I give people verbatim repeat-backs so that ambiguity is resolved/removed from all orders and instructions. I find that merely everyday there is an instance in which simply reiterating what another person said (back to them) can prevent errors from happening. With that being said, I’m irritated when people claim things as accidents with clear communication and a little bit of care. (Samuel)

Heather’s Response: I was 27 when I got out. I was already working as an account/secretary for Kelly Services. I was more of a submissive person and still am. The people I worked with sometimes were very direct and to the point. They had a specific duty for me to do. There was no deviation and I needed the money. I have been in contact with manipulative, passive-aggressive, aggressive and assertive managers in my life. (Heather)

Allister’s Response: a. Precision of language was very important. b. There was much more new lingo and slang, when I got out. (Allister)

James’s Response: A broader less aggressive verbal communication. (James)

To establish a repeat back system, like Samuel wants, with each student is impossible for a traditional college class. Here we can see the level of frustration Samuel is going through. As for Allister, he wants two things which he made clear he wanted to be presented as separate points. When he was in the service, language was something that was meant to accomplish a goal. In college, sometimes people make up new slang words, just to seem “cool” (or whatever the kids are using nowadays) to their peers. As for James, when I asked him what he meant by his answer, he replied, “College is way more ‘PC,’ and, you know, it’s the military. Some of the words we used are just... you know... aggressive” (James). Heather on the other hand, understands that her personality is someone who prefers to follow orders. Therefore, she feels

that her military training helps her manage how to communicate with these different types of personalities. Each of these participants shared some of the same preference of communication styles that they are accustomed to from their military service as well as expectations of how those around them communicate.

Next, let's focus our attention on part eight of the questionnaire. Part eight reads:

“Describe your transition to college regarding communication in college.” The following are some of the participants' responses:

Samuel's Response: My transition to college, regarding communicating, has only been difficult as I would prefer more clear and consistent communication. For example, a well respected professor here at the U of A often tells my class how important words and context are, but, she speaks contrary to her point just as often. An instance of this is when she speaks of the Affordable Care Act (A.C.A.) and she'll refer to it as Obamacare because that's what people know it as. Well that's just lazy and unacceptable in the Navy, in law, and especially in academics. (Samuel).

Cody's Response: After transitioning to college, I feel like the communication is lacking severely. While in service, what was expected was usually described effectively. (Cody)

Allister's Response: I have spent more time omitting language than learning new. I feel that I went from a military language style to a young kid and now I am attempting to talk in a more professional language. (Allister)

James's Response: I still don't speak to very many college students because I never know what will bother them. I mainly just speak to other veterans or older close friends. I just never know where 'the line' is when talking to others that haven't experienced or been in the military. (James)

I asked James, *Why do you think that is?* He responded, “The shit they [other students in class] think is big life problems are super easy problems. Just stop bitching, you know?” Out of these four, James has the most colorful response about why he thinks the way he does. However, both James and Allister's biggest struggle is changing their discourse lexis use. Both Samuel and Cody's responses were more focused on delivering information as clearly as possible. On the other hand, Heather has had a very different experience her transition into college. Her response for part eight was:

I used to write poetry from my heart. My first two classes were Comp classes and I wrote again from my heart but quickly found out that, that was not what they wanted. They did not want that side of us. It was almost like we were re-pressed to our inner selves but not what they wanted on papers. I was told I write like William Faulkner and that was not what they were looking for. This was hard for me. (Heather)

Heather's insight into college transition is interesting in itself as well as the fact that it differs from the other participants. For Heather, writing comes from who she is, and she wants to connect her emotions to each assignment. Contrary to this, the other four examples given show that the frustration comes from a certain level of compliance with others about the easiest way to communicate ideas and instructions. In future research, I would like to look into the reasons for this difference further, and ask questions such as: "Does the difference come from a person's branch of service, upbringing, gender, or even economic status?" I would prefer to analyze this type of situation and how it evolves over a full four-year college education, as well as conducting further research similar situations in a longitudinal research study, with a much higher number of participants.

All of the participants discussed the concept of "watching their mouths" during the questionnaire. For example, James said, "I never know who I'm going to offend" (James). By this they mean that in college they cannot use the same colorful language they used in the military with other service members. By colorful, I'm not referring to only profanity. Other elements of military language, such as acronyms, are hard to take out of your normal language use. For example, a common military phrase choice I make is "chow hall." I always get weird looks from civilians when I say this. This phrase means lunchroom cafeteria. But we don't say cafeteria in the military, and considering I don't go to cafeterias anymore, I will continue to use chow hall. I see no reason to change this aspect of my discourse for others.

However, as an instructor, there are times when I have to translate my discourse use for my students. When this happens, I use the opportunity to explain to them the aspects of discourse communities. I know that most instructors strive to be as clear as possible. However, the participants for this study found that almost all of their instructors, so far, at the University of Arkansas were unable to meet the standard of clear language use that the participants had in mind. One of the male participants Allister, discussed at length his frustration with trying to understand what his instructors wanted him to do for assignments. He stated, “There is nothing worse than walking into a class and not knowing what is expected of me” (Allister). Allister is not alone in this thought process. Samuel stated that he even wanted to establish a repeat-back system in his classes (Samuel). By this he means that the instructor would say the instruction and the students would repeat back how they interpreted the instructions. This suggestion would be impractical in today’s modern classroom. There is simply not enough time for each student to do this every time new instructions are given. However, it does show the frustration that first-year veterans struggle with when transitioning to college.

Additionally, they were each frustrated by the concept of using any “fluff” in their writing. One participant stated, “Why should I use any kind of fluff? If I write something concisely and it’s clear, I’m done. I shouldn’t have to explain it three times in a different way. And that’s all college writing is” (James). In future research, with more participants, I would like to delve into veterans who have this opinion and their understanding of what “fluff” writing is.

Discussion

The goal of this thesis is to better understand and create a starting point for my research on discourse transition. After this initial research, I am looking forward to analyzing this process in a longitudinal type of study. In the future study, I would like to include veterans from across the United States. However, that study will have to wait for another time. First, we need to discuss the results of this thesis and the future goals of how we might move forward with the data collected in future studies.

To review, this thesis was intended to better understand how a person could transition from his or her initial discourse to a new current discourse. Gee recognizes that we add elements of dominant secondary discourse to our initial discourse. Logically, if we add any new element into our initial discourse, then we have created something new. Like with our cookie analogy, if we add salt to our cookie recipe, then we have changed the recipe to something new. However, analyzing different dessert recipe outcomes won't explain the concept of discourse transition. For that I presented data that encourage further research into the idea of discourse transition. To show why there is a need for further research being done, I use student veteran transition as our lens.

The military discourse is an intentionally crafted discourse. Mind you, not an artificial one, but rather one that only changes out of necessity. The Navy has a saying, "Every rule is written in blood." Meaning that there is no reason to change anything, unless someone gets seriously hurt or dies. And when that type of tragedy happens, there is little resistance to the change by those who are a part of the discourse.

Like any other discourse, the military has words and phrases that only belong to that discourse. For example, the word, "buff" used by James is a word that is regularly used by many

different discourses. However, few of them will be using the word “buff” to mean “everything will be all right.” This is an important aspect of discourse transition. If James simply used this word in an essay with no context for the readers, his instructor may think he is writing about polishing his boots. James needs to be able to identify the differences in the discourses, and make the smart rhetorical choices in his writings.

One goal for future research would be to analyze how much of a veteran’s lexis changes through the students’ full four years of college. Are the same changes made for every class, or does one class change more than the others and why? If we can better understand this process, we may be able to help our students better understand the process of discourse transition they are going through. In addition, first-year students will have a D2D in addition to their PD. With future research in this area I will look at applying this theory to other D2D that students may have.

The next aspect of study is how veterans relate their military history and discourse to the current class assignment to gain more clarity. At first glance this may not seem like a theme that merits further study. However, many of the traditional students begin their college experience by relating these new events to prior high school events. As their first semester goes by, they begin to tell fewer stories about how something relates to high school and begin to use references from more current events in college such as social events or knowledge they have gained from another class. Veterans however, hold on to these types of comparative story telling with their military history to understand class assignments for a longer time compared to their traditional student peers. This is important because it shows the difficult process of making a transition between discourses, which tells us that there is a need for further research on this subject.

The third theme to consider conducting further research on is absolute thinking use

by veterans and why they use it. The use of disjunctive language is an important struggle that student veterans go through during college. As stated earlier, this is a result of the students' need to see every assignment as having only two outcomes: either it is right or it is wrong. This causes them to think there is only one way they can write a paper. From an instructor's point of view, fully understanding the reasoning behind this process will help us explain to them that there is more than one option to writing a "good" or "correct" essay in college. From a student's point of view, I can relate to the difficulties of trying to write the "perfect" essay. I always have to start out with a very specific writing plan. As I've developed my writing strategies in college, I have become better at allowing my writing plans to be more malleable. However, I still feel as if I need a specific writing plan to start an assignment. A lot of the time, I still see my own writing as being either right or wrong.

Next, concise language usage of the military discourse and how it translates to college classes has the potential to be a positive aspect for student veterans. For example, James's understanding of only writing what he needs to is good because this approach to writing can be problematic in cases of essays not meeting the required length or fully examining a topic. For this, I encourage my own students to consider the opposite side of the issues and address this in their writings. If we can explain to students like James how to address both sides of the issue, then we can let his natural tendency to be a minimalist work to his advantage. However, we see students such as Heather wanting to explain things in relation to her emotions, and that style of writing naturally leads to more explanation than James cares to do. In future research, I would also like to look into this concise language use by veterans, asking who all writes with concise language and who prefers to write with more detail analyzing if the veterans branch of service,

initial discourse, gender, or economic status plays into any aspect of the range of a veteran's concise language use.

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Appendix



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

May 30, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Taylor Weeks
David Jolliffe

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 17-04-675

Protocol Title: *Veterans' Primary Discourse Transition*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 05/30/2017 Expiration Date: 05/29/2018

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rsdp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 16 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.