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Article

Towards Iterative Authorship: CALD Students' Reimagined Writing Identities Through GenAI-Assisted Writing

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Abstract

With Generative AI's (GenAI) widespread use and reliance, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students face key challenges in terms of cross-cultural thinking and linguistic expression as academic writers. There is a gap in research that provides critical frameworks to examine ways that GENAI enables and constrains writing practices and that identifies CALD students' ambivalence about GenAI use. This article profiles ten international students' reflections about GenAI-enabled academic writing that offers key insights about critical ways to navigate GenAI-assisted academic writing. Applying Ivanič's research on writer identity and Mollick's concept of "iterative instinct", we examine how CALD students at a UK university perceive themselves, their culture and their identity within the context of GenAI-assisted writing practices. The research is ethnographic in nature, combining focus group data with a week of AI interactional data from each participant. Findings reveal the gains and losses at stake for CALD as they grapple with developing an academic writing identity in the age of GenAI. In particular, the study shows that writers' intuition and GenAI-supported iteration become mutually constitutive, giving rise to hybrid forms of academic authorship and extending existing understandings of writer identity in the GenAI era.

Keywords: GenAI-assisted academic writing; culturally and linguistically diverse students; academic writer identity; "A Day in the Life" ethnographic documentation; digitally critical lens



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1. Introduction

There is a history of research on academic writing that connects the complex ways that writers think through writing processes, as they form academic identities, which refers to the ways individuals construct and negotiate a sense of self within academic discourse communities through participation in academic literacy practices, relationships, and institutional contexts (Brandt, 2001; Ivanič, 1998). Such research closely inspects practices like brainstorming, reflecting, and revising writing through observations in classroom environments and interviews to deepen understanding about what it means to be an academic writer. Traditionally, academic writing was seen as a steady process requiring time in institutional contexts to hone the craft of writing for academic purposes (Thomson, 2023; Thomson & Kamler, 2016).

However, in the age of Generative AI (GenAI), this picture has changed dramatically, with Large Language Models (LLMs) allowing emerging writers to generate text quickly,

customised to a writer's needs and discipline. Given how pervasive it is, GenAI has been woven widely into life and work and particularly in the ways that people communicate and compose texts (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2024). GenAI gives developing writers immediate, synthesised text with potentially much less linguistic labour needed to bridge cultures, to hone linguistic repertoires, and to acquire academic registers (e.g., Zheng, 2025). Despite their transformative impact on writing and the need to rethink authorship, LLMs are often viewed as simple writing tools (Yang et al., 2025), overlooking their role as social actors with capacities comparable to human interlocutors in reshaping writing processes and profoundly influencing how individuals forge academic voices (Warschauer & Xu, 2024). By focusing specifically on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students, this study aims to advance a theorisation of authorship in the age of GenAI through a renewed examination of writer identity. Notably, GenAI-led writing should not be understood as a bypass of academic socialisation; rather, GenAI is conceptualised in this study as a co-traveller in the development of academic writing practices, particularly for CALD students navigating new linguistic and cultural contexts, through which academic writer identity is actively constructed.

This article features a qualitative research study with ten CALD postgraduate (MA, MBA and PhD) students at a university in the north of England. Modifying Gillen et al.'s "A Day in the Life" (2007) method of data collection, this research employed self-documented logs combined with focus group interviews. Specifically, ten students were asked to record their daily interactions with GenAI through saved chat logs, and they were asked to produce brief daily reflective accounts of how these interactions informed their writing decisions, emerging academic voice, and sense of authorship over one week. Focus groups were held with them to reflect on their writing experience afterwards to understand the formation of academic voices and writer identities in a broader and longer-term sense. Interpreting their GenAI-assisted written artefacts as representations of thoughts and beliefs gave us as researchers a window into the social practices of academic reading, writing, thinking and how these led to improvising academic writer identities.

The findings of this research revealed that in the past (i.e., before GenAI-led writing became relatively commonplace), language guided writer identity; however, with GenAI-led academic writing, it seems that intuition and iteration guide the writing process. The extent to which student writers can critically interact with GenAI via intuition and iterations significantly impacts the influence of GenAI on the formation of writer identity. The article begins with a presentation of Ivanič's (1998) study of academic writing, then presents Gillen et al.'s (2007) "A Day in the Life" method, followed by key research findings and broader implications of the research for burgeoning GenAI research. The article is an original contribution to the emerging field of GenAI literacy (Ng et al., 2021; Robinson & Hollett, 2024) by theorising GenAI writing as a social practice, through an extension of Ivanič's (1998) influential account of academic writing and identity with Mollick's (2024) concept of "iterative instinct," thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of academic writing in the GenAI era.

2. Theorising Academic Writing

Fundamental to research on academic writing are accounts of the practices used to move through writing processes (e.g., brainstorming, draft writing, revision process, etc.). Typically, these practices involve transferring thoughts into writing (Smith, 1981). Over the past three decades, academic writing has shifted from being viewed as a set of fixed skills and "problems" in student work to being understood as a contextualised social practice. Building on the New Literacy Studies tradition (Street, 1984), Lea and Street's (1998) academic literacies framework emphasises how writers develop subject-specific lit-

eracies through engagement with disciplinary, institutional, and cultural contexts. This conceptual shift has also directed attention to writer identity (e.g., Ivanič, 1998), foregrounding writers as active agents who develop authorial presence, constructing their texts while negotiating self-identification within multilayered contexts. As Lillis and Scott (2007) argue, this shift is particularly important for researching CALD student writers, who are often viewed through a deficit lens due to lower proficiency in the mainstream language, while their own linguistic and ideological resources shaped in other cultural contexts remain overlooked. Despite these efforts to empower CALD researchers by valuing their holistic linguistic repertoires in writing, more recent studies indicate that “anglonormativity” (McKinney, 2016) continues to prevail in the field, leaving CALD researchers in a disadvantaged position as academic writers (Curry & Lillis, 2022).

The emergence of GenAI further complicated this picture. On the one hand, recent research highlights the new possibilities GenAI offers for student-researchers’ development of disciplinary voices through suggestive feedback (Khuder, 2025), and, especially, for CALD students’ multilingual engagements with texts through its translation capabilities (Grieve et al., 2024). On the other hand, as Hyland and his colleagues are concerned (Hyland, 2026; Jiang & Hyland, 2026), GenAI-assisted academic writing runs the risk of flattened authorial presences due to the reduction in nuance, variability, and interpersonal richness in discursal features in generated texts. Robinson (2023) also points out that writers increasingly become “editors” rather than producers of texts. In the particular case of CALD students, scholars caution that their overreliance on technology to “fix problems” in second language (L2) writing can hinder language development and risk reinforcing a deficit view of their linguistic competence (Marzuki et al., 2023). This concern is heightened by the fact that GenAI-generated texts are not value-neutral but reflect the ideologies embedded in their training data (Robinson, 2023). GenAI research has tended to focus on teaching enhancements and strategies as opposed to ideological shifts in the nature of literacy (Su & Yang, 2024; Weng et al., 2024). Without sufficient L2 proficiency to discern ideological nuances, CALD writers may struggle to negotiate desired identities in texts increasingly shaped by GenAI input. From this perspective, GenAI is not merely an assistive tool within academic writing practices, but also GenAI represents a new social actor co-constructing authorial presence. This means that, as Godwin-Jones (2024) argues, both GenAI and human writers exercise agency, namely, the capacity to shape and transform language use. While authorship and authorial voice have conventionally been conceptualised in terms of the writer’s ownership of ideas and their rhetorical and discursal realisation in text (e.g., Hyland, 2005; Ivanič, 1998), urgent questions about what it means to be an academic writer in the GenAI era need to be addressed.

Recent research has paid attention to how GenAI redefines literacy in academic writing (Warschauer & Xu, 2024) and has highlighted the need for student-researchers, especially CALD students, to exercise human critical judgement (e.g., Curado Fuentes, 2025) and develop more effective prompting strategies (e.g., Crosthwaite & Sun, 2026) as part of literacy in GenAI-assisted writing. Mollick (2024) also notes that a key human ability in GenAI–human interaction is the “iterative instinct,” whereby humans strive to remain “in the loop,” using recursive feedback to counter algorithmic drift and steer GenAI outputs in line with their intentions. If humans lack this ability to iterate or accept the GenAI outputs directly, their authorial voice may be overshadowed by the GenAI outputs. However, there remains a lack of conceptual clarity regarding what it means to be an academic writer in the GenAI age. Emerging research (e.g., Smirnova, 2025) has shown that student-writers’ understandings of authorship vary considerably, often leading to confusion about academic integrity and the value of academic writing. To address this need, this article aims to explore CALD students’ writer identities in GenAI-assisted writing and re-theorise

human writers' sense of authorship, recognising GenAI as a significant social actor. To do so, we draw on [Ivanič's \(1998\)](#) influential study of academic writing and extend this with [Mollick's \(2024\)](#) concept of "iterative instinct" to develop new understandings of academic writing in the GenAI era.

Revisiting Ivanič's Research on Writing and Identity

In academic writing, [Ivanič \(1998\)](#) defines writer voice as a dynamic negotiation between a writer and their own identity and institutional and disciplinary conventions and norms, with their own discourses and ideologies. The gap between the writer and the discipline grows ever wider when working in a second language with different cultural practices. Ivanič's theorising of academic writing identity rests on performativity between the writer and the discipline. Becoming an academic writer is not immediate; instead, it is a kind of socialisation that takes time, reflection, and experience to build. Ivanič writes about four main properties of an academic writer: autobiographical self, discursal self, authorial self, and the possibilities of selfhood. Autobiographical self encompasses a writer's history, beliefs, and convictions as an informing force in writing. The authorial self comes with time and practice as a writer who acquires more of a command of a discipline and as a writer who positions themselves in particular ways in relation to texts. Discursal self is the persona or identity a writer projects in a text through language choice, such as tone, style, and genre conventions. Ivanič also writes about possibilities of selfhood, which are the affordances and constraints of a writer's identity to adapt to disciplinary conventions and expectations. Therefore, the four properties of writer identity enable an investigation into writers' developing understanding and the formation of academic writing practices, both diachronically and socially.

Reflecting on these four properties, we were interested in what changes were brought on by GenAI to academic writing, particularly regarding the role of critical human judgment in shaping it. We foreground what [Mollick \(2024\)](#) describes as an "iterative instinct", the capacity to refine thinking through cycles of prompting, evaluating, and revising GenAI-generated text, as a key mechanism in the formation of writer identity in the GenAI era. Specifically, following each property consecutively, the autobiographical self engaging with GenAI-assisted writing and thinking must mediate invisible sources used for the GenAI-assisted text, exploring how human judgment, formed through prior writing trajectories, informs writers' engagement with GenAI discourse. In other words, the autobiographical self can be the "anchor" for the development of human writers' "iterative instinct" which significantly shaped how they prompt, interact with and reflect on GenAI feedback. Through the lenses of the discursal and authorial self, we explore how GenAI reshapes student-writers' internalisation of academic discourse, disciplinary knowledge, and authorial presence, in contrast to pre-GenAI writing development, where such knowledge was largely acquired through imitation of more senior academics, including leading scholars and supervisors. Notably, given the high degree of grammatical and structural standardisation in GenAI outputs ([Hyland, 2026](#)) and the black-boxed (hidden) nature of their training data sources ([Benjamin, 2019](#)), existing research has produced conflicting conclusions about whether GenAI strengthens or diminishes authorial presence (e.g., [Curado Fuentes, 2025](#)). However, much of this work has focused primarily on textual outcomes or students' self-reports rather than on the developmental processes through which learners negotiate voice and identity. The close examination of how learners develop their discursal and authorial selves in interaction with GenAI can thereby offer new insights into how authorial presence is reshaped in GenAI-assisted writing. In particular, GenAI is predominantly trained on mainstream Western corpora, which tends to erase cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, ultimately leading to the homogenisation of CALD students' lin-

guistic practices into dominant English discourse norms (e.g., Shen & Chen, 2025; Zheng, 2025). Examining this process through discursal and authorial self enables a more critical understanding of how students bring their cultural understandings into negotiating dominant discourse conventions, potentially generated by GenAI, while sustaining, adapting, or potentially losing their authorial presence. Lastly, with possibilities for selfhood, we were interested in the affordances and constraints of GenAI in academic writing if selfhood becomes a possibility and maintains its “iterative instinct” in the interaction with GenAI.

Therefore, by adapting Ivanič’s (1998) model to understand writer identities in GenAI-assisted academic writing, we particularly pay attention to how human writers are able to stay “in the loop” by displaying their “iterative instinct” (Mollick, 2024) in their interaction with GenAI. We argue that this iterative instinct is central to the development of writer identity in the GenAI era, as it mediates the relationship between human judgment and algorithmically generated content. This addresses a gap in current research on reimagining academic writing through GenAI platforms. With GenAI-assisted writing, writers embed their own voice after prompting GenAI-assisted text. In other words, theory and knowledge come to writers all at once through LLMs and a writer’s biographical self as a reader, writer, and speaker is retrospectively added to automated words. Hence, as already suggested by existing studies (Curado Fuentes, 2025; Hyland, 2026), writers who use GenAI to assist writing must actively assert a discursal self as an academic writer—mediating GenAI amalgamated text with a writer’s own burgeoning understandings about academic conventions, registers, and styles. However, existing research has given scant attention to the ways that human judgment develops and enables writers to act agentically when interacting with GenAI. While plenty of research has emphasised the importance of critical human judgement (e.g., Yang et al., 2025), few studies clarify where such judgement originates. As we know, individuals cannot simply choose to be “critical” at will. Ivanič’s model, when combined with the notion of iterative instinct as a form of recursive judgement in interaction with GenAI, as illustrated above, provides a lens for understanding how such judgement may develop—or fail to develop—during interaction with GenAI, particularly when writers start from pre-populated thoughts and interpretations. Therefore, building on Ivanič’s (1998) conceptualisation of academic voice as a socially situated enactment of identity in writing—shaped through linguistic choices across autobiographical, discursal, and authorial dimensions—and extending it through Mollick’s (2024) notion of “iterative instinct,” this study moves beyond established accounts that foreground the importance of critical human judgement in GenAI-assisted writing. It makes an original contribution by examining how such judgment is progressively developed through iterative engagement with GenAI tools and how this developmental process, in turn, reshapes the formation of writer identity in the GenAI era. Two research questions are raised:

1. How did GenAI influence the construction of writer identity and authorship through the lens of Ivanič’s framework?
2. What role does “iterative instinct” play in shaping how writers negotiate judgment, agency, and authorship in GenAI-assisted writing?

To address these research questions, we collected data not only from students’ self-reports but also from their interactions with GenAI and the texts produced after these interactions, which will be detailed in the methodology.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participant Profiles

To explore GenAI-led writing practices among students with diverse cultural and linguistic repertoires, the study employed a purposive sampling strategy. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Sheffield, and pseudonyms are used

to protect their identities. Recruitment emails were sent to MA and PhD students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at a leading university in northern England. This faculty was selected because it has a large body of international and multilingual students. A total of 18 participants expressed interest in the study, of whom 10 were selected. Participants met two criteria: (1) they were multilingual students studying in an English-medium academic environment, and (2) they were actively engaging with GenAI tools for academic writing to varying degrees. We recruited ten CALD postgraduate students, including two MA students, an MBA student, and seven PhD candidates who consented to be involved, representing a range of disciplinary backgrounds, linguistic repertoires, and countries of origin. Table 1 summarises participants' profiles, including basic demographic information, languages used in interaction with GenAI tools, and their initial stances towards GenAI-assisted writing.

Table 1. Participant profiles and GenAI use.

Name	Country	Programme	Home Language	Languages Used with GenAI	GenAI Usage
Sahana	India	PhD Geography and Planning	Hindi	Mostly English, sometimes L1 (First language) for meaning check	- Brainstorming - Seeking feedback
Nuru	Zimbabwe	MBA Management	Shona	L1 and English	- Understanding concepts - Structuring writing - Training AI to write by feeding rubrics and sample papers
Siqi	China	PhD Sociology	Mandarin	Mainly English, sometimes L1 for concepts	Translating and checking, phrasing, tone, structure
Tamila	Azerbaijan	PhD Education	Turkish	L1 and English	- Translating - Language polishing - Exploring methodological framework
Fitri	Indonesia	PhD Architecture	Indonesian	Mostly English, occasionally L1 for translation	- Translating - Literature search - Proofreading and polishing language - Theory-crafting
Dora	Greece	MA Librarianship	Greek	L1 and English	- Proofreading - Brainstorming - Academic reading - Translating
Aisha	India	MA Sociological Studies	English is L1 Hindi is L2 (Arabic, stayed in the UAE most of her life)	English only	- Understanding theories - Literature search - Polishing language
Lyre	Azerbaijan	PhD Education	Turkic languages	English only	- Proofreading - Checking academic tone - Data analysis
Dina	China	PhD Information and Education	Mandarin	Mainly L1, sometimes English	- Writing emails - Paraphrasing - Manuscript revision - Summarising academic texts
Sami	Kuwait	PhD Education	Arabic	Mostly L1, sometimes English	- Translating - Proofreading - Literature search

3.2. Adopting Gillen's "A Day in the Life" (DITL) Method and Data Collection

To investigate how human writer identity is constructed through the use of GenAI, we required a method that gave us a lived, everyday sense of how participants engaged in GenAI practices. As a result, we adopted and adapted the "A Day-in-the-Life" (DITL) method created by Gillen et al. (2007), further rooted in New Literacy Studies (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984) as literacy comes alive through social practices by people in contexts. DITL, as an ethnographic video-based approach, aims at capturing participants' literacy behaviours and multimodal practices naturally occurring during everyday activities. Although Gillen et al. (2007) illustrated through DITL a rich repository of texts, artefacts, technologies, and images that children encounter and engage with over the course of one day, we adapted this approach to investigate adult international students' academic writing practices with the use of GenAI across five working days.

As Lillis and Scott (2007) noted, academic writing practices are social practices best examined through ethnographic methods. Gillen et al. (2007) used the DITL method to illustrate a rich repository of texts, artefacts, technologies, and images that children encounter and engage with over the course of one day. Gillen et al.'s DITL method is ideal for this research to get a close-up picture of lived social practices with GenAI. Drawing on this, we made three key adjustments to the DITL method. First, we shifted the data collection from researcher observation to participant self-documentation. While traditional DITL is often situated in classroom-based observations, inviting participants to self-document their chat logs captures GenAI use in everyday, natural writing conditions. Second, the time span was extended from one day to five working days. Unlike Gillen et al. (2007), who observed daily lives, this study focuses on academic writing interactions. Requiring participants to complete such tasks within a single day would create an unnatural writing context, especially since writing rhythms vary significantly between individuals. Extending the period to a week allows participants to record their GenAI usage at their own pace. Third, because GenAI-assisted writing takes place on personal devices, researchers cannot and should not monitor these interfaces in real time. Therefore, we adopted a structured journal approach (see Appendices A and B for daily interaction templates and reflections). We acknowledge that this self-reporting mechanism implies participants may selectively record or omit unconscious GenAI usage behaviours. This is an inherent limitation of our method. The ten participants agreed to copy-paste and write reflections based on their use of GenAI platforms for academic purposes. The micro-analysis of their week-in-the-life (WITL) of GenAI practices provided a detailed mapping of the social practices of GenAI (as shown in Figure 1 below).

To get a granular view of GenAI social practices, we asked participants to document a range of activities. Table 2 below provides an overview of the data collected by participants for documentation during the study. The daily logs documented the prompts participants entered, the revisions they made, the outputs they received, and their daily and weekly reflections, to provide a detailed record of interactions with GenAI in writing practices.

Following the DITL principles, participants took part in focus groups shortly after the one-week documentation and reflection to discuss their documented GenAI use in academic writing. Three focus groups were conducted, each lasting approximately 90 min, with all participants taking part: with 3–4 participants in each group. Discussions were held in English and explored four main topics: (1) experiences with GenAI-assisted academic writing; (2) the impact of GenAI on the development of their academic writing; (3) GenAI's role in facilitating language and cultural switching; and (4) the power dynamics between participants and GenAI and its influence on their writer identities. The benefit of small group focus groups is that they allow for group discussion, supplementing, and finding a sense of belonging within our recruited participants.

Interaction 1

Me: paraphrase: The primary aim at this stage was to generate an open and grounded codebook that captures the complex and sometimes contradictory logics that underpin digital disconnection. An inductive approach was used, drawing on constructivist grounded theory and thematic analysis principles. Coding was facilitated using NVivo, and memo-writing was incorporated throughout to refine categories. The coding outcomes are organised around five overarching themes that correspond to the empirical concerns outlined in the research questions: manifestations, reasons, methods, barriers, and gains of digital disconnection.

ChatGPT: The main objective at this stage was to develop an open and grounded codebook that reflects the complex and occasionally contradictory factors driving digital disconnection. An inductive approach was employed, guided by the principles of constructivist grounded theory and thematic analysis. Coding was carried out using NVivo, with memo-writing integrated throughout to help refine the categories. The resulting codes are grouped into five key themes, aligning with the empirical issues raised in the research questions: manifestations, reasons, methods, barriers, and gains of digital disconnection.

Me: I want to point out the cross-coding used in the process, and please make the whole piece of work more cautious.

ChatGPT: The primary aim at this stage was to develop an open and grounded codebook that captures the complexity and sometimes contradictory dynamics underlying digital disconnection. An inductive approach was employed, drawing on the principles of constructivist grounded theory and thematic analysis. Throughout the coding process, cross-coding was applied to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data, allowing for the identification of relationships between codes and categories. NVivo software was utilised for the coding, and memo-writing was consistently integrated to help refine and develop the categories. The resulting coding outcomes are organised into five overarching themes that correspond to the empirical concerns raised in the research questions: manifestations, reasons, methods, barriers, and gains of digital disconnection. These themes provide a nuanced view of the complex ways in which digital disconnection is perceived and experienced, while also acknowledging the potential contradictions and tensions within the data.

Figure 1. An example of the documentation of GenAI–human interaction.

Table 2. Overview of documentation and reflection (recorded for five working days).

Data Type	Description	Frequency	Focus	Total Data Collected from the 10 Participants
Documentation of GenAI–human interaction logs	Recording GenAI–human interaction: each interaction included the initial prompt, the GenAI’s response and any follow-ups, ending when the participants were satisfied or chose to discontinue due to unsatisfactory response.	2–5 interactions per day from each participant	Interactions are primarily for academic purposes; those from everyday life may be included if they are relevant to academic study (see Figure 1 for an example).	132 log entries
Text used in the draft assignment	Examples of final texts from the draft assignment following the recorded GenAI–human interactions described above.	Ideally, one example per day, but none if no decision was made	N/A	32 draft texts
Daily reflection	Around 100-word reflections on daily GenAI use	One per day	Reflecting on (1) the effects of the GenAI interaction, (2) any GenAI-assisted language switching, (3) unexpected experiences, and (4) any concerns that arose.	49 daily reflections
End-of-week reflection	Around 300-word reflections at the end of the week	One per week	Reflecting on (1) the benefits and challenges of GenAI-assisted writing, (2) language switching and (3) the impact on learning academic writing.	10 end-of-week reflection

3.3. Data Analysis

Data from the focus groups were transcribed, and data analysis combined inductive and deductive approaches. Initial coding was data-driven from documentation, reflections, and focus group discussions with descriptive labels attached to learners' experiences with GenAI-assisted writing in the planning, composing and reviewing stage (e.g., brainstorming, translation, proofreading, etc.), their attitudes towards GenAI-assisted academic writing (e.g., increased confidence, concerned, etc.) and strategies taken in the use of GenAI (e.g., setting boundaries or staying culturally sensitive). Higher-level labels relating to GenAI–human power relationships (e.g., human asserting agency and GenAI subtly imposing bias) and writer identities (e.g., beliefs about authorship and intercultural identity) were developed based on the initial codes. To enhance the validity of the developed codes, the first focus group was coded independently by the three researchers, and two participants' documentation and reflections were co-coded by the first and third authors. These labels were then grouped, conceptualised, and connected to develop more interpretive themes. As patterns emerged during the analysis, we realised that Ivanič's (1998) framework provided a particular theoretical lens to interrogate the emerging themes and to capture and map out the power dynamics between GenAI and humans and the complexities of constructing writer identities. For example, student writers' struggles to claim the lead in their interaction with GenAI became the key for determining authorship and were grouped under the authorial selves theme. It was also through this bottom-up engagement with the data that we came to recognise the significance of writers' intuition and intention in shaping writing trajectories. This, in turn, led us to draw on Mollick's (2024) notion of "iterative instinct" to adapt Ivanič's model for understanding writer identity in GenAI-assisted writing.

4. Findings

Data analyses reveal how GenAI influenced CALD students' development of academic writing identity, conceptualised from the perspective of autobiographical selves, discursal selves, authorial selves and possibilities of selves (Ivanič, 1998). By investigating these influences and the contested power dynamics in GenAI–human relationships, we argue that the integration of GenAI into academic writing introduces a new dimension to understandings about academic authorship: an assertion of human agency in resistance to algorithmic automation throughout the writing process, with human writers' iterative instinct playing a crucial role.

4.1. The Autobiographical Selves: Prior Experiences as the Foundation for Iterative Instinct

Drawing on data from weekly reflections and focus groups, this section examines participants' understandings of academic writing as shaped by their previous academic experiences and beliefs, i.e., their autobiographical selves, which also formed a basis for their instinct when iterating with GenAI. Specifically, eight participants had pre-GenAI academic writing experience, and five reported developing their own personal writing style without GenAI. However, only Tamila and Lyre expressed "confidence" in their current writer identities, partly due to their wider academic writing experiences, especially as Tamila had already completed her first PhD and was now working towards her second PhD degree. It is also interesting to point out that Tamila's and Lyre's confidence to some extent influenced their interaction with GenAI, as Lyre reported, "my proficiency in English and disciplinary knowledge of the field enabled me to always point out GenAI hallucinations. So I do not worry my voice will be erased by GenAI." (Focus Group 3). In other words, these writers' autobiographical experiences seemed to form the basis for

the formation of writers' instinct to protect their voices when iterating with GenAI, which would be discussed in more depth in Section 4.3.

Moreover, their writing experiences turned out to be more strongly associated with English than with their L1s. Five of them reported being educated in academic English since childhood, as exemplified below:

Nuru: The education system in Zimbabwe is mainly aligned with the UK system. So, the same way you do, it is the same way we do.

Sahana: Because of colonisation, we follow a lot of British style. So, it was similar when I wrote my master's thesis as well.

(Focus group 1)

Although two participants had experience in their L1 academic writing, they had also studied in the UK and described themselves as more familiar with the UK academic conventions, as Siqi mentioned, "During my second master's in the UK, I had a six-week language learning session. I think the majority of my knowledge about that comes from there." (Focus group 1).

These experiences, combined with their immersion in the UK higher education system, may explain their inclination to align with the UK academic standards or, at least, their tendency to internalise a deficit identity as non-native English speakers in academic writing when interacting with GenAI. For example, Nuru selected materials to train GenAI as his academic tutor. When asked about the criteria for choosing these materials, he emphasised the importance of "good English" and would revise "Shona-influenced sentences" to ensure adherence to this standard (Focus group 1). Therefore, Nuru's autobiographical selves, which prioritised standard English in academic writing, also formed his instinct to iterate to erase the L1 traces in writing in GenAI-human interaction. Similarly, Lyre and Fitri also reported editing out L1 traces in their writing. Even in the case of Sahana, who hoped to maintain her "academic tone" which was associated with her L1, she admitted feeling "unconfident" because "everyone here is a native English speaker, but I am not." (Focus group 1). These findings echo Yu and Jiang's (2025) research, which suggests that L2 academic writers may hold a deficit view of their L1s and strive to conform to English academic writing conventions. Admittedly, this deficit view of the L1 is an understandable stage of identity construction for L2 writers. According to Ivanič (1998), novice writers develop their writer identities by mimicking "expert" voices to gain community entry. In an overseas context, this mimicry might reflect a strategic alignment with the "standard" UK conventions, often at the expense of the student's L1 expertise. The following sections examine how such autobiographical selves shaped their use of GenAI and the negotiation of their writer identities.

4.2. *The Discoursal Selves: The Dual Role of GenAI in Constructing Authorial Presence and the Role of Iterative Instinct*

Data from participants' reflections, documentation, and focus groups revealed a double-edged role of GenAI in shaping students' discoursal selves, namely, how they presented themselves as writers through linguistic and rhetorical choices. On the one hand, this technology provided critical dialogical opportunities to acquire discipline-appropriate terminologies, which enabled writers to establish a more legitimate authorial presence in writing and allowed them to draw on their holistic linguistic repertoires. On the other hand, over half the participants feared that this reliance might erode their writing voice. This situation rendered the use of GenAI a site of struggle for asserting authorial agency.

Firstly, all participants integrated GenAI across the pre-writing and composing stages to support their academic writing. In the pre-writing stage, GenAI was used to facilitate

brainstorming, data analysis, and to deepen their understanding of theoretical terminologies. We offer some examples in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Types and examples of GenAI-assisted academic knowledge construction.

Usage	Examples from Students' Documented GenAI Use	Data Source
Brainstorming	I am writing an essay on the role of the library in a culturally diverse society. What might be the barriers to serving a diverse population?	Dora (Documentation log, Day 4)
Defining theoretical concepts	The terms multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary explain differences.	Tamila (Documentation log, Day 1)
Theory-informed data analysis	How can I connect the reluctance to discuss difficult subjects such as decolonisation, colonisation, racism, and oppression, with my interviewee's point ?	Lyre (Documentation log, Day 1)

As shown above, the CALD students used GenAI to participate in conversations within their academic fields. An important role GenAI played here was to help them familiarise themselves with the discursal repertoires of their specific field. For example, in response to Tamila's question about the definitions, GenAI (as shown in Figure 2 below) succinctly highlighted the conceptual traditions of each term, as well as the disciplinary knowledge and academic conventions they entail. This not only helped Tamila to quickly understand the academic discourses associated with them, but also provided her with linguistic and conceptual resources through which legitimacy was constructed in the discipline, supporting her in performing a more discipline-appropriate discursal self. As Tamila reflected in Focus group 2, "The GenAI clearly distinguished between terms, which enhanced my conceptual understanding (...) It makes my writing more academic."

It should be noted, however, that such use of GenAI risked simplifying the complexities involved in disciplinary-related terminologies, as Tamila also reported, "AI sometimes simplified content more than I preferred" (Daily reflection, Day 3). Thus, while GenAI summaries can be inspiring, the content may run the risk of remaining at a surface level, which might limit students' opportunities to engage closely with texts and develop their own authorial voices and disciplinary discursal repertoires.

In the stage of composing, all participants used GenAI to adjust their writing to a British academic register, sometimes by switching between their L1 and English, as specified and exemplified in Table 4.

Table 4. Types and examples of GenAI-assisted adaptation to the English academic register.

Usage	Examples	Data Source
Structure consultancy	(GenAI) guided me in developing a clear dissertation structure.	Aisha (Daily reflection, Day 1)
	Can you give me words that I can use in my sentence, which is referred to as 'critical writing'?	Sami (Documentation log, Day 2)
Seeking 'academically appropriate' language	I asked GenAI about the use of the word 'indeed' and if this could be used in an academic-like setting, because I think 'indeed' is a very informal word. But ChatGPT told me that "it's okay".	Siqi (Daily reflection, Day 5)

As noted in Table 4, GenAI also served as a mediating tool in helping the students to master discursive conventions established in the UK academic community they wished to participate in, ranging from macro-level genre structure (e.g., Aisha's dissertation chapters) to micro-level linguistic features such as vocabulary, syntax, and overall academic style (e.g., in Sami's and Siqi's cases). Siqi's reflections on the use of "indeed" particularly

show the role of GenAI in helping her understand the underlying discourse-level meanings associated with L2 expressions. This aligns with Singh et al.'s (2025) findings, which also drew upon Ivanič's (1998) work and found that GenAI supported the development of authorial voices by helping learners acquire discourse-level knowledge, which is vital for student writers to achieve a legitimate voice in their academic community.

The terms multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary, explain differences

ChatGPT said:

Excellent — that's insightful feedback, and your reviewer is absolutely right. The terms **multidisciplinary**, **interdisciplinary**, and **transdisciplinary** are *not* interchangeable, especially in academic writing.

Let's clarify their distinctions first, then I'll help you choose the most accurate term and refine your sentence.

Quick definitions

Multidisciplinary:

Different disciplines work *alongside each other*, contributing their perspectives, but without deeply integrating them.

Interdisciplinary:

Disciplines are *integrated* — theories and methods interact to create new insights or shared frameworks.

Transdisciplinary:

Goes *beyond academic boundaries* altogether — integrating academic and non-academic (e.g., lived experience, activism, policy) knowledge to address real-world issues.

In the context of Critical Disability Studies (CDS)

CDS is typically described as **interdisciplinary** (because it draws from and integrates insights from feminist theory, queer studies, critical race studies, etc.) and sometimes even **transdisciplinary**, when emphasizing activism and lived experience as knowledge sources. It is **not usually** described as *multidisciplinary*, since that implies less integration among fields.

👉 Refined sentence options

Option 1 – Interdisciplinary (most accurate academically):

It integrates theories, models, and frameworks from various disciplines, including feminism, queer theory, critical race studies, and postcolonial perspectives, making it a highly interdisciplinary field.

Option 2 – Transdisciplinary (if you want to stress practice and activism):

It brings together and extends theories and frameworks from feminism, queer theory, critical race studies, and postcolonial perspectives, making it a profoundly transdisciplinary field that bridges academic and activist knowledge.

Figure 2. Tamila's example interaction with GenAI (from documentation GenAI—human interaction log).

Participants also often used GenAI to translate culture-specific terms, as in Fitri's case, where she noted that GenAI understood her home language "pretty well" (Daily reflection, Day 1). This mediating role of GenAI enabled the decoding of L1 cultural nuances and the identification of L2 equivalents, supporting human writers' use of holistic linguistic repertoires and the development of an intercultural discursal self. Notably, in this process, the CALD writer's "iterative instinct" acted as a bridge between her L1 conceptual depth and L2 linguistic constraints. A telling example comes from Siqu, a PhD student who collected empirical data to investigate wellbeing (see Appendix C). She once negotiated with GenAI to add contextual depth to bridge the conceptual gap between the English expression, "withdrawal symptoms", and its Chinese source, "戒断反应". Specifically, the Chinese expression, "戒断反应", was used by the participants in Siqu's research to describe

their anxiety after attempting to break an addiction to social media. Siqi intended to use “withdrawal symptoms” as the English equivalent and used ChatGPT to check its connotation. GenAI noted that the English term carried medical connotations and suggested adding contextual information to clarify that “withdrawal symptoms” in Siqi’s study referred to participants’ emotional distress, not a clinical condition. Notably, Siqi’s role in this series of interactions with ChatGPT was not only that of a follower but also that of a critical questioner who repeatedly raised concerns about ChatGPT’s responses and redirected the conversation. For example, after ChatGPT confirmed that “withdrawal symptoms” was the most appropriate term and provided a clear definition, Siqi re-emphasised the need to attend to cultural differences between “戒断反应” and “withdrawal symptoms,” and requested more cautious use of the English expression in the prompt: “since my supervisors reminded me before about the use of terms when writing, I need to be more cautious to use such terms, as you said, those terms that have some clinical or cultural connotations.” (Documentation log, Day 4) This example clearly illustrates Siqi’s “iterative instinct” (Mollick, 2024), whereby she repeatedly re-engages with GenAI output through cycles of evaluation, refinement, and reorientation. Such instinct came from her prior supervisory feedback and her experience of navigating both Chinese and British academic contexts, enabling her to sustain a critically reflexive stance and remain “in the loop” of dialogue with GenAI rather than passively accepting its responses. Finally, after three rounds of negotiations, Siqi came up with the following text for her dissertation draft:

When talking about feelings of disconnection, participants’ accounts revealed a pattern of ambivalence and complex emotional states. Some participants used the term “withdrawal symptoms” (戒断反应) to describe their feelings of anxiety, distress, discomfort, and a sense of impulsive connectivity.

(Draft assignment, Day 4)

As shown in this case, GenAI’s robust multilingual capacities positioned it as a dialogical partner that helped Siqi move beyond literal translation, transforming her L1 knowledge into socially recognisable forms in L2 contexts. A similar role of GenAI has also been identified in Zhang and Liu’s (2026) research, where GenAI feedback helped writers engage in reflective and explorative dialogues that supported deeper thinking. Notably, as revealed in this study, when interacting with GenAI feedback, the student’s autobiographical self—her prior knowledge and writing experiences—engaged with the academic world to internalise new discursive resources (Wertsch, 1991). GenAI here acted as a “co-traveler,” providing immediate and interactive opportunities to elicit the writer’s prior knowledge while helping her explore the discursive resources of the target field. This enabled CALD writers like Siqi to bridge subtle cultural differences between seemingly equivalent terms across languages by adding contextual meanings to adapt the original English expression more effectively to capture the cultural differences embedded in its Chinese equivalent.

Despite the dialogical feedback provided by GenAI in developing student writers’ authorial presence, concerns were also raised regarding whether GenAI could also erode students’ unique, especially culturally distinctive, discursive selves in writing. In particular, given that participants’ autobiographical selves often held a deficit view of their L1, many of them, whether they intended to preserve L1 traces or move away from them, found it hard to maintain their personalised expressions when faced with the standardised stylistic conventions of GenAI, as exemplified below:

Sahana: The place where I come has trained me a lot on the tone in which I write. I feel sometimes my academic tone is risked by AI when I’m trying to ask for any feedback on my writing.

(Focus group 1)

Siqi: I feel that my increasing reliance on AI could potentially hinder my academic writing skills. (...) My supervisors encourage and expect simple words and sentences, but AI-assisted writing sometimes seems to be pushing me away from that kind of writing.

(Weekly reflection)

These two examples demonstrated how GenAI might not only erode participants' personal voices, which were associated with their home discursal patterns (in Sahana's case) but also suppress the emergence of their academic tone (in Siqi's case). Notably, while Siqi was aware of her supervisor's encouragement, she was still unable to develop her desired discursal self due to the overreliance on GenAI. The reason might partly be related to the transformation GenAI brought to the writing process. As Ivanič (1998) argued, writing is a constitutive process; knowledge is not a pre-existing entity to be translated but is generated through the act of meaning-making and the refinement of one's authorial stance. However, in GenAI-assisted writing, as four participants admitted, they tended to use GenAI to generate texts and then edit GenAI responses. This process changed the previous way in which authorial stance was constructed in writing. As Siqi suggested, it was not easy to always stay "alert" to the information generated by GenAI, and she might sometimes accept GenAI texts without "careful consideration" (Focus group 1). Similarly, Lyre treated GenAI text as a baseline, noting, "...I'm just taking the paragraph or anything from the AI to fulfill myself, and again, using the tone... of the articles published in the UK... I always try to double-check before agreeing with the establishment of the GenAI." (Focus group 3). In other words, it was challenging to constantly stay "in the loop" (Mollick, 2024) when writing with GenAI. In the next section, we will discuss more about why writers might be able or not to display their "iterative instinct" in GenAI-assisted writing.

4.3. The Authorial Selves: Ability to Stay "In the Loop" as a New Way to Claim Authorship

Moving beyond participants' authorial presence in specific written contexts, this section examines how participants perceive themselves as authors of their academic work, namely, their authorial selves. A key finding here is that the presence of GenAI appears to have triggered a reconceptualisation of authorship. Traditionally, Ivanič (1998) framed the authorial selves through two primary forms of ownership, namely, the ownership of content and that of language (i.e., identification with the discursal choices made). However, the data suggests a third form of ownership which focuses on the writing process, where the assertion of human writers' "iterative instinct" or ability to stay "in the loop" when negotiating power dynamics and tensions emergent from the GenAI-human interactions became essential to claiming authorship.

As revealed by written reflections and focus groups, all the participants actively took the lead in their interactions with GenAI or at least struggled to do so to ensure their authorial presence in the writing. The first strategy they adopted was setting boundaries regarding when it was appropriate to use GenAI. For example, Sami used GenAI as a "discussion tool" rather than as a writing tool to avoid unintended plagiarism (Focus group 3). To ensure core intellectual labour remains under the author's control, three participants, such as Sahana, restricted GenAI use to language proofreading rather than idea generation. Such boundary-setting manifested participants' deliberate efforts to resist passively adopting GenAI responses.

This tendency is also reflected in participants' critical engagement with GenAI responses. All the participants reported that they would verify GenAI responses and guided GenAI to produce satisfactory answers through refined prompts. Dora shared, "I never use GenAI outputs without review and verification." (Focus group 2). Four participants particularly reported the importance of staying culturally sensitive when reviewing GenAI

outputs. Tamila, for example, often provided additional input to help GenAI capture differences between her home language and its English equivalents, such as for terms like “disability” and “equal education,” which were always associated with the adoption of a “medical approach” in her home context (Focus group 2). Therefore, while these participants used GenAI to support translation, it was their personal judgement that triggered a feedback loop important for GenAI to function as a more effective cultural broker.

Notably, the GenAI–human iterative interaction differs from recursive revision in normative writing, where writers lead the processes of drafting, evaluating, and revising their own text. Rather, GenAI functions as an active actor in the writing process, not simply by improving drafts, but by generating alternative perspectives and possibilities that reframe how the task is understood. A vivid example can be seen in Dora’s Day 3 log, where she asked ChatGPT to co-design an online teaching session on introducing Mendeley and reflect on the teaching method. ChatGPT proposed synchronous (screen-sharing) and asynchronous document-based approaches, suggesting a hybrid model as optimal (see Figure 3). However, this did not simply lead to adopting the suggestion; instead, it prompted Dora to reconsider the value of synchrony and ultimately to choose an asynchronous design while seeking further GenAI input. In this way, GenAI helped her recognise a broader set of pedagogical possibilities and reorient her thinking toward new ideas. Here, Dora’s “iterative instinct” is not a recursive revision of a draft, but engagement with GenAI propositions that reshape her thinking in the process. In other words, this points to a new form of co-developed authorship, where GenAI acts as an actor in a feedback loop that contributes to the emergence of ideas.

Would you like me to help you **write that reflection section** — explaining and justifying why you chose this hybrid (video + guide) approach, using relevant learning theory and reflective tone? I can make it fit neatly into your coursework structure.

You said:

How about creating a video for asynchronous learning?

ChatGPT said:

That’s an *excellent* idea — in fact, creating an **asynchronous instructional video** is one of the most effective ways to teach a practical, tool-based skill like Mendeley. It shows creativity, digital literacy, and pedagogical understanding — exactly what your coursework assessors are looking for.

Let’s break down **why** this is a strong choice, **how** to design it effectively, and **how you could reflect on it** in your assignment.

Figure 3. Dora’s example (Documentation log, Day 3).

It is worth noting, however, that the GenAI–human power relationship did not always work in our participants’ favour. Five of them identified moments when GenAI subtly imposed its algorithmic preferences or even bias. Siqi contended that the difficulty users faced in resisting imposed bias could ultimately lead to its wider dissemination. She said, for example, “GenAI responses have biases. If we don’t have that literacy to identify them, writers can, and maybe this will be involved in our process of academic writing.” (Focus group 1)

As indicated in Siqi’s above excerpt, resisting the bias and standardisation imposed by GenAI necessitates sufficient prior knowledge and critical awareness, a requirement that can be particularly challenging for L2 student writers, as Siqi, Sahana, and Dora all admitted that their English proficiency and disciplinary knowledge were not always enough to “discern whether the terms used by GenAI is appropriate” (Weekly reflection) This view

was shared by Tamila, who suggested, “we can use AI to colonise ourselves” when student writers cannot capture the bias embedded in GenAI responses (Focus group 2). Such concerns align with Zheng’s (2025) argument that international students can be particularly vulnerable to the standardising processes and bias that GenAI imposes on their academic writing. In other words, even if the participants had the awareness of critically engaging with GenAI, their linguistic competence, disciplinary knowledge and academic literacies might not enable them to do so, aligned with existing research (Shen & Chen, 2025). Three participants reported that GenAI could direct the conversation, especially when human instructions were ambiguous. For example, Aisha worried that “AI has more power” than her (Focus group 2), and Dina reported, “when my question is slightly vague, AI tends to decide for me.” (Focus group 3). This again suggested that effectively steering GenAI–human interactions required users to possess sufficient literacy and knowledge to specify clear instructions. A review of the documentation of GenAI–human interactions showed that GenAI always automatically suggested subsequent steps after answering participants’ questions, such as proposals for text generation. Aisha commented on these suggestions as “stopping you from thinking beyond that point” (Focus group 2). This situation again echoed Robinson’s (2023) warning that human writers may be susceptible to the control of algorithmic pre-emption.

Facing the potentially unfavourable GenAI–human power dynamics, eight participants reported efforts to resist the GenAI homogenisation, as Dina suggested, “AI sometimes jumps into a direction I didn’t ask for (...). When that happens, I revise my prompt or explain again with more constraints” (Focus group 3). Similarly, when GenAI expanded her text despite a simple language-editing request, she explicitly instructed ChatGPT, “Can you not change much and just make it sound like a connected essay in paragraphs?” (Documentation log, Day 3). These interactions illustrated their “iterative instinct”, capturing individuals’ engagement in recursive feedback loops to force GenAI outputs back into alignment with human intent. Therefore, in this contestation of power between GenAI and humans, participants’ sense of their authorial selves increasingly hinges on whether individuals can stay ‘in the loop’ in the interaction with GenAI. When participants were able to restrict GenAI’s role to a level where their L2 proficiency and disciplinary knowledge allowed for critical evaluation, they viewed the technology as a means of strengthening their authorship. For example, Dina reported that she believed in her “taste of English” and could confidently use GenAI to help her write more “effectively” (Focus group 3). Conversely, when participants could not resist overreliance on GenAI, their authorial selves were weakened. Sahana, for instance, described a decline in her confidence as an academic writer due to compulsively using GenAI to check whether her writing was “academically correct” and fears of losing her personal style (Focus group 1). Tamila also reported “feeling lucky” by obtaining her first PhD degree before the arrival of GenAI, as she had already “improved my skills as an academic writer”. These showed that the development of an “iterative instinct” is not volitional; rather, it is closely tied to writers’ autobiographical selves, including accumulated writing experience, language proficiency and disciplinary understanding.

There was also a small group of participants who appeared to embrace the interwoven nature of GenAI and human agency in academic writing. For example, Sami expressed confidence in his authorial presence despite “completely relying on AI” (Focus Group 3). Similarly, Nuru, who primarily acted as an editor of GenAI text, reported that GenAI-assisted writing strengthened his identity as “an academic writer” (Focus group 1). However, their confidence remained linked to their active orchestration of the GenAI–human interaction, particularly through “teaching AI to be the tutor” (Nuru, Focus group 1). Nuru explained that, although he relied heavily on GenAI, he maintained authority

by selecting materials for the GenAI to learn, adjusting settings to make it “more critical,” and refining its responses. From this perspective, his confidence stemmed not from language proficiency and discursal knowledge but from high critical GenAI literacy to enable “iterative instinct” (Mollick, 2024). In short, this study suggests that in GenAI-assisted writing, the authorial self is increasingly anchored in the critical labour of navigating GenAI–human interaction.

4.4. Possibilities of Selves: Carving out a Space for Unique Human Contribution

When reflecting on how GenAI might shape their future identities as academic writers, all participants acknowledged the benefits GenAI offers—particularly for brainstorming ideas and proofreading. Meanwhile, they stressed the importance of preserving human agency and contributing original intellectual insights when engaging with GenAI in their work. Five participants preferred GenAI playing a relatively limited role in their future writing. Siqu, Sahana, and Lyre emphasised GenAI as a “mentor” or “proofreader” rather than a “co-author,” which equally contributed original ideas like human writers (Focus group 1 and 3). The ultimate goal, according to Sahana, is to preserve her “originality” in writing. For these participants, balancing originality with GenAI use shaped their future writer identities. Some, such as Sahana, were still “reflecting” on how to achieve this aim (Focus group 1).

The other half anticipated fully embracing GenAI. As Nuru noted, GenAI was an “indispensable collaborator” that enhanced his ability to switch between languages and identity as an academic writer (Focus group 1). Yet, even these participants remained alert to maintaining human originality. Nuru, envisioning his future as an empirical researcher, argued that GenAI cannot fully capture the emotional resonance of participants’ “feelings” during data collection and analysis—a space where he can contribute uniquely human insight, echoing Curado Fuentes’ (2025) and Khuder’s (2025) findings. Nuru’s sense of value was tied to his personal writing trajectory and ability to critically interact with GenAI; in other words, his autobiographical self and iterative instinct. Viewing himself as an empirical researcher, he identified GenAI’s limitations and pinpointed where his human expertise remained essential. As Ivanič (1998) argued, a writer’s imagination of their future identity is not a vague fantasy but situated in their ongoing interactions within specific social contexts. Through this lens, interacting with GenAI scaffolded Nuru’s reflection on his possibilities for self, grounding his future identity in his current positionality and clarifying where his unique human contribution could lie in the interaction with GenAI.

In short, despite their varying attitudes toward GenAI, the participants’ envisioning of their future was centrally focused on exploring their unique contributions, not only as humans but also as unique individual writers. From this perspective, GenAI becomes a critical social actor engaging in the renegotiation of human writers’ possibilities of selves, which involves an intentional effort to carve out a unique space for autobiographical and authorial selves to fully form.

5. Conclusions

Drawing on Ivanič’s (1998) framework of writer identity, this research positions GenAI not only as tools, but also as social actors where CALD students can re-negotiate their authorial presence. The significance of this research study is that it contributes to advancing an understanding of authorship in the age of GenAI by emphasising the potentially facilitative yet contested power dynamics in GenAI–human interaction (Burnett & Merchant, 2020). It demonstrated the dual effect of GenAI on shaping writer identities. In a shifting GenAI landscape, the participant students’ discursal and authorial selves, understood as their ability to claim ownership over their voice, are intimately tied to their

capacity to critically iterate with GenAI. In other words, maintaining authorship in GenAI-assisted academic writing demands sophisticated engagements with these power relationships. This is particularly pronounced for CALD students, whose autobiographical selves may be positioned as “less powerful” due to the linguistic hierarchies inherent in being non-native English speakers.

Our research also sheds light on the formation of this new form of writer identity, with the “iterative instinct” (Mollick, 2024) playing a central role in enabling participants to stay “in the loop” and steer machine outputs toward human intent. This helps writers to develop solid discursal and authorial selves by assuming the lead in GenAI–human power dynamics. Crucially, our study highlights that this instinct is not self-sustaining. Rather, it hinges upon the student’s underlying linguistic capabilities and disciplinary knowledge. Without these “human-in-the-loop” capacities (Mollick, 2024), the iterative process remains superficial, potentially leading to a diluted sense of authorship where GenAI overshadows the writer’s individual voice.

We also argue that this instinct serves as more than a technical or writing skill, or beyond recursive revision in normative writing, but a site of identity construction, supported by GenAI as a social actor in the writing process. As indicated in this research, this “iterative instinct” (Mollick, 2024) is fundamentally an act of self-exploration and self-affirmation. It represents the moment where our participants reflected on the different perspectives provided by GenAI, looked for and identified the limitations of GenAI, and, in doing so, discovered their own uniqueness as human beings and individual academic writers, thereby forming a new form of authorship. Through this interaction with GenAI as an intimate co-traveller, student writers did more than generate text that mirrors their intent. They engaged in a reflexive process that affirmed their sense of self in the broader academic community. As a result, Ivanič’s properties of academic writing still have relevance today, with the exception of authorial self, which has shifted in the age of GenAI to less about language and academic style and more about intuition and iterations as fundamental to the writing process. In addition, these iterations have more to do with autobiographical selves, given that all of our participants talked about how much they have to mediate their own linguistic backgrounds and cultural mediations of GenAI content.

In summary, this study advances the theorisation of academic writer identities in GenAI-assisted academic writing by conceptualising GenAI as an influential social actor and arguing that authorship should be understood from the ownership of GenAI–human interactive processes. The study also highlights the important role of “iterative instinct” in asserting human authorship, which needs explicit attention in academic writing courses, particularly for CALD students. The findings suggest important implications for academic writing pedagogy in higher education, particularly in how educators support CALD students’ use of GenAI. Rather than treating GenAI as a compensatory tool for perceived language deficits, academic writing development should be reconceptualised in terms of strengthening students’ “iterative instinct” and their ability to remain critically engaged with their writing choices, disciplinary knowledge, and GenAI outputs. While GenAI can enhance linguistic and content production, the study highlights that disciplinary knowledge, academic discourse development, and the capacity for distinctive intellectual contribution remain central in the GenAI era. Indeed, these become even more significant in shaping writer identity and academic authorship.

Admittedly, as a small-scale qualitative inquiry, these findings may not be directly generalised to all academic settings. Furthermore, the scope of this research did not allow a more in-depth analysis of the cognitive and socially constructed development of the “iterative instinct,” necessitating future longitudinal research. At the same time, the research confirmed our deeper commitment to GenAI research that foregrounds the

personal and the human within LLM experiences—especially research on using and understanding GenAI tools with care and criticality and acknowledging its crucial role in academic socialisation.

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Appendix A. Guidance Document for Digital Documentation Digital Documentation and Daily Reflection on Using AI for Academic Writing (Days 1–5)

Appendix A.1. Instructions

1. Please identify and select **at least two interactions (preferably 3–5)** from your use of AI for academic writing today. *Each interaction includes your initial prompt, the AI's responses, and any follow-up prompts or clarifications. An interaction ends when one of the following occurs: (1) you are satisfied with the final AI response, (2) you have completed that part of your work, or (3) you decide to end the interaction due to consistently unsatisfactory responses.* These can be interactions that you found particularly satisfying or unsatisfying, or ones that best illustrate how you interact with AI.
If you use AI less frequently, you may select 1–2 interactions instead.
2. You can either *copy and paste the interactions text directly into this document or take screenshots* (you can take a full-screen shot or multiple screenshots of each chat log) from your AI platform and send the screenshots to us.
3. (Optional) If you wish, you may add brief comments on specific parts of your interactions, especially where you negotiated your answers with the AI or found its responses particularly helpful or unhelpful.
4. If you choose to use AI-generated text in your work, please include the final version at the end of your daily journal entry, highlighting the AI-generated parts in yellow. This will help us understand where you agree or disagree with the suggestions provided by AI. We are not evaluating how much you used AI, but rather how you used it and what you thought about it.
5. Please write a short reflection (around 100 words) on your use of AI today. The following questions are provided to guide your thinking and you don't need to respond to all of them each day. Feel free to reflect on any other aspects you find **relevant or interesting**.

- a. Interacting with AI, were you satisfied with the process and final outcome? Why or why not?
- b. In which situations did you use your home language or other languages (LOTEs) in your interactions with AI, for example, to clarify a meaning, express emotion, or check a translation?
- c. When you switched or mixed languages, did the AI understand your intention accurately?
- d. Do you have experience using your home language or other languages to express personal emotions or nuanced cultural perspectives when interacting with AI? If so, does the AI accurately recognise and convey those emotions and perspectives and, if AI cannot, will you incorporate the AI responses into your final work?
- e. Highlight and explain specific instances where you negotiated with the AI to develop or express complex ideas, such as key arguments, your authorial voice, writing style, or cultural understanding.
- f. Did you notice any “foreign traces” of your linguistic or cultural background in your English writing (for example, phrasing or expressions that reflect your cultural values)?
- g. What were your concerns and did you have doubts about any biases or lack of reliability of searches?
- h. Did you notice patterns in your searches (e.g., authors from particular regions or a tendency to cite specific types of people over others)?
- i. Was there anything that surprised you in today’s interactions (for example, when AI performed better or worse than you expected)?

Appendix A.2. Recording Your Interactions with AI for Academic Writing

Day 1
Interaction 1
Interaction 2
Interaction 3
<i>Please feel free to add more interactions if you want</i>
The text you decide to use in your assignment/essay/dissertation/publication after interacting with AI
Daily reflection (around 100 words)

Days 2–5 followed the same format and are omitted for brevity.

Appendix B. Guidance Document for End-of-Week Reflection

End-of-Week Reflection

Please write a **200–300** word reflection on your use of AI in your academic writing this week. You do not need to address all of the following prompts, but you may use them to guide your reflection:

- How do you feel about using AI for academic writing overall? What benefits or challenges have you noticed?
- Reflect on your experiences using AI to switch between different languages. Does AI support this process, or are there any concerns?
- Did AI accurately reflect your ideas? If not, how did you manage that?
- Have you noticed any changes in your language use or writing style after using AI tools? (for example, in your home language, English, or in how you combine different languages)
- What are your expectations for academic writing, and how do you see AI shaping this process?
- What did you learn about your own way of thinking and writing while using AI?

Appendix C. The Example of Siqui's Interaction with GenAI

Me: When writing the descriptive analysis of my current data, I just cited participants' phrase 戒断反应, in English 'withdrawal symptoms', since they are talking about when they disconnect, they felt they have some withdrawal symptoms.

Gemini: That's an excellent point to raise, as translating and incorporating specific cultural or clinical terminology is crucial in academic writing.

Here's how I suggest you handle the phrase “戒断反应” (withdrawal symptoms) in your descriptive analysis, ensuring it meets academic standards for clarity, precision, and tone:

Strategies for Incorporating the Term

The key is to introduce the term clearly and consistently, acknowledging its source while maintaining the flow of your analysis.

1. The Initial Introduction (First Mention)

When you first introduce the concept, you need to define it and connect it directly to your participants' language. This is often the best way to handle non-English terms derived from qualitative data.

Example of first mention: “Several participants described the distress they experienced when disconnecting, frequently referencing what they termed ‘戒断反应’ (withdrawal symptoms). This phrase was used to characterize feelings of anxiety, irritability, and physical discomfort immediately following periods of intense engagement...”

1. **Why this works:** It introduces the original term in bold (or italics, depending on your style guide), immediately provides the translation, and then clarifies the **context and meaning** as used by the participants.

2. Subsequent Mentions

1. After the first time, you have a few options, but you should generally use the English term for flow, referring back to the original concept as needed.
2. **Option A (Standard Practice):** Use the English term.
“These **withdrawal symptoms** were consistently linked to the speed of disconnection, suggesting a psychological dependency...”
3. **Option B (Emphasizing the Participant's Voice):** Use the English term, but acknowledge the source. This is useful if you want to emphasize that *this* specific concept

came directly from their language.

“The severity of the reported ‘**withdrawal symptoms**’ (戒断反应) highlights the acute emotional impact of sudden disengagement.”

✅ Key Academic Considerations

- **Consistency:** Once you choose a method for the first mention (e.g., using bolding/parentheses/quotation marks), stick to it throughout the paper.
- **Tone:** Ensure you maintain an **objective, descriptive tone**. Your role here is to report *how the participants used* the phrase, not to clinically diagnose them unless your research design explicitly includes clinical assessment.
- **Contextualization:** As you’ve done, it’s vital to explain *what* the participants meant by “withdrawal symptoms” in this specific context (e.g., disconnection anxiety, FOMO, physical restlessness), as this may differ slightly from a purely clinical definition.

Which part of your analysis are you currently drafting? **Would you like to try writing a sentence using the strategy above, and I can refine it for you?**

Me: Since my supervisors reminded me before about the use of terms when writing, I need to be more cautious to use such terms, as you said, those terms that have some clinical or cultural connotations.

Gemini: That’s absolutely the right approach. Your supervisors’ caution is sound, especially when dealing with terms that bridge lay language, specific cultural experiences, and clinical definitions. **Precision and hedging** are paramount here.

Here are three key strategies and a practical example to help you navigate terms like “戒断反应” (withdrawal symptoms) while maintaining academic rigor:

1. 🗣️ Use Hedging and Attribution

Since you are reporting your **participants’ experience** and language, not making a clinical diagnosis yourself, you must attribute the term directly to them and use **hedging language** (words that show caution or uncertainty) to soften the claim.

Technique	Example Sentence	Rationale
Attribution	Participants frequently described their experience of disconnecting using the phrase “戒断反应” (withdrawal symptoms).	Clearly indicates the source of the terminology (the participants).
Hedging	This response appears to be consistent with, or at least analogous to, the feeling of withdrawal often reported in addiction studies.	Avoids stating it <i>is</i> withdrawal; suggests a comparison.
Combined	The feelings reported by the participants are reminiscent of what they called “戒断反应” (withdrawal symptoms), which may reflect a psychological dependence on the activity.	Uses cautious language (reminiscent of, may reflect) rather than declarative statements.

2. 📖 Contextualize and Define within Your Study

Always provide an **operational definition**—that is, how the term is used *within the context of your research*—to differentiate it from its strict clinical meaning.

“Although ‘戒断反应’ (withdrawal symptoms) is a term with established clinical uses, within the context of this study, participants employed it primarily to describe **acute psychological distress**, including feelings of irritability and intense craving, immediately following cessation of the activity.”

3. **Use Alternative, Less Connotative Terms**

Once you’ve introduced the participants’ term, consistently use a **less loaded synonym** in your own analysis sections (the parts where you discuss patterns or implications).

Loaded Participant Term	Recommended Academic Alternatives
“Withdrawal symptoms”	“Disconnection distress”
“Addiction”	“Maladaptive engagement” or “Compulsive use”
“Craving”	“Intense desire” or “Preoccupation”

 Refinement Example

If you were to write a section using this term, you could structure it like this:

“A salient finding across the interviews was the articulation of negative affect following disengagement. Specifically, participants often used the term ‘戒断反应’ (withdrawal symptoms) to describe a complex state of **disconnection distress**, including irritability, restlessness, and a strong urge to immediately re-engage. While not intended as a clinical diagnosis, the participants’ use of this loaded terminology **suggests a perceived severity** of their psychological discomfort that warrants further investigation, consistent with studies reporting **disengagement anxiety** in similar user populations (Smith, 2020).”

Would you like to draft a sentence or short paragraph from your analysis, and I can help you refine the use of “戒断反应” (or any other sensitive term) within it

Me: When talking about the feelings around disconnection, several participants shared their ambivalent moments and complexed feelings about disconnection. ‘Withdrawal symptom’ has been used to express participants’ anxiety, distress, uncomfortable, and a sense of impulsive connectivity after disconnection.

Gemini: That’s a strong starting point for reporting your findings, as it clearly identifies both the **ambivalence** and the specific cluster of negative feelings associated with disconnection.

However, to address your supervisors’ caution regarding clinical terminology, and to integrate the term “**withdrawal symptoms**” (戒断反应) precisely, we need to refine the language to ensure you’re reporting the *participants’ language* and *perceived experience*, not offering a clinical assessment.

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