Emerging disciplinary voices:
Bachelor students’ use of sources – between knowledge telling and knowledge transforming

Nye disiplinære stemmer:
Bachelorstudenters kildebruk – mellom kunnskapsreferat og kunnskapsbruk
Abstract

While referencing is an important feature of academic writing, many students struggle with using sources. This struggle seems to be due, in part, to the tension students experience when advised to cite sources (i.e., others’ voices) on the one hand, and to demonstrate their own disciplinary voice on the other hand. The aim of this article is to contribute to the understanding of source use, presenting a figure that illustrates gradients of students’ engagement with sources in various sections of their bachelor’s theses. Based on Bakhtin’s idea that a writer’s voice gradually emerges out of others’ words, and the terms *knowledge telling* and *knowledge transforming*, we developed a continuum that might help to understand the complexity of source use. We arrived at this continuum through the qualitative exploration of students’ use of sources in 15 bachelor’s theses from the humanities in one Norwegian university. In this article, we illustrate the continuum through extracts from the students’ theses, showing how issues of voice are intertwined with students’ engagement with sources. We propose that understanding the various functions of sources as they are typically used in the disciplines will help students to develop and demonstrate their disciplinary voices. Moreover, the continuum provides a foundation for fruitful discussions of writing practices that raise critical awareness about implicit expectations concerning source use and issues of voice in academic writing.

Sammendrag

Selv om referanser er sentralt i akademisk skriving, sliter mange studenter med å bruke kilder. En av årsakene til dette kan være spenningen mange studenter opplever: på den ene siden blir de bedt om å bruke kilder (dvs. andres stemmer), på den andre siden skal studentene demonstrere sin egen faglige stemme i teksten. Formålet med denne artikkelen er å bidra til forståelsen av kildebruk ved å presentere en modell som illustrerer ulike grader av studenters interaksjon med kilder i ulike deler av bacheloroppgaven. Med utgangspunkt i Bakhtins tanker om at en forfatters stemme trer gradvis fram av andres ord, sammen med begrepene *kunnskapsreferat* (knowledge telling) og *kunnskapsbruk* (knowledge transforming), utviklet vi et kontinuum som kan bidra til å forstå kildebrukens kompleksitet. Vi kom fram til dette kontinuumet gjennom en kvalitativ undersøkelse av studenters

Keywords: engagement with sources, bachelor's thesis, voice, dialogical theory

Nøkkelord: interaksjon med kilder, bacheloroppgave, stemme, dialogistisk teori

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Emerging disciplinary voices: Bachelor students’ use of sources – between knowledge telling and knowledge transforming

Introduction

The use of sources is a defining feature of academic texts that many students struggle with for a variety of reasons (see e.g., Brent, 2017; McCambridge, 2019). They are expected to use disciplinary perspectives, theories, concepts and methods to write and argue in an academic manner. This implies that students need to develop a certain degree of familiarity with the literature and the practices of their discipline. However, students often perceive these expectations as complicated and contradictory: On the one hand, they are expected to use sources or others’ voices; on the other hand, they are expected to display their own disciplinary voice. How do they handle this dilemma of developing their own disciplinary voice and using this voice together with others’ voices in their theses?

The complex and highly conventionalized practices of displaying a disciplinary voice by citing and referring to other scholarly work remain mostly tacit throughout academic contexts. When talking about referencing, the focus is often limited to formal conventions of quoting and referencing (e.g., required reference style) and avoiding plagiarism. Both students and faculty may be frustrated by the lack of time and resources available for delving into the complex and largely implicit conventions in academic writing. Most of these conventions – also for using others’ voices and displaying one’s own voice – are linked to the specific ways of thinking, writing and producing knowledge in the discipline that have become tacit knowledge. While this knowledge is part of the teachers’ habitus, it may be difficult for teachers to explain it explicitly to students. It is thus not surprising that students find it difficult to gain insight into referencing, a crucial feature in constructing both disciplinary knowledge and textual voice. By studying the students’ different ways of using references, we aim to gain explicit knowledge about the characteristics and development of disciplinary voices.
The theoretical background of the study

Our understanding of voice construction in academic writing builds on a dialogic, sociocultural view on writing and Bakhtin's idea that "[o]ne's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others’ words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345).

Our words, according to Bakhtin, always a response to others’ words. We respond to previous words in various ways – by borrowing, refuting, re-accentuating or re-interpreting others’ words (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91). These responsive reactions to others’ words include various levels of dialogue or relationships; these may be concrete relationships to the readers, to other texts and writers, or they may be more abstract relationships to the genre and the wider institutional and cultural context (see e.g., Dysthe, 1997; Evensen, 2013; Ivanič, 1998). In this article, we focus specifically on the dialogic relationships between the writer’s voice and the sources’ words, that student writers draw upon in their texts, as we link voice to knowledge telling and knowledge transforming.

Knowledge telling and knowledge transforming are well-known concepts that have been valuable in both writing research and pedagogy. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) developed the terms to describe different models of mental activity in the course of a writer’s development. Knowledge telling refers to a rather basic writing strategy of simply writing down content that is already stored in memory (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p. 13). Knowledge transforming addresses a more advanced stage of writing development where “thoughts come into existence through the composing process itself” (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p. 10) through rethinking, reworking, and revising.

Whereas the concepts of knowledge telling and knowledge transforming were developed within cognitive writing research, our focus is not on the cognitive processes of individual writers, but on the ways students enter into dialogue with their research community through their engagement with sources. Therefore, we reconceptualized the terms from a dialogical perspective, understanding writers’ engagement with sources as responsive reactions to others’ words. In accordance
with other studies (i.e., Blåsjö, 2009; Petrić, 2007), we understand knowledge telling as the re-telling of the sources’ words, whereas knowledge transforming is seen when writers engage actively with sources, for example through the establishment of links or new associations between different sources, clear relations between sources and own study, or a critical stance to the information from the source (see Blåsjö, 2009; Petrić, 2007).

According to Bakhtin, a writer’s own words gradually evolve out of others’ words, and the boundaries between the writer’s voice and the source’s voice can be scarcely perceptible at first. This means that instances of citation or re-telling of others’ ideas (knowledge telling) may indicate that the voice of the student writer is hidden behind the voice of the source. In contrast, active engagement with others’ words, for example by commenting on or establishing links between sources and the student’s own study, indicates knowledge transforming, where students actively position themselves, showing their emerging disciplinary voice. This understanding of the gradual evolving of the writer’s voice implies that knowledge telling and knowledge transforming cannot be seen as completely distinct from each other, but rather as a continuum.

**Previous research on voice**

Voice is a frequently used concept in writing research (see e.g., Matsuda, 2015; Prior, 2001; Sperling & Appleman, 2011; Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016; Tardy, 2012). The concept has evolved from focusing on the individual writer to acknowledging the complexity in voice construction (Matsuda, 2015) and has led to various approaches to research on voice. Most studies on voice have been quantitative studies focusing on linguistic features such as first person pronouns, hedges, boosters or attitude markers, and using Hyland’s (2005) interactional model to analyze voice features (see review Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016). Some of these quantitative studies on linguistic features added the use of references (Breivega et al., 2002; Castelló et al., 2012; Fløttum, 2006, 2010) or “countervoices” (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003) as an aspect of authorial presence in academic texts. Other studies have investigated the verbs that writers use to demonstrate their stance toward references: verbs such as report, refer to show a neutral stance, while verbs such as suggest, maintain show an evaluative stance (Jafarigohar & Mohammadkhani, 2015; Ramoroka, 2014; Soler-Monreal & Gil-
Salom, 2011). However, neither the identification and frequency of predefined categories for voice nor the analysis of neutral vs evaluative verbs is sufficient to understand the complex practices of referencing and how these contribute to the emergence of the student’s disciplinary voice.

The association between the use of sources and voice construction has been shown in studies that asked readers to describe voice features. For example, in a study by Matsuda and Tardy (2007), reviewers of academic manuscripts named “representation/positioning of other scholars in the field”, “breadth of knowledge” and “theoretical lens” as crucial identifiers for voice – all of which allude to authors’ use of others’ voices through referencing. Likewise, in the comprehensive study by McCambridge (2019), teachers characterized student writers’ voices as “sophisticated” when linked to the disciplinary discussion where students “imagine and position themselves as participants in a global scale disciplinary discussion, drawing on the voices of the field” (p. 122). In a study by Morton and Storch (2019), supervisors commented on features related to the use of sources, as for example “ability to marshal information from sources in a way that goes beyond that sort of dutiful listing of things” (p. 20). Supervisors in focus-group interviews mentioned “positioning oneself in relation to sources” (p. 1408) as an important feature of bachelor students’ independence in a study by Magnusson and Zackariasson (2019). These studies bring to the fore that engagement with other disciplinary voices is crucial in the construction of an own disciplinary voice. They also show the need for research on student texts that goes beyond linguistic features and takes into account content-related voice features, for example identifying how writers use sources in their argumentation and how they position themselves as participants in the disciplinary discussion.

The writer’s engagement with sources is therefore at the center of our analysis. The following question has guided our investigation: In what ways do students engage with sources in their bachelor’s theses, and what does this engagement reveal about their emerging disciplinary voices? We mapped out the concepts of knowledge telling and knowledge transforming on a continuum, in order to illustrate the range of different functions of sources and gradients of students’ engagement with sources. The aim of our exploratory, descriptive study was to provide a better understanding
of what bachelor students are “doing” with sources in their bachelor’s theses, and how their disciplinary voices emerge through their various ways of engaging with sources. Our intention was not to show “good” or “bad” examples of source use, but to describe how bachelor students engage with sources. The continuum we developed is not meant as recipe for “good” source use, but as a foundation for fruitful discussions about writing practices that raise critical awareness and can help teachers and supervisors make implicit expectations concerning source use and issues of voice in academic writing more transparent for students.

The context of the study

This study is part of a larger project on students’ disciplinary voices. The project includes an investigation of institutional and organizational conditions for the bachelor’s thesis in the humanities in one Norwegian university (see Stock, 2017), where the thesis had recently been introduced to strengthen the bachelor’s degree. That sub-study was done in order to gain insight into understandings of and requirements for the genre, such as learning outcomes, learning activities and other conditions for the bachelor’s thesis (Stock, 2017). The investigation of 24 course descriptions from all disciplines revealed considerable differences in terms of numbers of credit points, length of thesis, and the semester/year the thesis is to be written (Stock, 2017). In Media Studies, the thesis was given 15 credit points, whereas in English only 7.5. In Media Studies, the students wrote their theses in their final (6th) semester and students were offered several hours of supervision, lectures and seminars about academic writing. In contrast, the English program offered no separate course for the bachelor’s thesis; the students wrote their bachelor’s thesis as part of one of their ordinary courses in their 3rd or 4th semester and received little supervision or other support. Further insight into the procedures and understandings of the bachelor’s thesis genre was attained through a focus group interview with faculty members who taught and supervised bachelor students.

This contextual information from the sub-study was important for our understanding and interpretation of student’s source use presented in this article, where our aim was to gain insight into the students’ strategies regarding use of sources in their bachelor’s theses.
Data collection and methodological approach

The exploratory qualitative text analysis of the students’ engagement with sources was done on 15 bachelor’s theses from three disciplines, all submitted to the Faculty of Humanities at one of the larger Norwegian universities: 5 theses stem from English Cultural Studies (ENGCULT), 3 from English Literature (ENGLIT), and 7 from Media Studies (MS). English and Media Studies were chosen because they are the disciplines with the greatest number of students at the Faculty of Humanities. The 15 theses were regarded as a collection of case studies rather than as a representative corpus of the bachelor’s thesis genre in the humanities. All theses in our collection had been given a grade of A or B, the two best grades on a scale from A to F. Our material is thus likely to include students’ texts that meet disciplinary expectations. The 8 bachelor’s theses from English were from 2014 (2) and 2015 (6), and written in English, the 7 theses from Media Studies were from 2016. All but one of the texts from Media Studies were written in Norwegian, hence the extracts shown in this paper are translated to English. All extracts are followed by the writer’s pseudonym and discipline. We did not edit any mistakes in the extracts. All writers gave their written consent. Required notification was sent to the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD).

Our analytical approach in the text analysis was influenced by our knowledge about the typical “moves” (see Swales, 1990) or “writing acts”¹ (see Stock, 2019) that experienced readers of research papers expect in distinct parts or sections of a research paper. Examples of expected moves or acts include the act of describing the background of the study (which includes acts such as showing the relevance of the study or introducing theoretical terms the study builds on), describing the methodological approach, and the acts of presenting, interpreting and discussing the findings (see e.g., Basturkmen, 2009; Maswana et al., 2015). Some of these acts require an extensive use of sources that writers use, for example to establish the territory and niche for their own research in the introduction (see CARS-model, Swales, 1990) or to relate their own results to previous work in the field. That means

¹ In our study, we use the term writing acts instead of moves, to emphasize the “doings” of writers and the communicative functions of academic writing in line with the terminology in recent Norwegian writing research (e.g., Berge et al., 2016; Dagsland et al., 2023; Ofte & Otnes, 2021).
that sources have various functions in different sections of a research paper, and these functions might influence gradients of knowledge telling and transforming.

Therefore, our analysis of emerging student voices by means of other voices took into consideration the section or writing act in which sources were used and the function they fulfilled. For example, the description of the background of a study often includes the definition of theoretical terms, especially in the humanities, and requires primarily re-telling of others’ ideas. In contrast, a discussion of findings or the development of an argument demands novel associations, where writers transform others’ terms and ideas to interpret their own observations and findings.

This idea is illustrated as shown below (Figure 1):

**Figure 1**

*Functions of Source Use on a Horizontal Continuum: Writing Acts Aligned between Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Transforming*

As a first step in the analysis, we identified sources and their functions in relation to the writing acts of various sections of the theses. This exploratory approach included close, repeated reading and annotation of the texts in an iterative process. We made manual annotations (see Moreno & Swales, 2018), for example: “here the writer uses the source to introduce and describe theoretical terms”, or “here the writer uses the source to discuss the findings”.

Our observations during this first part of the analysis led to a more refined analysis where we took into account aspects of knowledge telling and transforming not captured in the horizontal continuum. We noted that student writers’ voices differed not only between the different sections of the theses, but also within sections. Thus, in this second part of the analysis, influenced by Petrić (2007) and Blåsjö (2009), we
directed our attention to features of knowledge transforming in all sections of the theses. We focused on variations in the writers’ engagement with sources, such as the establishment of links or new associations between different sources, clear relations between sources and own study, or a critical stance to the information from the source. In this part of the analysis, we asked questions such as: Do the students actively engage with their sources and in what ways? Do they comment on the information from the source or mostly re-tell what they have found in the sources? Do they link diverse sources to each other, take a stance on the source’s statement, or show the sources’ relevance for their own work?

Furthermore, it was important to recognize that knowledge transforming is often intertwined with, or even requires, knowledge telling. As an example, when we wrote this article, we purposely used knowledge telling to present Bereiter and Scardamalia’s understanding of the terms knowledge telling and knowledge transforming in the theoretical background section of our study. However, after this re-telling of others’ ideas, we positioned ourselves towards these ideas and thus used knowledge transforming in the subsequent paragraph, where we presented our understanding and use of the terms.

This second part of the analysis resulted in a vertical continuum, combined with the horizontal continuum (see Figure 2), to illustrate the complexity our data revealed regarding source use.
In the following, we will briefly illustrate the use of the continuum. We started with a student’s presentation of the background of the study – the section placed at the knowledge telling end of the horizontal continuum. If the student’s use of a source consisted of pure citation of others’ ideas, the instance was placed at the knowledge telling (upper) end of the vertical continuum. In these instances, the voice of the source was visible, but the student’s voice was hidden. In contrast, when a student commented on or established links between sources or links between the source and the student’s own study, the instance was identified as knowledge transforming along the vertical continuum. In these instances, the students’ disciplinary voices became visible through their active engagement with the sources; they used their sources to suit their own purposes in preparing the ground for their own study.

At the other end of the horizontal continuum are sections of the theses where students use sources to interpret and discuss their findings, thus transforming knowledge. In these sections, too, we found gradients of the visibility of the writer’s disciplinary voice. Instances of re-telling of a source’s interpretation – for example the interpretation of a historical event (ENGCULT) or a literary work (ENGLIT) –
without actively engaging with the source’s interpretation, indicated knowledge telling on the vertical continuum. In contrast, clear links between students’ findings or arguments and the ideas or findings of their sources demonstrated active engagement with others’ words and hence they were placed on the knowledge transforming end of the continuum.

To sum up, our analytical approach has been both deductive and inductive: deductive because of the theoretical assumptions the analysis was based on (Bakhtin’s citation and the reconceptualized terms of knowledge telling and transforming), and inductive through the data-driven approach that included repeated, open-minded reading, looking for several features and patterns of knowledge telling and transforming throughout the theses.

**Findings: The emerging disciplinary voices of student writers – examples of knowledge telling and knowledge transforming in three disciplines**

To understand how the disciplinary voices of the writers emerged, we examined the different gradients of engagement between the students and their sources or, in Bakhtinian terms, the ways they responded to the voices they used. The variations we found seem to relate to epistemological issues of the discipline and the students’ understanding of the bachelor’s thesis genre. However, we also found individual variations within the same thesis and across disciplines. We have selected examples from the bachelor’s theses that represent students’ various forms of engagement with sources, and we illustrate the complexity in the findings through these extracts from our data, referring to the model in Figure 2. We describe our interpretation of the extracts in detail to make our chain of thought transparent for the reader.

**Using sources to present the background of a study**

As shown in Figure 2, sources used in writing acts that provide background for a study are often used in a knowledge telling way where the writers report their sources’ ideas, for example presenting historical background, methodological approaches or theoretical ideas. Eli (ENGLIT) uses only one source in the entire section that describes the historical background of the two novels she is going to analyze, and much of that section seems to be mostly knowledge telling:
When writing about post-war British fiction Randall Stevenson describes how the Second World War has had a great impact on British fiction written in this period. Many modernist writers considered the First World War a “Cataclysm’ cutting across the previously ‘smooth road’ of history”, likewise the Second World War marked a break with the past for many postmodernist writers (434). Furthermore, The Second World War disturbed the sense of historical continuity and invoked a sense of fragmented temporality, which had a fundamental effect on the form of fiction (435). Finally, Stevenson emphasises how the war remained a moral centre of gravity throughout the century, making authors look back on the past and favour the retrospective as a narrative form (443). (Eli, ENGLIT)

The references behind almost every sentence indicate that Eli is re-telling what she found in that source. However, in the next paragraph, she expands on the ideas from the source, linking them to the two novels she intends to analyze, signaling knowledge transforming: *Time’s Arrow and Spies are postmodern novels in that this impact of the Second World War is evident both in their form and content. The primal events of both novels are located in ....*

In the next extract, we see Mona (MS), referring to two sources as the background for her method. She describes framing analysis, the approach she used in her analysis of newspaper articles:


Når man skal gjennomføre en innrammingsanalyse av innholdet blir det som vist av Kitzinger relevant a stille spørsmål som; Hvordan er problemet
definert? Hvordan er hovedaktørene portrettert? Hvem blir presentert som de ansvarlige? Hvilke løsninger er foreslått? Når man gjennomfører en slik innholdsanalyse brukes det også innholds og diskursanalyse til å identifisere forskjellige rammer som man mener blir fremmet. (Kitzinger, 2007, s. 139-140). (Mona, MS, original text in Norwegian)

Kitzinger writes about framing analysis. She describes ‘framing’ as something that refers to how we organize reality, [...]. The term is used to explain how we interpret our everyday encounters with our world. ‘Framing’ is also used to show how a newspaper frames a story or event. (Kitzinger, 2007, s.134). [...] Hornmoen writes that “it is about putting a subject or an issue in a suitable context to achieve a planned interpretation or understanding of the subject” (Hornmoen, 2011, s. 86).

Framing analysis as it is used in this assignment is based on content.
As shown by Kitzinger, when performing a frame analysis of the content, it is relevant to ask questions such as: How is the problem defined? How are the main actors portrayed? Who is presented as responsible? What kinds of solutions are suggested? When carrying out such a frame analysis, content and discourse analysis are also used to identify different frames which seem to be most prominent. (Kitzinger, 2007, s. 139-140). (Mona, MS, translated)

Mona describes framing analysis in a general way, re-telling what Kitzinger and Hornmoen have written about framing analysis. The only reference to her own study that points toward knowledge transforming is the sentence: Framing analysis as it is used in this assignment is ..., but Mona makes no clear “statement of use” (see Petrić, 2007, p. 244), about whether, how or to what purpose she used these sources, for example if she used Kitzinger’s questions in her analysis or which of these questions she used. Thus, this extract appears to be mostly knowledge telling where the sources’ voices are in the foreground.

Brit (ENGLIT) also refers to several sources, but in contrast to Mona, she establishes clear links between them while describing the background for her study:
Yet, Nixon also believes that it is not simply policy-makers but “writer-activists” who can play an important role in exposing this violence. “In a world permeated by insidious, unspectacular violence,” he argues, writers can bring attention to injustice and incite to change because “imaginative writing can make the unapparent appear, rendering it tangible by humanizing drawn-out calamities inaccessible to the immediate senses.” This view is supported by Kimberly A. Nance, who documents that research carried out by social psychologists proves that “reading about social injustice [in literary texts] can increase the likelihood of action to combat that injustice” (162). Stories engage readers’ feelings of empathy in a way statistics do not, and literature can be the first step that drives a person into understanding, caring and progressive action. The importance of this is emphasised by Judith Butler’s argument that losses that are not framed by story or narrative, that are surrounded by silence, dehumanise the victims and exacerbate the violence (24-25). (Brit, ENGLIT)

Brit uses three sources in this extract, each showing the relevance of her topic. Brit not only quotes and paraphrases words from the sources, but also clearly establishes links between the sources: This view is supported by..., this is emphasized by ... Brit not only re-tells the source’s view, she indicates the strength of the study she refers to: [Nance] documents that research carried out by social psychologists proves that.... This extract exemplifies how Brit establishes links between sources and shows how she uses those sources to transform knowledge and claim her own emerging voice.

These three examples from sections where the students describe the background of their study show variations of using sources and the students’ emerging voices. Even if the acts of describing the background of the study tend to be on the knowledge telling end of the horizontal continuum, the extracts show that there is not necessarily a clear distinction between knowledge telling and knowledge transforming; the examples show gradients on the vertical continuum between knowledge telling and transforming. Students’ emerging voices come through when they link the information from their sources to their own project, or when they
clearly establish links between the sources they have drawn upon, and when they use them for their textual argumentation.

**Using sources to interpret and discuss findings**

In our illustration (Figure 2, above), we placed acts of interpreting and discussing findings on the knowledge transforming end of the continuum. However, we also found instances of knowledge telling in writing acts of interpreting and discussing findings, especially in the theses from English Cultural Studies where students wrote about Thatcher or Churchill. Ken’s thesis question was: *How important was Winston Churchill’s wartime rhetoric for maintaining British Morale during the Second World War?* He answered his question by reporting ideas from secondary sources that described facts and interpreted events. In this sense, Ken’s thesis appeared to contain mostly knowledge telling, even in writing acts where we would expect – and even require – knowledge transforming. In this extract, Ken gives the impression that he is using sources to interpret and discuss events to answer his research question:

*He did not however, hide anything or step down in silence like Hitler and Mussolini when thing went wrong and he faced opposition*[^40]. *The public noticed, and there were widespread claims that “he’s not hiding things”[^41]. In reality this was not always the case, as he did hold back some information such as the sinking of the liner Lancastria with the loss of over 3000 lives for reasons of morale. Charts also confirms that the speeches made when Churchill had good news were the most popular ones[^42]. It is therefore fallacy to judge the impact his speeches by their literary quality. Historians have often made this mistake, by measuring the effect of the speeches at face value. Throughout the war Churchill gathered a large audience domestically, but he did not have this audience immediately*[^43]. (Ken, ENGCULT)

At first glance, Ken’s voice appears to be quite firm, making strong evaluations such as: *It is therefore fallacy to judge... Historians have often made this mistake.....* However, all of the references behind the sentences (40-43) revealed that these interpretations and evaluations were actually taken directly from the secondary
source that Ken used most in his thesis. Thus, Ken’s voice is not his own emerging voice, but an imitation and regurgitation of that secondary source’s voice.

Moreover, even though he seems to be aware of their importance, Ken uses no primary sources in his investigation of his research question. For example, in the introduction of his thesis he states that there is a wealth of great sources such as reports, research, polls and diaries that can help us in creating a picture of the civilian morale at the time, and what impact Churchill’s speeches made. Even though Ken lists many important primary sources, he does not make use of any of them in his investigation of his research question; he presents only secondary sources’ interpretations of these primary sources. It seems that he has not yet learned the importance of distinguishing between primary and secondary sources in his discipline nor has he learned the importance of engaging with his sources.

In contrast, we see the following example of knowledge transforming where the student, Eli, initially uses a (secondary) source to interpret her findings. Then she argues for her alternative interpretation, showing her disagreement with the source. The extract is from Eli’s analysis section, where she focuses on the use of first-person as a narrative technique:

According to Adam Glaz, the story is narrated from a third-person point of view; “The narrator and the protagonist share the same body; physically they are one. Yet, the story is told in the third person. The narrator, the protagonist’s alter ego, [...] refers to himself as me and the protagonist as him” (111). While Glaz is correct in his observation that the narrator refers to the protagonist in the third-person and since they share the same body it can in that sense be seen as a third-person narrative. Even so, I argue that this is a first-person narrative, albeit disrupted by the fact that the narrator and the protagonist are two distinct personas inhabiting the same body; “Something isn’t quite working: this body I’m in won’t take orders from this will of mine. Look around, I say. But his neck ignores me. [...] Are we okay?” (13). Although the narrator refers to the protagonist in the third person, this is still a first-person narrative; the narrator is internal to the story and refers to himself as ‘I’ and to the protagonist as ‘we’. (Eli, ENGLIT)
Eli starts the paragraph by re-telling Glaz’s interpretation: According to Adam Glaz,..., where Glaz gives reasons for interpreting the novel as narrated from a third-person point of view. Eli begins her reasoning by acknowledging the source’s interpretation: While Glaz is correct in his observation that the narrator refers to the protagonist in the third-person and since they share the same body,..., admitting that it would be a reasonable interpretation: it can in that sense be seen as a third-person narrative. Eli then argues explicitly for her own alternative interpretation: Even so, I argue that this is a first-person narrative, albeit disrupted by the fact that the narrator and the protagonist are two distinct personas inhabiting the same body. Eli here follows up and concurs with Glaz’s reasoning, referring to the fact that the narrator and the protagonist share the same body. She gives evidence for it through providing an extract from the novel: ‘Something isn’t quite working: this body I’m in won’t take orders from this will of mine. Look around, I say. But his neck ignores me’. [..] Are we okay?’ (13). Finally, Eli provides reasons for her interpretation of the novel as a first-person narrative: Although the narrator refers to the protagonist in the third person, this is still a first-person narrative; the narrator is internal to the story and refers to himself as ‘I’ and to the protagonist as ‘we’.

Eli engages actively with the source’s interpretation. Her own voice is clearly wrought out of the source’s voice and draws a clear boundary as she refutes the voice of the source. Hutchings, who has shown that referencing allows writers to take part in the communities’ discussion by agreeing or distancing themselves from other participants, would describe Eli’s active engagement as using the source “as a tool to the crafting of voice” (Hutchings, 2014, p. 323).

Showing disagreement with a source was unique; out of all of the 15 bachelor’s theses, we found only this single example. Mostly, sources were used to forward and support the writer’s own ideas or interpretations. Refuting a source requires a sense of authority, where writers put themselves on the same level as the acknowledged researcher. Humphrey and Economou (2015, p. 46) describe this as “the challenging of a theoretical notion or aspect of research in an external source, and the positioning of the reader to accept an authorial alternative/counter position”. The act of challenging might be intimidating for many bachelor students who are keenly aware
of their role as student writer and the “fine line between sounding appropriately authoritative and overstepping the limits of their authority” (Ivanič, 1995, p. 26).

**Discipline-specific differences**

Our analysis also revealed substantial differences between the bachelor’s theses in the different disciplines. This was not surprising, given the various ways knowledge is constructed in different disciplines and the diverse ways the bachelor’s thesis is framed in the different disciplines. In the bachelor’s theses from English Cultural Studies, sources were mostly used to present historical facts and events and to present sources’ interpretations of events, for example:

*As operation Seelöwe was postponed, the Luftwaffe now turned their attention to the cities of Britain. German bombers began dropping bombs at an increasing rate in night raids on British cities in hopes of crushing British morale*. Despite the resilience of the British people being severely tested, Churchill aimed his rhetoric mostly at neutral countries and people living under enemy occupation in hopes of gaining allies. There were however no signs of British collective morale cracking as a whole because of the German air raids. (Ken, ENGCULT)

Generally, the theses from English Cultural Studies seemed to be mostly knowledge telling, where the students re-told what they had found in their sources. Even though the act of finding relevant information in order to answer the research question can be considered as an act of transforming that requires thorough reading and selection, we would argue that the use of sources in English Cultural Studies was more telling than transforming of established knowledge.

This probably is due to the way these theses were framed. The English Cultural Studies theses were in the form of typical school assignments or essays. Questions as for example: “Was there a distinctive Thatcherite foreign policy in the 1980’s?” (Simen, ENGCULT) seem to invite knowledge telling. In contrast, questions in Media Studies were of a more investigative nature: “How can students at [the university] use ICT in a more sustainable way? What technological, social, cultural and institutional constraints has the idea of a transition to a greener computing
practice for those students?” (Berit, MS). Such questions are more conducive to knowledge transforming. In theses from English Literature we found research aims that focused on exploring, for example, “how slow violence and its victims are revealed through a selection of texts in different genres by writers from widely different places and backgrounds” (Brit, ENGLIT). These disciplinary differences in research questions and aims might explain why we found more examples and variations of knowledge transforming in the theses from English Literature and from Media Studies.

The bachelor’s theses from English Literature seemed to show both more variation and more knowledge transforming than their English Culture Studies counterparts. In English Literature theses we found more variation in using sources for different purposes. For example, sources were used to show the relevance of the topic, to describe the contextual background for the literary work, or to present theoretical terms or concepts. Most prominent was the use of sources for interpreting the literary works the students were analyzing, as in this example:

\[
\text{At first it may seem as if the narrator Stefan wants to distance himself from his younger self by referring to his younger self in third person; “I watch him emerge from the warped front door” (novel’s author’s name 12). According to Sargent this juxtaposition between the two can be seen as an invitation to compare the difference between the immature and the mature version of the narrator. (Eli, ENGLIT)}
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In addition to using secondary sources for interpretation, English Literature students showed extracts from the literary works (primary sources) to provide evidence for their statements and interpretations. Thus, in their interpretation of the literary works, the students established connections between theoretical concepts from secondary sources and the literary work itself. This is a transforming act where students construct their own voices through establishing connections between their primary source and theoretical terms and/or the interpretations from secondary sources (see Eli, ENGLIT above).
Most variation was found in the bachelor’s theses from Media Studies where sources were used in a wide range of writing acts as, for example, to show the relevance of the topic, to present previous research, to present theoretical terms or concepts, to describe and give reasons for their methodological approach, to interpret, discuss and compare findings. In the theses from Media Studies, we found the most instances of engagement with sources. Ruth, for example, investigated social functions of diet apps and interpreted her findings through the use of theoretical concepts:

Our use of diet apps might signal to our surroundings that we are engaged in health and well-being. The social functions also constitute a starting point for collective group identity among users of diet apps. This is relevant in both Jenkins’ (2004:21-23) theory and for Giddens (1991:94-99). The groups we belong to have significant importance for who we are, and they constitute an essential part of social life and one’s life history. For Jenkins, groups will be important for how other people interpret you as part of something, whereas for Giddens it is rather a matter of your own reflection about this group identification. (Ruth, MS, translated)

This is a clear act of knowledge transforming where the student applies theoretical terms and ideas to her data. She establishes links between sources through the comparison between Jenkins’ and Giddens’ theories, showing how different theoretical perspectives would give different interpretations of her data. Through this
reasoning and engaging with sources, Ruth’s disciplinary voice is quite clear and visible.

It should be noted that the disciplinary differences found in the bachelor’s theses in our study may be attributed to many different factors. These include differences between disciplines’ ways of producing knowledge, disciplinary practices, understanding of the genre, the educational setting and the students’ own position as student and/or researcher, and institutional conditions surrounding the bachelor’s theses (see Stock, 2017). As mentioned earlier, students in the English program wrote their theses as parts of their ordinary courses, and the genre they used resembled assignments/essays that the students wrote in these courses. This assumption was confirmed in a focus group interview with the faculty members/supervisors.

**Final discussion and implications**

The continua we developed illustrate and confirm the complexity of source use. They show that it is not only the function of a source in the performed writing act, but also the way the writer engages with the discipline’s theories, concepts and methods, that contribute to the emerging voice of the writer.

Bakhtin’s idea of the writers’ gradual appropriation of others’ words indicates that imitating other voices might be a necessary stage in the knowledge appropriation process where one’s own voice evolves step by step out of others’ words. Petrić (2007) noted that the ability to compare or be critical to sources presupposes a certain degree of acquisition of the field’s knowledge. Similarly, Blåsjö (2009) revealed that even experienced writers can have difficulty using sources for their own purposes when they write about knowledge from a field they are not familiar with. These developmental aspects of writing are reflected in terms such as “patchwriting” (Howard, 1995), or “interim literacies” (Paxton, 2007) where copying or imitating is regarded as a valuable stage in the appropriation process. Knowledge telling might be a necessary first step in the process of “disciplinary becoming” (see Dressen-Hammouda, 2008) where writers gradually develop their own position in a process from re-telling disciplinary knowledge to taking a stance towards that knowledge, using sources to position themselves as participants in a larger disciplinary
discussion. This is challenging even for master students, as Eriksson and Mäkitalo (2013) have shown in their study. Referencing requires “recognizing, recontextualising and repurposing others’ messages for the purpose of writing their own academic paper” (Eriksson & Mäkitalo, 2013, p. 173). Our findings suggest that this might be especially difficult for students on the bachelor level. Establishing links between sources, or links between the source’s ideas and student’s own purposes requires that students recognize relevant ideas in others’ work. Moreover, it requires an understanding of disciplinary ways of knowledge construction where the use of disciplinary theories, concepts and methods are crucial to developing and displaying one’s own disciplinary voice.

Another point that needs highlighting is that knowledge telling and knowledge transforming are connected to the genre at hand as well as to the discourse community’s practices and the teachers’ expectations. Some writing tasks seem to require knowledge telling, e.g., typical ‘school’ assignments whose purpose is to control whether the students have read required texts. Other genres, such as research papers, require knowledge transforming where the writer is expected to establish links between established knowledge and the new knowledge developed by the writer. In fact, for every genre, there are typical, conventionally-expected writing acts that vary across text sections, and the lines between telling and transforming knowledge are not clear-cut.

Hirvela and Du (2013) emphasize the need for writing instruction to support students’ knowledge transforming abilities/competences. Their findings indicate that too much focus on linguistic and technical aspects of paraphrasing can be misleading; such focus may confuse rather than help students understand how they can use sources for knowledge transforming purposes. To expand this line of thought, we suggest that talking about, and making explicit, various communicative functions of sources is more important than teaching technical aspects of source use. Learning to understand how knowledge is constructed in their discipline, may help students understand how building on the voices of the field is a crucial part of knowledge and voice construction in their own writing. Making the purpose of source use comprehensible to students and highlighting writing as participation in an
ongoing conversation can help students to use sources as conversation partners while they develop and demonstrate their own position and argument.

Recent studies have investigated writing instructions and stressed the importance of assignment design (e.g., Dagsland et al., 2023; Ofte & Otnes, 2021). Ofte and Otnes (2021), who analyzed assignment design in teacher education, focused on verbs such as describe, explain, reflect or discuss in writing instructions, i.e., types of writing acts the students were expected to perform in their assignments. Drawing attention to verbs or other aspects of assignment design is crucial, also when it comes to knowledge telling and knowledge transforming and the development of students’ disciplinary voices. For example, assignments that mainly require describing a term or a theory invite to knowledge telling, while instructions that require discussing are more conducive to knowledge transforming, using sources as conversation partners. Dagsland et al. (2023) have focused on writer roles and audience in their investigation of assignment design at school. They mention the ambiguous communication situation of writing in educational settings that students have to deal with: they are expected to write for a given or imagined audience while they also are writing for the teacher as an examiner. Also in higher education, it is important that teachers and supervisors design assignments that motivate knowledge transforming and encourage students to see themselves as authentic contributors to their field’s knowledge.

Since knowledge transforming – the writer’s engagement with sources – is intertwined with disciplinary ways of thinking and knowledge production, further research could investigate aspects of knowledge telling and transforming in various disciplinary fields. Similarly, different writers’ engagement with sources in different genres could provide useful insight into various ways of voice construction and how voice is linked to the disciplinary field and to genre.

How students understand the bachelor’s thesis genre, will influence their “possibilities of selfhood” (Ivanič, 1998) and their construction of voice(s). Understanding the thesis as an assignment and themselves as dutiful students in an educational setting, students might be concerned with memorizing, reproducing and demonstrating their knowledge to the teacher. On the other hand, by understanding
the thesis as a research paper and themselves as participants in an ongoing scholarly conversation, students might regard the voices of their sources rather as conversation partners and themselves as contributors to, and participants in, the ongoing conversation. It is important to treat source use “as a gate-opener rather than a gatekeeper to academe, as a liberator of voice” (Hutchings, 2014, p. 323). Instead of focusing on norms and rules for referencing, it would be more helpful for students to understand how they can use referencing as a tool to develop their own voice and agency.

Merely understanding sources as participants in an ongoing disciplinary dialogue is not sufficient. Students also need specific examples that illustrate the various functions of sources in different writing acts, and which show how sources can be used to shape their disciplinary voices. Revealing how different writers have treated other voices, as this study has done, can help students make deliberate choices in their writing and support their ways of constructing their voice.

We must keep in mind, however, that knowledge transforming and one’s own emerging disciplinary voice are not developed once and for all. The writer’s voice is never fixed; it is developed anew in every piece of writing.
Literature:


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