Shifts in discourse theory have often been accompanied by changed conceptions of *voice*. One shift occurred when this term, which had been used only for oral language, came to be used for written language too. *Voice* began referring to distinctive ways of writing associated with particular authors and thus became a near synonym for *style*. Not only did literary scholars examine the aesthetic qualities of particular authors’ language, but composition educators in the expressivist tradition of the 1960s and early 1970s called for novice writers to discover, and to write in, their own individual voices. Elbow (1973) put it this way, “In your natural way of producing words there is a sound, a texture, a rhythm—a voice—which is the main source of power in your writing. … [T]his voice is the force that will make a reader listen to you, the energy that drives the meaning” (p. 7).

This individualistic notion of voice is being questioned, and the concept of voice has become more complex in the past four decades. Today, attention is going to the multiplicity of voices associated with writing as well as to voice as a manifestation of writers’ discursive and relational identities (cf. Ivanič, 1998, 2005). The French poststructuralists made academics aware of the polyphony of written language, and Bakhtin’s (1981) notions of heteroglossia — the multiple, competing, and often conflicting voices that comprise a text — came to Western European as well as North American theory. Research into the social nature of writing has emphasized the various kinds of collaboration that are involved in writing, not only coauthorship but also response from those whom Reither and Vipond (1989) called “trusted advisors.” These activities have implications for a conceptualization of authorial voice. Also providing complications has been research into the use and appropriation of textual “sources” that is customary in academic writing (e.g., Nelson, 2001a; Spivey, 1990) and the changes that translators make when they transform a text for another linguistic community. Any analysis of the concept of voice must consider complexities
resulting from appropriation and transformation of other writers’ texts in the writing of a “new” text.

In this chapter, we consider the question of voice/s in light of research that we and others have conducted into social processes and cultural practices. Our purpose is to interrogate the concept of voice and to consider its complications, particularly as the construct relates to academic writing. We use the term academic writing to refer to writing produced in and for “the academy.” The concept thus encompasses the writing that scholars in academe produce as they engage in the knowledge-making practices of their disciplinary communities. It also refers to the writing of students who, as disciplinary neophytes, are learning — and are beginning to adopt — the forms and conventions of scholarly communication in their fields. Our attention is first on the nature of voice as it is projected and interpreted in written communication, particularly the complexities associated with authority and authenticity in academic writing. That leads to a focus on particular discourse markers, including metadiscourse and self-mention, which seem to communicate an authoritative and authentic voice but which vary across disciplines, languages, and cultures. That section is followed by a consideration of the complex challenges student writers face as they seek to adopt such features. After these discussions, attention goes to the complexity resulting from the mixing of voices and insertion of voices in other voices as academic writers engage in discourse practices. The conclusion draws from the previous sections to consider the matter of individual identity as well as social identity as these two constructs relate to voice.

**Voice Projected and Interpreted**

The complex and often elusive concept of voice refers to attributes associated with the writing of a single or collective writer. In referring to an individual, we might say, for instance, that a writer has an authoritative voice, a deferential voice, or a strident voice. Although written language signals voice for its author, it is important to note that voice is not somehow in the language of the text. Instead, a writer’s voice is inferred from textual cues by those who read the text; it is manifested in the social relation between writer and reader in a particular context. A writer may seek to project a certain kind of voice and make choices for writing that seem associated with that kind of voice, but voice is not realized until perceived by a reader.

**Readers’ Inferences**

This point about the role of readers was made by Matsuda (2001) when he defined voice as “the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users [appropriate], deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires” (p. 40, italics ours). In a subsequent article, Tardy and Matsuda (2009) described voice as a writer-reader negotiation “motivated” by the