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“Our Culture Will Not Really Allow That”: Rethinking Criticality in Academic Writing from an Intercultural Perspective



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Abstract

This study investigates how criticality, a central concept in academic writing, is understood and negotiated in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom within an intercultural and multilingual Indonesian context. Drawing on an intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL) framework, the study conceptualises criticality not as a fixed set of textual or cognitive skills, but as an intercultural and relational process of meaning-making. Using a qualitative, interpretivist design, data were collected from classroom interaction, including teacher–student dialogue, and analysed thematically across textual, interpersonal, and epistemological dimensions. The findings show that while criticality is introduced as a structured academic practice aligned with dominant Anglophone conventions, students interpret and enact it through culturally shaped practices such as indirectness, relational sensitivity, and mitigation. Classroom interaction reveals that within an ILTL perspective, criticality is realised through the intercultural processes of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and negotiating meaning, rather than through adherence to fixed academic conventions. At the same time, tensions persist between global academic expectations and students’ existing cultural frameworks. The study argues that understanding criticality requires attention to these intercultural processes and highlights the need to reconsider how academic writing is taught in multilingual contexts. Future research should examine how such understandings are realised in students’ written texts to provide a more comprehensive account of criticality in practice.

Keywords: Intercultural language teaching and learning, academic writing, EAP, criticality, Indonesia

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Introduction

The study aims to investigate how criticality, a central concept in academic writing, is understood and negotiated in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom within an intercultural and multilingual Indonesian context. Criticality is widely recognised as a key component of academic literacy, often associated with the ability to evaluate, synthesise, and construct arguments in relation to existing knowledge (Bruce, 2019; Liu et al., 2015; Wingate, 2012). Within EAP pedagogies, it is commonly framed as a set of transferable cognitive and textual skills that students are expected to acquire to participate effectively in academic discourse (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). However, despite its prominence, criticality remains a contested construct with no single, universally agreed definition (Davies & Barnett, 2015; Orfanò & Wingate, 2024). Such conceptualisations risk presenting criticality as a neutral and context-independent competence, overlooking the cultural, linguistic, and epistemological conditions that shape how it is understood and enacted (Lillis & Curry, 2010; Tang, 2012).

Recent scholarship has increasingly challenged these assumptions by emphasising the socially situated nature of academic writing. Research in academic literacies and intercultural language education shows that writing practices are shaped by different rhetorical traditions, communicative norms, and ways of knowing (Canagarajah, 2013; Hyland, 2016). Intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL), in particular, reconceptualises language as a process of meaning-making in which learners interpret and negotiate meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020). From this perspective, criticality is not simply a set of skills but involves negotiating different expectations about knowledge, evaluation, and communication (Byram, 2021). This position also aligns with critiques of monolingual and Anglophone-dominated models of academic writing, which often marginalise alternative ways of expressing critique and position multilingual learners as lacking rather than differently knowledgeable (Canagarajah, 2013; Kubota & Lehner, 2004).

Despite these developments, there remains limited empirical research examining how criticality is mediated and negotiated in classroom interaction, particularly in multilingual EAP contexts. Existing studies have largely focused on textual features of student writing or on abstract conceptualisations of critical thinking, with less attention to how meanings of criticality are constructed between teachers and students in real time (Arsyad, 2013; Arsyad & Adila, 2018; Du & Liu, 2021). Addressing this gap, this study adopts an ILTL-informed perspective to examine how criticality is enacted across textual, interpersonal, and epistemological dimensions in an Indonesian EAP classroom. It focuses on how teachers and students interpret and negotiate critique in interaction, and how this shapes the ways criticality is understood in academic writing.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Criticality in Academic Writing

Criticality is a key concept widely emphasised in the teaching and learning of academic writing (Bruce, 2019). Often framed as “critical thinking skills,” it remains an elusive construct with no single, universally accepted definition (Bruce, 2019; Davies & Barnett, 2015; Liu et al., 2015; Orfanò & Wingate, 2024; Wingate, 2012). This review examines how criticality has been conceptualised in academic writing across three interconnected dimensions, textual, interpersonal, and epistemological, to show how its meanings are shaped by the contexts in which it is taught and practised. Through exploring these dimensions, it becomes apparent that a fuller understanding of criticality requires attention to the cultural and linguistic diversity underpinning academic communication.

Textual Dimension of Criticality

Critical thinking in academic writing is frequently described in cognitive or textual terms as the ability to synthesise, evaluate, question, and challenge information to develop and justify arguments (Liu et al., 2015; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). This perspective, often reflected in academic writing textbooks and pedagogical frameworks, emphasises the structural and argumentative organisation of the text. From this view, criticality is demonstrated through coherence, logic, and the integration of sources in building a persuasive argument.

In this sense, criticality is defined as the capacity to construct, justify, and develop arguments in academic writing through the coherent organisation of ideas, the use and evaluation of evidence, and logical reasoning (Salter-Dvorak, 2016). It involves linking claims to supporting grounds and underlying warrants, demonstrating how ideas relate across the text, and engaging with knowledge in a way that shows informed and independent reasoning. Criticality therefore operates at a global level of meaning and argument structure, requiring writers to move beyond surface-level language accuracy and instead focus on how evidence is selected, interpreted, and integrated to build a persuasive and coherent argument.

However, understanding criticality predominantly through textual organisation can be limiting. It risks framing academic writing as a set of generic, transferable skills detached from its cultural and institutional contexts. Such an approach, often based on western, Anglophone rhetorical norms that prioritise explicit argumentation and linear reasoning, tends to treat these conventions as neutral and universally valid. As Lillis and Curry (2010) and Tang (2012) argue, this view normalises the dominance of English in global scholarship and presents its textual structures as default forms of “good” academic writing. In English as a medium of instruction (EMI) settings, courses like English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or Composition are widely used to teach academic conventions, including how to construct arguments. Yet these pedagogies often position criticality as a fixed skill derived from western contexts (Canagarajah, 2018), overlooking alternative ways of organising thought and argumentation. This suggests that even at the textual level, what counts as “critical” writing is not culturally neutral but bound to particular linguistic and cultural contexts.

Interpersonal Dimension of Criticality

Beyond textual organisation, criticality is realised through the interpersonal dimension of writing; how authors position themselves in relation to knowledge, sources, and readers. From this perspective, to be critical involves not only presenting logically structured arguments but also establishing a voice and stance toward existing scholarship. Hyland (2016) emphasises that academic writing is inherently interactional: writers express attitudes, weigh certainty, and engage with their disciplinary community through evaluative and stance-taking language.

Liu et al. (2015) note that effective critical writing balances synthesis and evaluation, such as integrating sources while signalling the writer’s stance through linguistic resources such as hedging and evaluative language. Similarly, Mhilli (2023) highlights how authorial voice emerges through interpretation and evaluation rather than mere description, allowing writers to construct their own position within scholarly debate. Evidence also suggests that students’ difficulties with criticality are closely tied to how they understand and enact stance. For instance, students often interpret criticality as expressing personal disagreement or strongly held beliefs, whereas lecturers expect more nuanced positioning grounded in evidence and engagement with sources (Butler & Britt, 2011; Wingate, 2012; Wolfe, 2011). This indicates that challenges in critical writing may stem not only from a lack of skills, but from differing understandings of how stance should be constructed in academic discourse.

Early research in English academic writing has also revealed the cultural politics underlying apparently “neutral” pedagogical practices. Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996), in their study of US Composition textbooks, demonstrate that foundational notions such as “voice” and “audience” are shaped by Anglo-American discourses of individualism and argumentation. Students are often encouraged to develop a unique authorial voice and to write with an awareness of an imagined audience that mirrors the teacher or an academic peer. However, such expectations assume a shared cultural understanding of self-expression and argument that may be unfamiliar or even contradictory to students socialised in different rhetorical traditions.

However, as with the textual dimension, the interpersonal realisation of criticality is shaped by dominant Anglophone expectations. Academic conventions often privilege explicit authorial stance, direct evaluation, and clear positioning, which may not align with the rhetorical traditions of multilingual writers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Consequently, students who adopt more implicit or cautious forms of evaluation may be perceived as lacking criticality, even when they are engaging meaningfully with ideas. This tension highlights that criticality is not only culturally situated in how texts are organised, but also in how voice, stance, and evaluation are expressed. It therefore becomes necessary to move beyond a purely linguistic or rhetorical understanding toward a broader perspective that accounts for cultural variation in meaning-making practices.

Epistemological and Social Dimension of Criticality

Criticality also operates at a broader epistemological and social level, where it is understood not just as a textual or interpersonal feature, but as a practice embedded within disciplinary and institutional structures. Bruce (2019) conceptualises criticality as evaluative judgement shaped by disciplinary standards and epistemic norms. In this view, critical writing is not simply about applying generic skills, but about learning how knowledge is valued, contested, and constructed within a particular community of practice. Atkinson (1997) similarly advocates for viewing critical thinking as a social practice rather than a universal cognitive ability, requiring awareness of how reasoning and evaluation are enacted differently across disciplines and traditions.

Research in academic literacies supports this perspective by framing writing as a social practice embedded in power relations and knowledge hierarchies. Writers are expected not only to demonstrate analytical ability but also to conform to dominant epistemological assumptions about what constitutes legitimate knowledge and argumentation. Studies such as those by Ogiermann and Wingate (2024) illustrate how knowledge is co-constructed through interaction, where participants negotiate epistemic authority and legitimacy in discourse. Yet these interactions are shaped by institutional practices that often privilege western modes of reasoning, argument, and critique. Omodan (2025) argues that such dominance reinforces the epistemic authority of western frameworks. This is particularly relevant within EMI and EAP settings where students are expected to adopt particular modes of critical engagement. As Hyland (2016), Kubota and Lehner (2004), and Zhang and Hyland (2025) observe, this imposition can marginalise students from other linguistic and epistemic backgrounds, positioning them as lacking rather than differently knowledgeable.

Toward a Contextualised Understanding of Criticality

Taken together, scholarship across these three dimensions shows that criticality, whether expressed through textual organisation, interpersonal stance, or epistemic evaluation, is not simply a neutral or universally applicable skill. Rather, it is mediated by the cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts in which academic writing is produced and taught. The recurring tensions identified in research, between cognitive and cultural views, implicit and explicit stance, and local and global epistemologies,

point to the need for a more contextualised understanding of criticality. Recognising its context-dependence invites educators and researchers to consider how diverse rhetorical and epistemic traditions shape what it means to write critically in academic settings. Such a perspective lays the groundwork for developing an intercultural understanding of criticality, one that values multiple ways of reasoning, evaluating, and constructing knowledge.

Academic Writing and Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning

The limitations identified in the preceding discussion point to the need for a reconceptualisation of academic writing, including the embedded concept of criticality, beyond monolithic, Anglophone-dominated norms. One productive way of addressing this is through the lens of intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL), which foregrounds the relationship between language, culture, and meaning-making. Rather than treating language as a neutral medium for transmitting knowledge, ILTL conceptualises it as a socially situated practice through which individuals interpret, negotiate, and construct meaning across cultural contexts (Byram, 2021; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020; Porto & Byram, 2015).

Liddicoat (2020) reconceptualises language learning within an intercultural framework by challenging traditional views that treat language as a discrete system to be acquired. Instead, intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL) positions language and culture as inherently interconnected and central to processes of meaning-making and interpretation. At its core, ILTL is grounded in the understanding that language learning involves not only acquiring linguistic forms but also developing the ability to interpret and engage with diverse cultural perspectives. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that this requires learners to move between their own linguistic and cultural frames of reference and those of others, engaging in processes of *noticing*, *comparing*, *reflecting*, and *interacting*.

Within Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) model of intercultural learning processes, *noticing* involves becoming aware of linguistic forms, cultural practices, and underlying assumptions that may otherwise be taken for granted, both in one's own and others' use of language. This awareness then leads to *comparing*, where learners actively examine similarities and differences between their own linguistic and cultural frameworks and those encountered in the target language. Through this process, learners begin to recognise that meanings are not universal but shaped by particular social and cultural contexts. *Reflecting* builds on this by encouraging learners to critically consider their own perspectives, values, and communicative practices in light of these differences, often leading to a questioning of previously held assumptions. Finally, reflection, in turn, leads to *interacting*, where learners actively engage with others using these emerging understandings to communicate, negotiate meaning, and reshape their interpretations through dialogue. Importantly, these processes are not linear or sequential but recursive and mutually reinforcing, forming an ongoing cycle through which learners continually develop more sophisticated intercultural understanding.

Liddicoat (2019, 2024) suggests that these intercultural processes themselves contain inherent potential for criticality, particularly as learners "decentre" from their taken-for-granted assumptions and come to understand how meanings, perspectives, and ways of knowing are shaped by linguistic and cultural contexts. Criticality therefore develops through processes of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and negotiating meaning across diverse cultural frames. Within ILTL, the focus is not on acquiring a predetermined form of critique but on developing the capacity to understand how meanings, values, and communicative practices are culturally situated and consequential for interaction. This positions criticality as an integral component of intercultural learning rather than a separate cognitive skill. Such an understanding has important implications for academic writing, where meaning-making is often treated as stable, standardised, and governed by universal conventions. An intercultural orientation

challenges this assumption by foregrounding the interpretive, negotiated, and context-dependent nature of writing practices, thereby opening space to reconsider how criticality is conceptualised and enacted in academic discourse. This perspective also raises questions about the linguistic and epistemological assumptions underpinning dominant models of academic writing, particularly the extent to which they privilege monolingual and Anglophone norms.

One influential perspective that resonates with these concerns is Canagarajah's (2012, 2013) translingual perspective, which argues that the dominant models of academic writing marginalise the linguistic and rhetorical resources of multilingual writers. He proposes a translingual orientation, which departs from monolingual assumptions by rejecting the idea that languages exist as separate, self-contained systems. Instead, translingual practice conceptualises communication as transcending individual languages, drawing on multiple semiotic and ecological resources in meaning-making (Canagarajah, 2012). From this perspective, linguistic resources are fluid, interconnected, and co-constructive, with multilingual writers negotiating meaning through their full linguistic repertoires in situated contexts. This emphasis on negotiation, interpretation, and meaning-making aligns closely with ILTL's view of language learning as an intercultural process in which learners draw on diverse linguistic and cultural resources to understand, mediate, and construct meaning across contexts.

Empirical research on academic writing further supports the view that writing practices are culturally shaped and interpreted. For example, Du and Liu (2021), in a longitudinal study of Chinese undergraduate students, found that paraphrasing was not understood merely as linguistic reformulation, but as a broader practice involving summarising, reorganising, and demonstrating comprehension of source texts. Students' understandings evolved over time through engagement with academic tasks and instruction, suggesting that writing conventions are learned as situated practices rather than fixed rules. Similarly, Arsyad and Adila (2018), in their analysis of English-medium research article introductions by Indonesian authors, found distinct patterns in citation practices, including a preference for non-integral citations and present tense forms when referring to prior research. These patterns indicate that writers draw on locally shaped rhetorical practices even when writing in English. Further genre-based research by Arsyad (2013) demonstrates that while Indonesian research articles may share overall structural similarities with Anglophone models, they also exhibit distinctive discourse features in how methodological information is presented.

In line with the discussion above, this paper conceptualises criticality in academic writing as a relational practice rather than a fixed set of textual, cognitive, or interpersonal skills. While criticality may be realised through textual organisation, evaluative stance, and epistemic engagement, these dimensions are understood as culturally and linguistically situated rather than universally defined. This conceptualisation aligns with ILTL, which recognises that meanings, perspectives, and ways of knowing are shaped by particular linguistic and cultural contexts and are continually interpreted and negotiated (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). It is from this perspective that this research aims to understand criticality in academic writing.

While the body of research in academic writing discussed above (Arsyad, 2013; Arsyad & Adila, 2018; Du & Liu, 2021) provides valuable insights into how writing practices such as paraphrasing, citation, and genre organisation are interpreted across contexts, it tends to focus predominantly on observable textual features and developmental processes. There remains limited attention to the underlying epistemological and intercultural dimensions that inform how these practices are understood and enacted by learners. Therefore, this study seeks to extend existing research by examining how criticality in academic writing is shaped through students' existing epistemological orientations and multilingual resources. It aims to contribute to more nuanced, context-sensitive understandings of academic writing in intercultural language education.

Methodology

Research Design and Orientation

The study aims to answer the research question: *How is criticality, a central concept in academic writing, understood and negotiated in an EAP class within an intercultural and multilingual Indonesian context?* It looks at how the teacher mediates between the dominant academic discourses of criticality and students' local cultural frameworks in classroom interaction.

This study adopts a qualitative design and implements an interpretivist perspective (O'Donoghue, 2019), seeing reality as subjective, plural, and socially constructed. From this standpoint, knowledge is understood as emerging through social interaction and shaped by participants' cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts. Such an orientation is particularly appropriate for this study, as it seeks to explore how criticality is not simply transmitted as a fixed set of skills, but is interpreted, negotiated, and enacted differently by teachers and students within an intercultural classroom.

This study forms part of the broader inquiry into the affordances of ILTL (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020) in Indonesia's English language education (Setiawan, 2023, 2026a, 2026b). These existing studies argue that English language education in Indonesia must move beyond monolingual, native-speaker, and western-centric models by validating students' multilingual and multicultural realities through an intercultural perspective in languages education.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a private Indonesian university offering English-medium transnational programs in partnership with a U.S. university. English is the primary language of instruction in these programs; however, both teachers and students are multilingual, commonly drawing on Indonesian, English, and various regional languages in their everyday communication. This multilingual environment reflects the complex linguistic ecology in which academic writing is taught and learned.

The selected course, *Composition I*, is a compulsory first-year writing subject to students from all majors and modelled on a U.S. freshman composition syllabus. The course is designed to develop students' ability to produce academic essays aligned with Anglo-American rhetorical conventions, with a strong emphasis on grammatical accuracy, coherence, and linear, logically structured argumentation. As such, it represents a context where dominant academic discourses of criticality are explicitly taught, often as standardised and transferable skills.

The focal participant, referred to here by the pseudonym *Ciweka*, is a local Indonesian lecturer holding a master's degree in TESOL, with six years of experience teaching academic writing. He volunteered to participate in the ILTL-informed intervention and consented to classroom observation and audio recording. Ciweka's multilingual repertoire includes English, Indonesian, and Javanese, and his pedagogical orientation reflects both an alignment with established western EAP conventions and an openness to incorporating intercultural and locally grounded perspectives into his teaching. As *Composition I* was open to students from all disciplines, Ciweka's class consisted of students from various majors. Students in this class had either passed the required Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) or taken the pre-requisite English classes, and their English level was considered college-ready. All students were local (Indonesian) and spoke one or two local dialects as well as the national language of *Bahasa Indonesia*.

Ciweka's classroom therefore provided a particularly productive site for examining how criticality is mediated at the intersection of global academic expectations and local linguistic and cultural resources. Specifically, it enabled an exploration of how the teacher navigates tensions between standardised models of academic writing and students' diverse ways of meaning-making, and how these tensions are negotiated through classroom interaction. In this sense, the classroom functions as a space where criticality is not merely transmitted, but actively co-constructed, interpreted, and recontextualised within an intercultural and multilingual setting.

The focus of this study is how the teacher navigated the understanding of criticality from an intercultural perspective. Therefore, Ciweka was the main participant in the study. Nevertheless, extracts in the findings section will include voices from the students, as complementary to the analysis of classroom interaction. These student contributions are drawn from naturally occurring classroom discourse and are used to illustrate how meanings of criticality were co-constructed in interaction, rather than to position students as individual participants in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The broader study in which this study is a part of (Setiawan, 2023, 2026a, 2026b) incorporated interventions that were collaboratively designed by the researcher and the teacher participants. The interventions integrated features of ILTL, mainly the recognition of the roles of students' lifeworlds such as their existing languages and cultures, prior knowledge, and daily experiences in students' learning of English (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Scarino, Kohler & Benedetti, 2014), into the existing pedagogy. For this particular paper, the intervention centred on conceptual learning of criticality in Composition I that Ciweka taught. Sequenced activities were designed to scaffold students' understanding of critique across cultural frameworks, drawing on local and global understanding of academic writing.

Ciweka enacted the intervention for one 70-minute lesson. His enactment involved teacher explanation, guided discussion, and interactive questioning designed to elicit students' reflections on criticality in their cultural experience. Multiple data sources were used to capture the interpretation of criticality including classroom video and audio recording (the study was conducted during the CoVID-19 pandemic, so lessons were conducted online), observation notes, and a debriefing interview with Ciweka.

Data in this study also included transcription of interactions between Ciweka and his students. All data were collected with informed consent following the ethics committee's approval. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the teacher, students and identifying institutional details have been omitted. Data analysis followed an iterative, interpretive process. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2022) was conducted in line with key points discussed in the literature review, particularly in terms of dimensions of criticality in academic writing and main features of ILTL. Coding and themes were generated based on three interconnected dimensions of criticality: textual, interpersonal, and epistemological/social, while also considering the ILTL processes that mediate these dimensions, such as decentring, reflecting, and negotiating meaning.

The researcher's positionality was integral to the interpretive process. Having previously worked in the research site and in the Indonesian higher-education EAP programs, the researcher shared cultural and linguistic backgrounds with participants while also occupying an academic position within an Australian university context. This dual positioning facilitated empathy and access but also required ongoing reflexivity to mitigate potential bias. Reflexive notes were maintained throughout data collection and analysis to record interpretive decisions and prevent biases.

Findings

This section analyses how Ciweka, an Indonesian English lecturer, negotiated the concept of criticality in his academic writing classroom. The analysis draws on short extracts from the classroom transcript provided in the Appendix. The following sections examine how this broad, everyday understanding of criticality is mediated and reconfigured across the textual, interpersonal, and epistemological dimensions of academic writing, as Ciweka and his students negotiate its meaning within an intercultural classroom context. These dimensions are consistently shaped by ILTL processes, particularly decentring, noticing, reflection, comparison, and negotiation of meaning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020), as the teacher and students move between local cultural understandings and dominant academic expectations.

Criticality as Textual Practice within Dominant Academic Conventions

It appears that criticality in academic writing in Ciweka's class as textual practice. At the textual level, criticality is primarily framed as a set of structured, observable writing practices aligned with western academic conventions. For example, Ciweka introduces critique as a structured academic practice, explaining that students should "*come up with a systematic way*" of evaluation by identifying "*what is good about the paper*" as well as its limitations (Extract e). He further models this process through a sequenced approach: "*First is this. Second is this. Third is this.*" This reflects the dominant conceptualisation of criticality as involving skills such as evaluation, synthesis, and logical argumentation (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Liu et al., 2015).

This emphasis on textual conventions is also evident when Ciweka reminds students that they must be familiar with "*four types of sentences*" and that "*all of these constructions are needed to write down a set of paragraphs*" (Extract f). He further stresses the importance of paragraph organisation, titles, and subtitles. Such comments position academic writing as a codified system that requires mastery of formal linguistic and organisational structures, reinforcing a view of criticality as something demonstrated through adherence to established textual conventions. This textual dimension affirms that the teaching and learning of academic writing is normatively constrained, reflecting the continued dominance of western rhetorical models in EAP contexts (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Criticality as Interpersonal Stance: Negotiating Evaluation and Voice

The data also illuminate the interpersonal dimension of criticality in Ciweka's *Composition I* class. At this level, criticality is realised through stance-taking, that is, how students position themselves in relation to others' ideas, knowledge, and authority. However, the findings indicate that, in this Indonesian academic writing classroom, such stance-taking is neither straightforward nor simply adopted from dominant academic norms. Rather, it is experienced as socially and culturally mediated, shaped by relational considerations and affective responses.

In attempting to express stance, both Ciweka and his students foreground these interpersonal and affective dimensions. Ciweka explicitly draws attention to this by asking students how they feel when offering criticism: "*Do you feel okay? Do you feel reluctant? Do you feel aduh malu, aduh ga enak* [embarrassed, not feeling good about it]?" (Extract b). By asking students whether they feel *malu* or *ga enak* when offering criticism, Ciweka encourages ILTL processes such as *reflection* on their own cultural and emotional responses to critique as well as creating opportunities for *noticing*, as students become aware of assumptions about evaluation that might otherwise remain implicit. These expressions highlight the emotional and interpersonal risks associated with critique in this context. The reluctance to express evaluation suggests that maintaining social harmony is highly valued, and that taking

an explicit stance in academic writing may not be a straightforward or culturally neutral practice for students. In this sense, academic writing is inherently interactional, with stance shaped by social relationships and expectations rather than purely individual cognition (Hyland, 2016).

This example demonstrates that the interpersonal dimension of criticality is not simply about adopting explicit, assertive stance as prescribed in dominant academic writing conventions. Rather, it involves the negotiation of voice and evaluation across cultural norms, where mitigation and relational sensitivity (such as reluctance) play a central role. Students' hesitation, therefore, should not be interpreted as a lack of criticality, but as an indication that they are enacting criticality through different interpersonal resources that may not align with dominant expectations (Hyland, 2016; Liu et al., 2015).

Criticality as Epistemological and Socio-cultural Negotiation

The interactions between Ciweka and his students in Composition I show that criticality is mostly understood and discussed at the epistemological and social dimensions. Overall, these extracts indicate that Ciweka and his students used the terms *critique*, *criticism*, and *giving feedback* interchangeably under the umbrella of criticality. This interchangeable use of terms suggests that criticality is not conceptualised as a discrete or clearly bounded construct, but rather as a broad, everyday practice encompassing evaluation, response, and commentary. In this sense, criticality is framed less as a specialised academic skill and more as a familiar social activity, albeit one that is recontextualised within academic writing. Such a framing reflects the epistemological dimension of criticality, where meanings of critique are shaped by participants' prior experiences and cultural understandings of evaluative practices, rather than derived solely from formal academic definitions.

Ciweka also links criticality to engagement with disciplinary discourse, arguing that students “*need to come up with lots of readings*” and that exposure to multiple texts helps develop “*the style, the idea, and also the objective of writing itself*” (Extract g). He further suggests that students should read extensively because it enriches both their understanding of the topic and their familiarity with academic language and conventions. In this view, criticality emerges through participation in disciplinary practices and engagement with existing knowledge rather than through the application of decontextualised skills alone. This echoes Bruce's (2019) assertion that criticality in academic writing should be disciplinary contextualised, arriving from the argument that critical thinking is a social practice (Atkinson, 1997).

Ciweka also attributes students' challenges in academic writing to the influence of their existing linguistic and rhetorical resources, noting that “*we've got a strong influence from our first language*” and that conventions surrounding the “*completeness of ideas*” in sentences and paragraphs continue to present difficulties (Extract h). This was evident in Ciweka's interaction with his students, where he contrasted local cultural practices with academic expectations of critique, explaining that “*our culture ... will not really allow that ... People tend to keep silent*” whereas in the “*Western academic concept, critique is important*” and “*required*” (Extract a).

The interaction suggests that students approach academic writing through meaning-making frameworks shaped by their prior linguistic and cultural experiences. Ciweka's observation that students are influenced by their first language highlights the need for *decentring*, as learners engage with alternative ways of organising ideas and constructing arguments in academic writing. From this perspective, criticality involves more than mastering academic conventions; it also entails negotiating between existing ways of organising and expressing knowledge and those expected within dominant academic discourse.

In addition, the extracts further point to the social dimensions of criticality, where critique is understood and enacted through culturally embedded practices. Students' responses demonstrate how criticality is interpreted through familiar social norms and communicative conventions. Rina illustrates this orientation through the "burger method", explaining that feedback begins with "*appreciation*", followed by the "*main feedback*", and concludes by giving the recipient "*trust*" and encouragement (Extract c). Here, critique is not conceptualised as direct or explicit evaluation, but as a socially appropriate practice that maintains interpersonal harmony and supports the interlocutor. This contrasts with the dominant expectations of explicit stance-taking and direct evaluation (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996), highlighting that what counts as "appropriate" critical engagement is culturally shaped.

A similar understanding emerges in the discussion of Iwan Fals' song. A student, Sri, observes that Iwan Fals expresses criticism in a "*humorous way*" and "*not literally directly*" (Extract d). Rather than viewing critique as explicit disagreement, students interpret it as something that can be communicated indirectly through culturally familiar forms of expression such as humour and music. Ciweka's validation of this interpretation suggests that such alternative understandings of critique are not dismissed but brought into the classroom as legitimate resources for meaning-making and understanding concepts in academic writing.

Discussion: Criticality as Intercultural and Relational Practice

The findings suggest that, when mediated through pedagogical interventions informed by intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL), criticality in academic writing cannot be reduced to the textual dimension alone. While conventional EAP approaches tend to frame criticality as a set of transferable textual skills, such as argument structure, evaluation, and coherence (Salter-Dvorak, 2016), the data demonstrate that criticality is also fundamentally shaped by interpersonal and epistemological processes of meaning-making, which are activated through intercultural engagement.

In Ciweka's classroom, the intervention foregrounds key ILTL processes, particularly *decentring*, *noticing*, *comparing*, and *reflecting* (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020). This is most evident when Ciweka contrasts local cultural practices with academic expectations, explaining that "*our culture ... will not really allow that ... People tend to keep silent*" whereas in the "*Western academic concept, critique is important*" and "*required*" (Extract a). This moment simultaneously involves *decentring*, as students are invited to move beyond their familiar cultural frame, *comparison*, as two systems of meaning are juxtaposed, and *reflection*, as Ciweka explicitly prompts them to "reflect" on these differences.

Similarly, in Extract b, when students are asked whether they feel *malu* or *ga enak* when offering criticism, the focus shifts to reflecting on personal and affective experiences, making visible how critique is shaped by social and cultural norms. Rather than presenting critique as a fixed academic norm to be acquired, these pedagogical shifts position it as something to be interpreted in relation to students' existing cultural frameworks. This shifts the focus from reproducing textual conventions to engaging with interpretive processes, where meanings of criticality are explored, questioned, and reconfigured.

Such an orientation reflects ILTL's view of language as a socially situated practice of meaning-making, rather than a neutral system of forms (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Within this perspective, learning to write critically involves not only acquiring linguistic and rhetorical resources, but also developing the capacity to interpret and mediate between different ways of knowing and evaluating knowledge. The interpersonal dimension, particularly stance-taking, becomes a site where students negotiate how to position themselves in relation to others' ideas, as seen in their expressed reluctance to critique (Extract b), while the epistemological and social dimension involves reflecting on what counts as legitimate critique across contexts, as made explicit in Extract a.

At the same time, the data show that students actively draw on their existing cultural and communicative repertoires to make sense of academic critique. In Extract d, for example, students analyse how critique is expressed in Iwan Fals' song through humour and indirectness. This moment illustrates *noticing*, as students attend to how critique is realised through culturally specific forms, as well as *comparison*, as these forms are implicitly contrasted with more direct academic expectations. Similarly, Rina's explanation of the "burger method" (Extract c) demonstrates how evaluation is organised through mitigation and encouragement, reflecting culturally grounded ways of managing interpersonal relations. These examples show that students interpret critique through familiar communicative practices, rather than simply adopting academic norms. This aligns with ILTL's emphasis on learners as active agents who co-construct meaning through interaction (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Rovagnati & Pitt, 2022), as well as with translingual perspectives that conceptualise communication as fluid and adaptive across linguistic resources (Canagarajah, 2012, 2013).

The findings also demonstrate that criticality emerges when learners become aware of differences between their own assumptions and alternative ways of understanding critique, reflect on the implications of these differences, and reconsider how they position themselves in relation to others. In this sense, the students are not simply learning about the criticality as a fixed academic structure; they are engaging in criticality through intercultural reflection. This finding resonates with Liddicoat's (2019, 2024) conception of critical intercultural learning, which views criticality as emerging through engagement with linguistic and cultural difference rather than through the acquisition of discrete evaluative skills. In Liddicoat's (2019, 2024) critical intercultural learning, criticality is realised through processes of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and decentring, as learners examine taken-for-granted assumptions and develop awareness of alternative ways of knowing and meaning-making. The classroom interactions therefore demonstrate that criticality is realised through the same processes that underpin intercultural learning, making the relationship between ILTL and criticality mutually constitutive rather than separate.

Importantly, the findings also highlight persistent tensions between global academic expectations and local cultural practices. While Ciweka introduces critique as a structured academic practice (Extract e), this coexists with students' culturally grounded orientations toward indirectness and relational harmony (Extracts b–d). The tension echoes existing studies that highlight challenges in implementing pedagogies that challenge a monolingual paradigm in languages education due to the high-stake order and pervasiveness of the existing dominant paradigm (Wang & Ai, 2024). This suggests that academic writing pedagogy needs to be reconceptualised within an ILTL framework, where criticality is understood as an intercultural process of meaning-making and negotiation rather than a fixed set of universal norms.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that criticality in academic writing, when viewed through an intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL) lens, cannot be understood as a fixed set of textual or cognitive skills. Rather, it emerges as an intercultural and relational practice, shaped through processes of interaction, interpretation, and negotiation across linguistic and cultural frameworks. The findings show that students do not simply adopt dominant academic conventions of critique but actively mediate these expectations through their existing epistemological orientations and communicative repertoires. Within an ILTL perspective, criticality is realised through the intercultural processes of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and negotiating meaning, rather than through adherence to fixed academic conventions. Consistent with Liddicoat's (2019, 2024) conception of critical intercultural learning, criticality emerges when students notice differences between academic and local understandings of critique, reflect on their own assumptions, and negotiate alternative interpretations. The findings

therefore position criticality as an intercultural process of meaning-making through which learners develop awareness of self, others, and the cultural situatedness of knowledge.

At the same time, this study has several limitations. The analysis is primarily based on classroom interaction data, including teacher explanations, student responses, and discussions, rather than on students' written artefacts. While such interactional data provide valuable insights into how criticality is conceptualised, negotiated, and understood, they do not fully capture how these understandings are subsequently enacted in students' academic writing. As a result, there remains a gap between what students say about criticality and how they perform it in their written texts. Future research would benefit from incorporating students' written assignments and drafts as data sources, allowing for a more comprehensive examination of how criticality is realised across both discourse and text.

Building on this limitation, further studies could adopt a cross-analytical approach that triangulates classroom interaction with students' written artefacts and their reflections on writing. Such an approach would enable researchers to trace the relationship between students' stated understandings of criticality and their actual writing practices, providing deeper insight into how intercultural processes are materialised in texts. This would not only strengthen the empirical basis of research in this area but also contribute to more robust pedagogical implications for ILTL-informed academic writing instruction, particularly in addressing the tensions between global academic expectations and locally grounded ways of meaning-making.

Use of Generative AI

This manuscript made use of ChatGPT to assist in improving the clarity of text. No AI tools were used for the generation of research hypotheses or the writing of conclusions. The final manuscript was authored and reviewed by the author without additional AI input.

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Appendix

Extracts from Ciweka's Classroom Observation

a.

... critique is actually everywhere in our life. I'm sure that you're familiar with that also. Feedback [or] critique is something common. However, our culture is not really ... will not really allow that a lot, yeah. I mean, somehow that people feel not only reluctant to provide critiques because the culture does not really accommodate that. People tend to keep silent. But in terms of [western] academic concept, critique is important. Critique is required. Critique is also, what do you call that, very important. So, now I want you to reflect [on] that, would like to discuss a little bit in this. (Ciweka's intervention, October 2021).

b.

How do you offer criticism? I want one to three of you to answer that. And how do you feel, for example, when you offer such feedback or critique to your teacher? Do you feel okay? Do you feel reluctant? Do you feel "aduh malu, aduh ga enak [embarrassed, not feeling good about it]" (Ciweka's intervention, lesson 1, October 2021).

c.

I wanna try probably. [laughing] For me, how do I offer criticism in terms of education, ya, or teaching learning process. I think sometimes I offer feedback or criticism to someone or my students using the burger method, if you're familiar with that. The burger method. We know that at the top of, at the top of the burger we have the bun or the patty. So, actually the first is mmm ... I deliver the appreciation, or appreciate anything that they already done like ... You already done good. There is a great job, and etc. Just to keep them motivated. And they will feel appreciated for their effort. And then the main one is the filling of the burger like we have the chicken or the beef, etc. So, it's kinda like the main feedback that we wanna deliver for them, like which area that the student should improve and what they can do to ... yeah to improve or to become better later on. And then we can also give like the deadline probably. Sometimes I'm waiting for bla bla bla. And the last one is the ... penutupnya lah, alasnya [the base]. Bun yang ada di bawah [at the bottom]. Itu kita bisa [there we could be] giving mmm like I do really hope that you can do this more so ... Kita memberikan mereka sebuah kepercayaan [we give them trust]. It's kinda like trust. So, they, they feel more, oh, berarti aku dipercaya, gitu ya [trusted]. Ok I can do this. Kaya gitu. Saya bisa percaya kalau kamu bisa, kok [Like that. I believe I can do it]. Simple like that as a closing. Sometimes, the thing that I did is like that, the burger method. (Rina in Ciweka's intervention, October 2021).

d.

[the song playing]

[Ciweka reading the Indonesian lyric]

Ciweka So, what do you think? Any comments on this?

Riska I think the song is more like for the government, Sir.

Ciweka Ya, for the government, yes. Exactly. And the way, look, the way

Iwan Fals come up with his criticism. Caranya bagaimana menyampaikan kritik [the way he expressed critique], what do you think?

- Sri Hallo, Sir.
- Ciweka Yes. Go on, Sri.
- Sri I think Iwan Fals is one of a famous legend like ... A legend that, who creates song, a criticism song for the government. Like Slank in the ... Kaya jaman-jaman dulu gitu, Sir. [Like in the old times]
- Ciweka Good, good, yes.
- Sri And I think, he is critiquing the government in humorous way. Like, he added ehm di liriknya itu kaya kelucuan-kelucuan gitu [humour in the lyric] but actually it's criticism gitu, Sir. Not literally directly "this is criticism for the government, but I'm just singing, I'm just expressing my opinion, my idea, my criticism. 'Gitu', Sir [like that].
- Ciweka Very good, very good. So, this criticism is not about for teachers, but for government.

(Ciweka's intervention, October 2021)

e.

Now, let's come back to writing a critique, actually. Nah, this is the one that I would like to introduce later on. What do you know about how to write critique or reaction paper or feedback paper? ... we need to come up with a systematic way by, for example, mentioning what is good about the paper ... So, you try to identify that. First is this. Second is this. Third is this. Yeah. Kemudian [Then], Hyland and Tse also base their critique on their own corpus, yeah derived from a certain ... But later on, Hyland and Tse do however identify problems concerning to this, yeah. Their conclusion through is this: such students and so on and so on. (Ciweka's intervention, October 2021).

f.

Well, this is what I would like to always try with the students. The idea to have that complete idea or complete thought in one single paragraph. And sentences, for example, there are four types of sentences, I always try to remind them. There are four types of sentences. And they have to be familiar with that: what's called a simple sentence, compound sentence, complex compounds, complex sentence. All of these constructions are needed to write down a set of paragraphs, for example, in one paragraph. And again, when we go with the paragraphs, again, then title is important and the title subtitle is important. (Ciweka, debriefing interview, November 2021).

g.

... they [students] need to come up with lots of readings. That's, I think, their source. And I mean, by having enough information references, it would help them actually to be able to write that more again ... Probably, that becomes an issue when they don't really read a lot. Or what do you call that, they need some more exercise on reading, and then be familiar with certain expression. This is what I did actually, like this morning, I showed them how to write down for example, methods how to express that. Indeed, I have to show that and ask them to look, this is the example, this is some common expressions to do. And let's try to practise that ... Basically, what I would like to say, they still need to have some reading exercise, to equip them with some references. So, then they are able to write that better, not only grammatically correct, but also the style, the idea, and also the objective of writing itself should be increased.

They need to, for example, read at least 15 papers in order to write down an academic journal, academic paper, rather than, for example, only 4. That's not enough. It will enrich not only the idea or the issue being discussed, but also the language styles, the vocabulary style that people use in academic

paper should be well introduced. So, they can, for example, automatically remember that and they can use them in the writing itself. (Ciweka, debriefing interview, November 2021).

h.

Well, I mean, we've got a strong influence from our first language ... For students, I think the influence of Indonesian language, of course, that happens a lot ... I think conventions and also completeness of ideas in for example one sentence, one paragraph [within the Indonesian language system and the western academic context], still become a big issue. I think that's strong influence from our own language. (Ciweka, debriefing interview, November 2021).