



Academic Networking in Transition: Mapping Trajectories of Mobility and Precarity

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Abstract

This study investigates how academics in precarious transition develop and adapt academic networks to support writing for publication amid institutional instability and geographic mobility. Drawing on longitudinal data from three displaced scholars, including interviews, feedback interactions, and repeated Academic Network Plots, we analyze changes in network size, structure, and function. Across cases, network development is explained by three integrated moves: (1) targeted initiation with selective pruning: purposeful outreach aligned with publishing aims while de-prioritizing less productive ties; (2) value brokering with role repositioning through reciprocal collaborations; and (3) durability orientation via structuring follow-ups and outputs (co-authorships, revision cycles, grants) to stabilize ties despite mobility. These moves function as counterstrategies to the epistemic marginalization described in centre–periphery research, showing how scholars under precarious conditions reshape their trajectories despite structural hierarchies. We extend research on academic networking by showing how precarity shapes both access to networks and scholars’ positions within them. We offer a transition-sensitive framework that integrates structural and functional change with

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temporality, brokerage, and mobility. Implications are outlined for mentoring design, institutional support, and equitable participation in global knowledge production.

Keywords

academic networking, academic precarity, academic mobility, symmetrical collaboration, collaborative writing, feedback negotiations

Introduction

Writing for research publication is not only a textual process but also a relational one, shaped by evolving constellations of relationships between scholars as well as between scholars and institutions that facilitate access to resources, feedback, and opportunities for development. These constellations, known as academic networks, connect academics to disciplinary knowledge, publishing practices, and collaborative opportunities, and they play a central role in shaping research visibility, productivity, and access to professional advancement (Casanave, 1998; Lillis & Curry, 2010; Liu & Buckingham, 2025). In academic networks, the actual relationships, also known as ties, can be shaped by both institutional structures and informal exchanges (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2001); they can vary in strength, formality, durability, and function (e.g., text production support, publishing guidance, networking facilitation). Understanding which ties persist and why is central to understanding the social dynamics of writing for publication, specifically understanding how scholars interpret, navigate, and sustain academic relationships under various constraints.

Curry and Lillis (2010) show how access to publishing is mediated by transnational research networks that provide mentorship, feedback, and strategic guidance, often determining whether scholars gain entry into English-medium publishing. Similarly, Castelló et al. (2021) identify three post-PhD writer profiles (productive, productive struggler, and struggler), each associated with different levels and types of engagement with academic networks. Both studies underscore the bidirectional nature of this relationship: While networks support writing, sustained engagement with writing also shapes the development and maintenance of academic ties.

These studies primarily examine scholars in relatively stable institutional contexts, where long-term contracts, predictable promotion structures, and secure access to institutional resources (offices, libraries, research funding, writing support) might be taken for granted. Little is known about how academic networks are built during prolonged periods of disruption—let alone

how such relationships evolve in support of writing for publication under precarious conditions. In this context, precarity refers not only to employment insecurity, residential/legal status, or disruption to existing academic networks but also to broader forms of marginalization (Khuder & Petrić, 2025a), including outsider status, peripheral geographic positioning, and reliance on limited or fragile academic ties. Our study addresses this gap by examining how scholars experiencing what we call precarious academic transition—involuntary mobility due to conflict, systemic collapse, or persecution—develop academic networks across time (for more information on involuntary academic mobility, see Khuder & Petrić, 2025b). Drawing on Social Network Theory and longitudinal qualitative data, we develop an analytical framework that traces changes in network size, structure, and function, showing how academics mobilize resources and relationships under conditions of instability. These transitions are distinct from routine academic moves (e.g., from post-doctorate to tenure-track) in that they are shaped by professional disruption, reduced access to scholarly resources, and exclusion from institutional infrastructures.

Theoretical Framework: Academic Networking and Precarious Transition

Social Network Theory (SNT) provides a framework for analyzing academic networking by conceptualizing social interactions as networks of nodes (individuals or groups) connected by ties (relationships). Much of the existing research on academic networking draws attention to the structural features of ties, such as their strength (Granovetter, 1973) and durability (Lillis & Curry, 2010), and how these attributes shape scholars' ability to mobilize support. Another structural dimension is symmetry or directionality of support: whether value flows mainly one way or circulates between both parties. In sociolinguistic social network research, Milroy (1987) used symmetrical/asymmetrical (or uni-/bi-directional) relationships to explain how linguistic innovations spread through dense, multiplex networks. We borrow this notion for academic writing networks, where "value" can take the form of disciplinary, discursive, publishing, or networking capital that enhances publication prospects; symmetrical ties are those in which such capital is exchanged reciprocally, while asymmetrical ties position one actor primarily as giver and the other as receiver.

Granovetter's (1973) theory of weak ties highlights the importance of distant or infrequent connections for accessing novel opportunities, while stronger ties are associated with stability and trust. In academia, both types of ties play different yet complementary roles; strong ties may offer sustained

collaboration and mentorship, while weak ties can connect scholars to new institutional or disciplinary contexts. Studies have also emphasized the geographic and institutional positioning of ties, whether local or transnational, formal or informal, and the varying kinds of access they afford (Curry & Lillis, 2010; Luo & Hyland, 2019). For example, strong local ties have been found to facilitate international collaborations (Casanave, 1998; Curry & Lillis, 2010), while strategic networking can help scholars overcome linguistic barriers, especially for English as an Additional Language (EAL) academics (Luo & Hyland, 2019).

In addition to structural features, academic ties also serve distinct functional purposes. Networking can yield both instrumental returns (e.g., research funding, publications) and emotional or symbolic returns (e.g., mentorship, intellectual support) (Lin, 2001). Scholars have identified the many ways academic relationships support writing for publication, through providing feedback on drafts, guiding methodological or disciplinary development, offering advice on publication strategies, or introducing researchers to potential collaborators and institutional resources. These functions are not static; a single tie may evolve over time or shift in function depending on institutional pressures, career stage, or access to other resources. Understanding academic networks, then, requires attention to both the structural configuration of ties and the functions they perform in scholarly production.

To account for the specific vulnerabilities and constraints faced by scholars in contexts of displacement, we draw on Bourdieu's (1998) theorization of precarity as a relational and symbolic condition. For Bourdieu, precarity is not merely a question of employment instability, but of limited access to recognized forms of capital (economic, cultural, and symbolic) that confer legitimacy and influence within a field. Applied to academic life, precarity includes disrupted institutional affiliations, exclusion from established scholarly communities, and diminished capacity to convert prior achievements into recognized value within new systems. In the case of displaced or forcibly mobile scholars, precarity is both material and symbolic: a condition shaped by professional dislocation, linguistic marginalization, and restricted access to scholarly networks that could otherwise support writing and career advancement.

These perspectives allow us to conceptualize *precarious academic transition* as a process shaped by shifting relational landscapes. Academic networking in such contexts involves not only building or maintaining ties but also navigating asymmetries of power, access, and legitimacy. The structural dimensions of these networks—how ties are formed, sustained, or lost—interact with their functional roles in supporting academic writing, particularly under conditions where institutional support is limited or absent. Research has long shown how academics positioned at the peripheries face

epistemic marginalization and constrained access to recognized forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1998; Curry & Lillis, 2010). In precarious academic transitions, academic networking thus becomes not merely relational but politically consequential: a means of re-establishing legitimacy, rebuilding access, and negotiating participation in global scholarly communities. By synthesizing insights from SNT and Bourdieu's account of symbolic capital, precarity, and exclusion, we develop a framework for analyzing how scholars reconfigure their academic relationships while attempting to sustain their participation in scholarly communication. These concerns guide the overarching inquiry of this study:

Research Question: How do three academics undergoing precarious academic transition develop, reconfigure, and sustain academic networks in ways that support writing for publication?

To answer this RQ and building on previous frameworks, we provide a dynamic analytical framework that integrates structural and functional dimensions while foregrounding temporality, brokerage, and mobility under precarious transition. While our framework draws on established structural (e.g., strength, formality, durability, symmetry, geography) and functional (e.g., text-production support, disciplinary input, publishing knowledge, networking facilitation) lenses in studies of networking (e.g., Curry & Lillis, 2010; Lin, 2001), it reconceptualizes them for contexts of precarious academic transition in three ways. First, temporality is built in rather than inferred: ties are tracked and reclassified across data collection waves and sources, allowing us to analyze transitions (e.g., weak→strong; asymmetrical→symmetrical; formal→informal). Second, mobility and brokerage are operationalized explicitly: "local" is anchored to current residence (not origin/appointment) to reflect forced mobility, and direct/indirect ties are modelled as brokerage chains that change over time (who connects whom, when, and to what end). Third, we couple structure and function for writing for publication: We employ a use-of-tie lens that links a tie's structural status to the work it performs (drafting/revision, theoretical/methods input, navigating peer review, opening collaborations), enabling us to trace role shifts within evolving networks with a focus on symmetry, an aspect less researched in academic networking under stable conditions but key in identifying shifting agency and power dynamics in precarious academic transitions. Methodologically, the framework is abductively developed: theory-informed at the outset and iteratively refined through longitudinal analysis of the trajectories of three displaced scholars, yielding an analytical tool that is transition-sensitive.

Methods

Participants and Context

This study is part of a larger three-year project investigating the academic literacies practices of displaced EAL Syrian academics as they navigate new academic environments (Khuder, 2021). Specifically, it explores how these scholars develop academic networks to support writing for publication while under the support of the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA). Participants were involved in research collaborations with UK-based academics, and those based in Turkey also received networking and writing support from CARA-affiliated English for Academic Purposes (EAP) tutors. (More details about CARA's Syria Programme are available at <https://www.cara.ngo/what-we-do/caras-syria-programme>.)

To ensure consistency, we use the following terminology: “participants” or “Syrian academics” refers to the displaced scholars in the study. At the time of data collection, some participants were based in the UK (“UK-based participants”) and other participants were based in Turkey (“Turkey-based participants”).

This multiple-case study (Negretti & Khuder, 2024) draws on data from three displaced Syrian academics (Table 1), selected based on their academic profiles and publishing goals. All participants had a minimum of 5 years of university teaching experience, an active research background, and a self-reported high level of EAL. Ahmad was identified as the central case because of the richness of his data: He had all the drafts of previous publications. We interviewed his co-author, and we traced the transformation of his academic network over the study period, from no English-medium publications to sustained co-authorship with international academics. The other two cases, Amer and Mubarak, are included as supporting cases, offering complementary perspectives on network development in different geopolitical contexts.

All participants gave informed consent, and ethical approval was granted by Birkbeck, University of London. Pseudonyms are used throughout, and identifying details, including institutional affiliations and names of collaborators, have been anonymized where necessary.

Data Collection

To address the research question, we employed three complementary data sources: Academic Network Plots (ANPs), feedback interactions, and stimulated recall interview accounts.

Participants were asked to visually map their academic networks by drawing ANPs at three points during the study, timed at regular intervals, using a

Table 1. Participant Profiles.

Participant and Context	Discipline	Years in Displacement at the Beginning of the Study
Ahmad (UK-based)	Life sciences	3
Amer (UK-based)	Biology	2
Mubarak (Turkey-based)	Economics	4

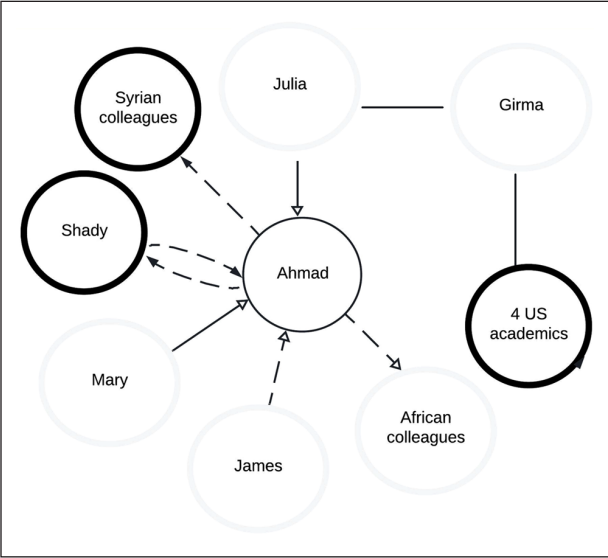


Figure 1. Ahmad’s ANPI (March 2018).

think-aloud protocol to aid memory recall. This method yielded rich, temporal representations of how networks evolved over time (Fernandes et al., 2018). Each participant drew three ANPs over the course of the study. These were completed at roughly 6- to 12-month intervals spread across the 3-year project window.

The ANPs captured who was in each participant’s network, the nature of their interactions, and the functions each tie served at different stages of their academic trajectory. Participants created the initial hand-drawn plots, which were then standardized by the researchers for clarity and consistency. As illustrated in Figure 1, the central circle represents the focal participant. White circles indicate local nodes, and dark circles denote transnational nodes. Solid lines reflect strong ties, while dotted lines represent weak ties.

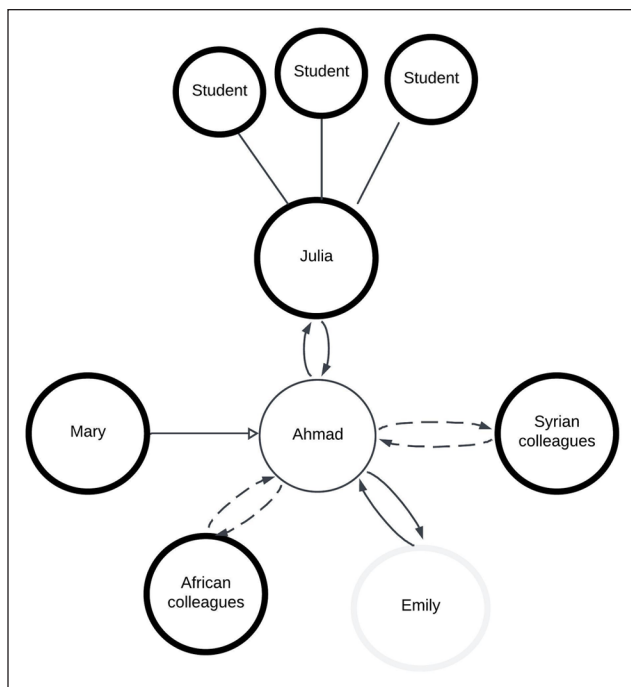


Figure 2. Ahmad's ANP2 (March 2019).

One-way arrows indicate asymmetrical relationships (unidirectional support), and two-way arrows signify symmetrical relationships characterized by mutual exchange. Connections between nodes appear as simple straight lines, representing indirect relationships; these were included for completeness but were not analyzed for other features (e.g., durability). This visual coding scheme was consistently applied across Figures 1 to 3. Figures were created using Lucid Software Lucidchart (Lucid.app).

Given the cognitive demands of drawing ANPs (Curry & Lillis, 2010), the task was limited to three sessions per participant. Think-aloud protocols were used during each session to clarify participants' drawings. To reduce recall bias and strengthen the data set, we combined ANPs with two less memory-dependent methods: analysis of feedback on the participants' writing and repeated semi-structured and stimulated-recall interviews.

To examine how academic ties influenced writing practices, the first author collected and analyzed feedback interactions¹ embedded within participants' networks. This included drafts, co-author comments (e.g., tracked changes, margin notes), participants' written responses, and verbal reflections on our

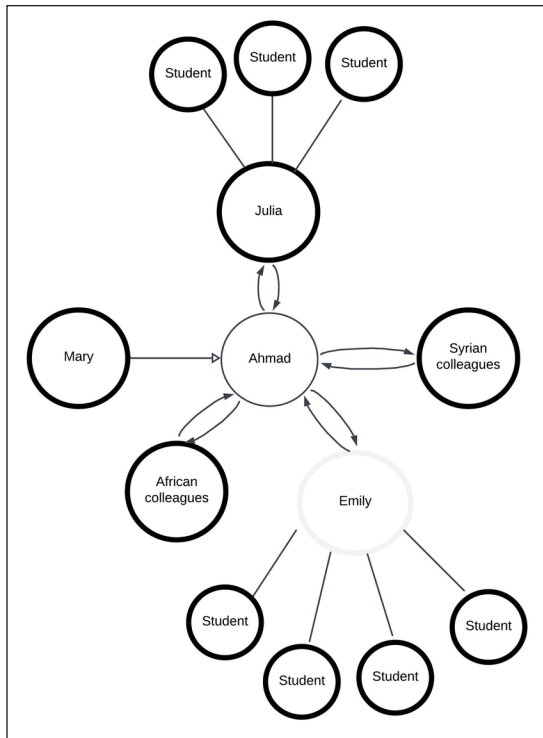


Figure 3. Ahmad's ANP3 (August 2019).

comments. We focused on drafts produced in precarious conditions, especially those that underwent revision based on networked feedback.

The first author conducted repeated semi-structured interviews with each participant over the 3-year study period. Interviews explored how participants built and sustained their networks, how different members contributed to their writing, what strategies they used to maintain ties, and the barriers they encountered. During each interview, participants' ANPs and feedback samples were used as stimulated recall prompts to help participants reflect on specific interactions and decisions within their academic networks.

Analytical Framework

The framework was developed iteratively through engagement with existing theory (Curry & Lillis, 2010; Milroy, 1987) and the data set (for a detailed coding scheme with examples, see Appendix A). The framework was used to

code and interpret changes across participants' networks by distinguishing between structural features and functional contributions. Structural features refer to the formal properties of ties that shape how scholars are connected to others. We coded for:

- **Strength:** whether the tie was strong (frequent contact) or weak (infrequent).
- **Formality:** whether the relationship was institutionally structured (e.g., funded collaboration, mentorship) or informally developed (e.g., peer support, introductions).
- **Durability:** whether the tie persisted across multiple writing projects or dissolved after a single exchange.
- **Symmetry:** whether the tie was reciprocal or one-sided in terms of knowledge/support exchange.
- **Geographic positioning:** whether the tie was *local* (within the participant's current national/institutional setting) or *transnational* (across borders). This was adapted to reflect the current location of participants rather than citizenship.

Functional contributions capture what each tie enabled or provided in relation to writing for publication. We coded for four recurring functions:

- **Text-production support:** feedback, editing, or co-writing help.
- **Disciplinary expertise:** contributions to framing, methods, or conceptual development.
- **Publishing knowledge:** guidance on journal selection, peer review navigation, or responding to reviewers.
- **Networking facilitation:** connecting the participant with other scholars or institutions.

Each tie could exhibit multiple structural features and serve more than one function; the coding was designed to capture these dynamics over time rather than assign static labels.

Coding and Interpretation

All three data types—interviews, feedback comments, and ANPs—were analyzed using this dynamic framework longitudinally over 3 years, iteratively coding ties and functions at each data collection wave and updating classifications as participants' networks evolved. First, interviews were coded inductively and deductively to identify how participants described and interpreted

their ties and writing support. Second, feedback interactions were analyzed thematically and discursively to capture shifts in modes of providing feedback (e.g., overwriting, editing, suggestions) (see Khuder & Petrić, 2020 for more details) and symmetry. Third, both visual (participants' drawings) and narrative (accompanying think-aloud explanations) forms of ANPs were analyzed to track how participants' networks changed between interview points. By triangulating across these data sets, we tracked changes in participants' networks along three axes:

- **Network size:** changes in the number of active ties.
- **Network structure:** shifts in tie strength, durability, symmetry, and configuration.
- **Network function:** evolution in the roles different ties played in supporting writing.

Ahmad's case was used to develop and refine the framework, as it offered the richest longitudinal account of network transformation. The coding scheme was then applied to Amer and Mubarak's cases to assess its relevance and adaptability across contexts.

Findings

We present three case studies. Ahmad's trajectory anchors the analysis given the depth and continuity of his data across 3 years. Amer and Mubarak then contextualize and contrast this core case, illustrating alternative patterns of agency and network-building under different institutional and regional conditions.

Ahmad: Trajectory of Network Expansion and Functional Consolidation (March 2018–August 2019)

Ahmad developed his academic networks by moving from dependence on formal, legacy ties to proactive, strategic networking (Ahmad's academic network is summarized in Appendix B). He deliberately sought international collaborators, initiated contact beyond prior circles, and used conferences to create new links. He rebalanced asymmetric relationships by contributing data, leading projects, and brokering introductions, thereby converting help-seeking ties into reciprocal collaborations. When reciprocity stalled, he adjusted, shifting effort toward partners who offered clearer mutual benefit. He embedded himself in local communities by mentoring PhD students, which expanded co-authorships and extended reach into supervisors' networks.

Ahmad's ANPI: limited, asymmetrical, and functionally narrow network (March 2018). Ahmad's ANPI (Figure 1) reveals a moderately sized but historically rooted network shaped by earlier career affiliations and dominated by asymmetrical, functionally concentrated relationships. While the network contained several durable ties, many offered limited engagement with writing-for-publication processes beyond a few key actors.

His most significant structural tie was with Julia, an established African academic he met while working for an international organization in Syria. Despite Ahmad's limited English proficiency at the time, Julia became a key collaborator, co-authoring 14 English-medium articles, involving him in international projects, and co-presenting at conferences. She also helped him secure a UK-based postdoctoral placement. Their tie was strong, formal, and durable, spanning 4 years, but at this stage (March 2018), it remained asymmetrical: Julia provided extensive functional support in text production, networking, publishing, and disciplinary development, while Ahmad primarily contributed data collection and analysis.

Through Julia, Ahmad was introduced to Girma, an African economist with whom he had a weak, informal, and temporary tie, limited to a single co-authored publication. Despite its short duration, this tie had functional significance: Girma's feedback on Ahmad's drafts shaped his own supervisory practices, particularly his use of reader-awareness strategies with students. Girma's feedback left a lasting impact: "Girma was the first person to tell me to think about the reader. He wrote: 'Don't just explain results, explain why they matter.' I still use that advice with my students" (Int.3). Functionally, this tie also served as a brief bridging node, connecting Ahmad to four US scholars who offered disciplinary insights, though these secondary ties were short-lived and did not reappear in later ANPs.

Another node from Ahmad's past was Mary, an EL1 speaker who had formerly worked with Ahmad in Syria and later moved to an African country. Though they had co-authored 10 papers, her role was largely logistical. Mary helped secure access to data but did not contribute to text production or conceptual development. The tie was structurally durable and formal, but functionally limited. On the other hand, Ahmad's experience with James, a language editor, was brief and unproductive. Lacking disciplinary expertise, James's revisions were deemed irrelevant, leading Ahmad to discontinue the relationship. This was the only unproductive tie Ahmad mentioned: "He fixed grammar, but the meaning got lost. I had to rewrite everything. . . . It taught me that writing support needs to be disciplinary, not just linguistic" (Int.2). This weak and temporary tie shaped Ahmad's future choices; he concluded that effective writing support required both linguistic and disciplinary knowledge, an insight that influenced his future collaborations.

Ahmad's ties with most colleagues in Syria at this stage were largely symbolic. Though listed as co-authors, Ahmad described these relationships as formal but weak, with "minimal intellectual engagement" (Int. 2), suggesting a disconnect between professional obligation and actual collaboration. In contrast, his interactions with Shady, a mathematician in Syria, were intellectually stimulating. Their discussions expanded Ahmad's understanding of interdisciplinary research. This symmetrical tie, though limited to conversation, influenced Ahmad's willingness to explore new theoretical directions. Thus, Shady contributed in more interactive ways: "He made me see that my data could be useful to other fields. That's when I started thinking about interdisciplinarity" (Int.3).

In summary, ANP1 depicts a network anchored in legacy institutional ties, with heavy functional reliance on one mentor figure (Julia). While most other ties were structurally weak or functionally narrow, the network provided the initial scaffolding for Ahmad's re-entry into international academic publishing.

Ahmad's ANP2: network deepening, functional diversification, and shifting symmetry (March 2019). One year after ANP1, Ahmad's network showed modest expansion in size, but more importantly, a deepening in structure and a broadening of functional contributions across existing ties. As seen in Ahmad's ANP2 (Figure 2), previously passive connections became more active, while new collaborators added disciplinary and publishing value. These changes marked a shift toward greater network symmetry and role diversification, especially in Ahmad's core relationships.

His longstanding relationship with Julia remained structurally strong and functionally central but had evolved into a more symmetrical collaboration, reflecting a change from mentorship to partnership. Ahmad reported that his statistical expertise was increasingly valued, and Julia continued to support his academic development by introducing him to three of her PhD students, whom he later co-supervised. These collaborations led to three English-medium co-authored publications with Julia and Mary. Ahmad's expanding role in joint projects reflected a shift from data provider to co-author with conceptual input, particularly in methodology and analysis: "She made me rewrite the whole methods section, and it got accepted! I finally understood what 'rigour' means in their journals" (Int.5).

Mary, who had played a more peripheral role in ANP1, became structurally and functionally more significant in this phase. Despite their geographic separation, she engaged in extended disciplinary exchanges with Ahmad, especially around research ethics and data interpretation. This tie, once limited to networking, now contributed to the conceptual dimension of Ahmad's work, making it a durable and increasingly reciprocal connection: "She was emailing me about data analysis ethics, and we disagreed, but in a good way" (Int.5).

Ahmad also sustained ties with several colleagues in North Africa and Syria, though these remained structurally weak and functionally limited to data collection. He included them as co-authors out of both reciprocity and strategic positioning. Ahmad explicitly linked these collaborations to his efforts to distinguish himself in the UK academic job market, describing cross-regional partnerships as a form of symbolic capital in an increasingly competitive environment.

A key new tie in ANP2 was Emily, his UK-based advisor, whose introduction to Ahmad's network marked an important structural and functional milestone. Their formal collaboration began shortly after Ahmad's arrival in the United Kingdom and quickly developed into a symmetrical and multi-layered relationship. Emily recognized the strength of Ahmad's research and provided guidance on experimental design, while Ahmad contributed disciplinary insights and introduced Emily to Julia and Mary: "We both bring something: me from Africa and Syria, her from UK academia." (Int.5). In this way, Ahmad began to act as a network broker, expanding the connectivity between his new and legacy networks.

Emily also played a pivotal role in functional transformation by offering publishing support and encouraging Ahmad to target high-impact journals. Her feedback on his writing signalled another important development: As reported by Ahmad, unlike earlier interactions focused on language correction, Emily's feedback now emphasized refinement of disciplinary issues: "Emily said: 'This reads like a native speaker.' . . . She only commented on the science part and did not correct a word I wrote" (Int.5). This shift in feedback-focus mirrored Ahmad's improving linguistic proficiency and marked a turning point in his academic confidence and self-perception.

In summary, Ahmad's ANP2 reflects a phase of network consolidation and functional enrichment, with increasing symmetry in key ties and growing recognition of his scholarly contributions. While the network had not expanded dramatically in size, its evolving structure and layered functions positioned Ahmad more centrally in collaborative research and publishing efforts.

Ahmad's ANP3: functional repositioning and strategic awareness amidst network plateau (August 2019). By the time Ahmad drew ANP3 (Figure 3), his academic network had largely stabilized in size, but it continued to evolve in terms of structure and function. Most ties had become symmetrical and collaborative, reflecting Ahmad's growing contributions and professional confidence. Yet two of his central ties, Mary and Emily, stood out as exceptions, prompting Ahmad to critically reflect on the nature of reciprocity and access within his network.

Ahmad's relationship with Emily, his UK-based advisor, had shifted from a generative mentoring tie to what he described as an increasingly asymmetrical dynamic: "She was more giving to the relationship in the first year. Now, I write drafts, co-supervise her students, and all I want from her is to help me get a job at this university" (Int.9).

Although Emily had previously provided publishing and disciplinary guidance (ANP2), by ANP3 Ahmad's expectations had changed. He hoped she would act as a network broker, introducing him to more senior academics. Instead, he felt this opportunity was withheld: "She has many brilliant co-authors, but she has not introduced me to any of them. She is so busy even to meet me, so I don't think she will have time to introduce me to people" (Int.6). This unmet expectation reconfigured Ahmad's perception of the tie; while still structurally formal and durable, it now felt asymmetrical in terms of influence and opportunity.

Despite this, Emily did connect Ahmad with four of her PhD students, leading to a collaborative article co-authored with them and with Julia. Ahmad described this as a functionally layered and reciprocal engagement, which explains the change in the symmetry of his tie with Emily. He mentored the students in text production, supported them in navigating the publishing process, and introduced them to his colleagues in Africa for data collaboration. The students, in turn, contributed disciplinary expertise and empirical data. Ahmad positioned himself as the more experienced academic: "They are bright, and I liked working with them. But they're still learning, so I helped guide the writing and showed them how to respond to reviews" (Int.8).

This tie marked a role reversal—Ahmad was no longer the recipient of mentorship but a provider of it, reinforcing his emerging identity as a senior collaborator and facilitator.

Ahmad's relationship with Julia also continued, but its functional focus had shifted. Whereas she had once been instrumental in offering text production support, she now contributed primarily in terms of publishing strategy and disciplinary framing. Ahmad involved her in UK-based projects that he was part of, saying: "I feel now we are really equal. She still helps with some things, but I also bring her into my own work now" (Int.6).

Meanwhile, Mary continued to advise on experimental procedures. Yet Ahmad described this as asymmetrical, expressing discomfort about what he perceived as a lack of reciprocity: "She gives me feedback and advice, yes. But I don't know if I'm giving her anything back. It's not balanced" (Int.6). His colleagues in Syria and Africa remained in his network in similar ways as in ANP2. Their contributions were still primarily related to data collection, and Ahmad listed them as co-authors out of professional respect and strategic value. However, he noted that these ties had not changed significantly in form or function.

When prompted to reflect on the three ANPs during a final interview, Ahmad came to a critical realization: “I failed to develop my network in a long time. Since drawing the last one a year ago, I was not able to make more connections” (Int.10). This moment of reflexivity became a catalyst for change. Two weeks after drawing ANP3, Ahmad attended a national conference with the specific aim of expanding his network. He credited the ANP process itself for prompting this shift in awareness: “I think this study helped me see my own habits. I wasn’t thinking about networking strategically before” (Int.10). Ahmad’s ANP3 marks a turning point. While network size plateaued, the structure of key ties shifted, with Ahmad taking on more central, guiding roles in collaborations. His growing awareness of asymmetries, especially with senior UK-based colleagues, did not diminish his agency; instead, it motivated him to re-engage with networking as a strategic, deliberate process. ANP3 thus captures both the consolidation of Ahmad’s academic identity and a renewed commitment to expanding his scholarly community.

Amer’s ANPs: From Institutional Dependence to Strategic Reorientation

Amer’s academic network, as captured across three ANPs (summarized in Appendix C), reflects a pattern of late-stage growth and reorientation. Amer developed his network by shifting from institution-bound, reactive ties to proactive, region-targeted collaboration. He reoriented his goals toward the Gulf, used conferences to initiate contact with scholars there, and followed up to convert introductions into concrete projects. He pruned weak, obligation-based links from previous workplaces and invested in relationships that matched his disciplinary interests and geographically oriented career prospects. Crucially, he changed roles from peripheral contributor to text-producer and mentor, which increased reciprocity and visibility. He then sustained these ties through ongoing value exchange (feedback, co-authoring, supervision) and selective renewal when nodes did not reciprocate.

Network size: stagnation, institutional containment, and late-stage expansion. Amer’s network remained small and institution-bound for most of the study period. In ANP1, it consisted of only three UK colleagues (Jamie, Linda, Ihsan), all tied to a single research project. Once he moved institutions, these ties dissolved. ANP2 introduced three new colleagues (John, Robert, James), again linked to his new workplace, along with two indirect contacts (Rashed and James’s PhD students). But these additions were still framed by institutional affiliation rather than broader disciplinary or interest-based alignment.

It was only in ANP3 that Amer demonstrated network expansion beyond institutional borders, forming ties with Iyad and Mohannad, Gulf-based scholars he met at a conference. These new connections were not assigned or incidental, but self-initiated, indicating a shift toward intentional, goal-oriented networking: “I feel I can contribute more in the Middle East; here they do not need me or my knowledge” (Int.10). This growth was modest in numbers but significant in terms of strategic orientation.

Network structure: from weak, temporary, and asymmetrical to emerging reciprocity. Structurally, Amer’s early ties were formal, weak, and temporary, highly dependent on project timelines and institutional affiliation. For instance, in ANP1, his co-authors provided disciplinary framing and publishing support, but Amer saw himself as marginal: “Not really important” (Int.3). These ties dissolved when Amer changed institutions, showing minimal durability or personal investment.

In ANP2, the structure remained similar—new workplace, new weak ties—but indirect links (via James and John) began to surface. His connection to Rashed, a high-status academic, was asymmetrical and reputationally motivated; Rashed contributed visibility, while Amer had minimal reciprocal influence. In contrast, Amer offered writing guidance to James’s PhD students but found the interaction one-sided and, as Amer said, “not intellectually satisfying” (Int.5). Only in ANP3 did Amer initiate symmetrical and reciprocal ties, as with Iyad and Mohannad, academics Amer met at a conference. These were not filtered through institutional obligation but stemmed from disciplinary alignment and mutual respect.

Network function: from peripheral engagement to text-level contribution. In terms of function, Amer’s early network ties were primarily geared toward disciplinary support and project completion. He viewed himself as a secondary contributor, often relying on others for writing: “An academic does not have to know the language of publishing to be able to publish” (Int.1). This belief aligned with his early practice of deferring text production to editors or co-authors. However, his experience working with scholars in the Gulf challenged this assumption and redefined his sense of his academic value. By ANP3, Amer began to take on a text-production role, offering feedback and guidance. His perspective shifted: “It is important that academics living in the UK develop their publishing language” (Int.7). This transition, toward greater functional engagement, may suggest an emerging recognition that writing itself was a site of authorial contribution (Khuder & Petrić, 2026).

Mubarak's ANPs: Steady Expansion Anchored in Durability and Strategic Interdisciplinarity

Mubarak's academic network expanded consistently over the study period, from 4 initial nodes in ANP1 to 11 by ANP3 (summarized in Appendix D). Mubarak developed his academic network through deliberate, long-term relationship management and targeted, interdisciplinary outreach. He maintained and nurtured durable legacy ties with colleagues in Syria, scheduling ongoing intellectual exchange so that collaborations could recur and mature. He proactively expanded his network by approaching Turkish scholars to secure data access and add interdisciplinary framing, and he leveraged CARA workshops to connect with UK academics and an EAP tutor for support with manuscript revision, publishing strategy, and grants. He converted mentorship into collaboration by co-authoring with a former student, and he sustained reciprocity via structured follow-ups and clear, output-oriented roles, using collaborations to extend, not substitute for, his expertise.

Network size: intentional and sustained growth. Mubarak's network nearly tripled in size from ANP1 to ANP3, albeit starting from a small number of nodes. Initially composed of four former colleagues in Syria, his network gradually expanded to include Turkish interdisciplinary collaborators, UK-based researchers, and a former PhD student-turned co-author. This growth was strategically aligned with Mubarak's research and publishing goals. By ANP2, Mubarak had reached out to Turkish academics to seek support in local data collection and enhance the interdisciplinary framing of his work. In ANP3, his participation in CARA workshops led to ties with UK-based academics who supported revisions and internationalization of his research: "My aim is to publish my research in an international journal, and having UK academics could help with this even if they are not co-authors. They can still give valuable advice on making the research better" (Int.5).

Network structure: durability as a deliberate academic strategy. Mubarak's ties were characterized by durability and a gradual shift toward reciprocity. His initial connections with economists in Syria were strong and asymmetrical—he led research efforts and text production while others contributed data and local knowledge. Over time, however, some of these ties evolved into more symmetrical collaborations, especially as team members developed academically in their new contexts, as Mubarak explains:

"It is a skill academics need to learn. How to keep your academic relationships. I see academics meet each other and collaborate for once and that is it. I think it is

important to stay academically in touch even if you do not collaborate with each other.” (Int.7)

His relationships with Turkish academics, though newer and disciplinary-adjacent, were formal, purposeful, and framed around mutual benefit. With UK-based scholars and an EAP tutor, Mubarak maintained structured ties focused on specific academic outputs, such as grant applications and article revisions. These ties were originally intended to be short-term but were sustained through ongoing intellectual exchange.

His co-authorship with Thaer, a former student who completed a PhD in the United Kingdom, reflects Mubarak’s long-term commitment to mentoring and maintaining ties across career stages. This tie was both transnational and symmetrical, rooted in shared intellectual history and mutual contribution.

Network function: multi-layered support for publishing, funding, and career sustainability. Functionally, Mubarak’s ties supported text production, disciplinary feedback, data access, publishing strategy, and grant development. His early network helped him publish in Turkish-medium outlets; by ANP3, he was submitting to international journals with targeted support from UK-based reviewers and advisors.

His ties with Turkish scholars provided practical research infrastructure, especially data collection, which is essential for a non-citizen social science researcher navigating access challenges. Meanwhile, UK academics contributed textual refinement, conceptual feedback, and publishing navigation, even when not named as co-authors. Yet unlike Ahmad or Amer, Mubarak never voiced concern about his scholarly status or legitimacy. He entered all relationships with a clear sense of his own value and used collaborations to extend his expertise rather than compensate for any lack of it.

Discussion

This study investigated how academics undergoing precarious academic transition develop and sustain academic networks to support writing for publication. Across the cases, participants moved from inherited or institution-bound ties to agentive, value-creating networking that increased reciprocity and durability. We synthesize this process as three recurring moves: (1) targeted initiation with selective pruning, (2) value brokering via role repositioning, and (3) durability orientation.

Targeted Initiation With Selective Pruning

Participants replaced opportunistic or inherited contacts with purposeful outreach aligned to specific publishing aims (venue targeting, data/method needs). This echoes work showing that collaboration pays off when it is goal-congruent and “active” rather than merely dense (Goel & Grimpe, 2013). For displaced scholars, targeted initiation also functions as field re-entry—a way to reattach to resourced contexts and/or programs (e.g., CARA), thereby rebuilding access to the means of production in scholarly publishing (Curry & Lillis, 2010). While classic network theory emphasizes the benefits of bridging ties (Granovetter, 1973), in these cases, bridges were most productive when purposefully selected to match near- and long-term publication goals and audience fit. This pattern was evident in Ahmad’s targeted outreach to Julia’s network and Mubarak’s intentional engagement with Turkish and UK scholars motivated by specific research and publishing needs, in contrast to Amer’s earlier, institution-assigned ties, which yielded little durable or reciprocal value.

In parallel, participants de-emphasized non-reciprocal or institution-dependent ties and redirected their time toward relationships with clearer mutual benefit. This focus on judicious use of time and effort and tie decay is consistent with findings that networking benefits plateau or reverse when networks are maintained indiscriminately (Goel & Grimpe, 2013). Pruning is, thus, not failure but optimization, particularly salient under precarity, where relational maintenance competes with survival work (e.g., grant seeking, relocation). Strategically letting ties lapse also mitigates structural asymmetries by avoiding relationships that repeatedly fix scholars in subordinate functions (Curry & Lillis, 2010). However, the three cases in this study also show that such pruning is partial and negotiated: Ahmad, for instance, remained uneasy about the asymmetry of his tie with Mary yet chose to maintain it because her disciplinary and methodological input continued to be crucial for his publishing trajectory.

Value Brokering via Role Positioning

Initial contacts became stable collaborations when participants brokered concrete value, such as data, methodological expertise, text production/feedback, and network facilitation. This aligns with the literature on literacy brokering in multilingual publishing, where text-level support and genre navigation redistribute expertise across partners (Casanave, 1998; Lillis & Curry, 2010). Our cases extend this by showing that value brokering is bidirectional and dynamic: Displaced scholars moved from recipients of support to providers of text leadership or methodological input, thereby recalibrating power and

authorship leverage. In Bourdieu's terms, brokering converts social capital into symbolic capital recognized in decisions about venue, authorship order, and project scope (Bourdieu, 1989).

Network development hinged on role shifts in all three cases: from help-seeker or peripheral contributor to collaborator, mentor, and broker. This finding resonates with research on status mobility and legitimacy recovery in disrupted careers, where scholars reframe identity by demonstrating indispensable contributions (Lamont, 2009). It also accords with communities-of-practice accounts: Movement from legitimate peripheral participation to fuller participation is accomplished through changing tasks and recognized responsibilities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In contrast to communities-of-practice accounts, role repositioning is not merely developmental for displaced academics; it is strategic resistance to epistemic marginalization, contesting relegation to "data provider" roles in centre-periphery hierarchies (Curry & Lillis, 2010; Khuder & Petrić, 2022b).

Durability Orientation

Durability proved to be built, not given. Scholars sustained ties via structured follow-ups and output-linked work, such as co-authorship cycles, revision timetables, and grant writing. This aligns with research on embeddedness and repeat collaboration, where coordination routines convert episodic contact into reliable productivity and higher-impact outputs (Lee & Bozeman, 2005). For displaced academics whose institutional anchors are uncertain, durability practices substitute for organizational stability, helping restore temporal rhythms of scholarship (characterized by deadlines and review cycles) and converting social capital into cumulative publication advantage.

Prior work often treats academic networking as a route to productivity or visibility (Goel & Grimpe, 2013). The three cases show that under precarity (Bourdieu, 1998), networking is also survival and legitimacy work: Rebuilding access to valued resources, reasserting scholarly voice, and regaining recognition in academic venues (Khuder & Petrić, 2026). Centre-periphery research documents how scholars from peripheral locations are frequently positioned as epistemically marginal (Curry & Lillis, 2010). The three moves above operate as practical countermeasures, though they do not erase structural hierarchies.

Conclusion

Although this study centres on three displaced Syrian academics supported by CARA, its insights speak to broader experiences of scholars navigating

precarious academic transition—a condition increasingly familiar across the global academy. While the sample is necessarily small and context-specific, the study's longitudinal design and multimodal data offer rich insights into the processes and patterns of academic networking under precarious conditions. The displaced scholars in this study represent an extreme end of the precariousness continuum, but their trajectories highlight dynamics that may also shape the experiences of many early-career researchers, international scholars, and academics working on temporary or insecure contracts.

Also, this study contributes a holistic, longitudinal analytical framework that accounts for how academic networks evolve in terms of size, structure, and function. Building on and extending existing social network frameworks, we offer a dynamic lens that captures how ties are reconfigured over time: Formal connections may become informal, strong ties may weaken, and roles within networks may shift from recipient to broker. By integrating Bourdieu's concept of precarity as a structuring force in scholars' participation, we show how academic networking in these contexts becomes not just a matter of scholarly productivity, but a survival strategy—a way to restore symbolic capital, maintain legitimacy, and remain part of the academic field.

These findings have several implications for institutions and academic communities. For universities and funding bodies, support for displaced and precarious scholars must go beyond one-time access to networks or mentorship. Sustainable support structures should include opportunities for reciprocal collaboration, institutional recognition of informal and transnational ties, and mechanisms to maintain continuity during transitions. Programmes such as CARA offer crucial entry points, but long-term inclusion depends on scholars' ability to renegotiate roles and resources within changing fields.

This study also holds insights for novice and early-career academics, particularly those navigating institutional or geographic mobility. Building and sustaining an academic network is not a linear or hierarchical task but a strategic, iterative process. Newer scholars should be encouraged to create and nurture ties that serve multiple functions (e.g., disciplinary, publishing, and relational) and to recognize the value of offering support to others as much as receiving it. Mentoring relationships, interdisciplinary collaborations, and informal peer networks all play critical roles in scholarly development, especially under unstable conditions (Khuder & Petrić, 2022a).

Finally, the findings call for further research into how academic networks are shaped by intersecting factors such as language background and institutional status (Khuder and Petrić, 2025a). As global academia continues to rely on transnational flows of scholars, understanding how knowledge is legitimized, who gets included in research networks, and what kinds of roles are valued will be critical for ensuring more equitable participation in

knowledge production. In rethinking academic networking through the lens of precarity and transition, this study not only sheds light on the experiences of displaced scholars but also raises broader questions about how we define academic legitimacy, belonging, and collaboration in an increasingly unstable and precarious academic world.

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Note

1. While this article draws on feedback interactions as part of the triangulated data set, we do not include extended excerpts here because of space limitations. A fuller analysis of the feedback data, including illustrative examples, is provided in Khuder and Petric (2022a). Readers interested specifically in how feedback interactions mediate writing and network development are referred to that publication.

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Appendix A: Data Analysis Coding Scheme with Examples

Part 1: Structural Features of Academic Networks (Ties).

Code	Definition	Example from data
Strength	Depth and frequency of interaction: strong ties involve regular, meaningful engagement; weak ties are occasional or superficial	"I meet my writing mentor every two weeks. We go through drafts together and she really pushes my thinking." → Strong Tie
Formality	Whether the tie is institutional/ formal (e.g., advisor, supervisor) or informal (e.g., peer, online contact)	"I connected with him through a conference. We just clicked and kept in touch on WhatsApp." → Informal Tie
Durability	Indicates how long the tie has lasted or is expected to last	"We've been writing together since our PhDs, nearly ten years now." → Durable Tie
Directionality	Whether the support is mutual or one-directional	"I usually ask her for advice, but I'm not sure I've helped her back." → Asymmetrical Tie
Directness	Whether the contact is direct or mediated through another person	"A friend introduced me to this journal editor—without him, I wouldn't have dared to submit." → Indirect Tie
Geographic Scope	Whether the tie is local (same country) or transnational	"My co-author is based in Canada—we've only met on Zoom." → Transnational Tie

Part 2: Functional Contributions of Network Nodes.

Code	Definition	Example from Data
Text-Production Support	Help with writing, structuring, or editing manuscripts	"My colleague helped restructure the discussion section—she basically rewrote parts of it with me."
Disciplinary Expertise	Sharing disciplinary knowledge, methodological advice, or theoretical framing	"He's the only one in my circle who understands this methodology—I always send him my data analysis drafts."
Publishing Knowledge	Guidance on navigating peer review, choosing journals, or responding to editors	"She told me how to handle a revise-and-resubmit. I didn't even know what a cover letter should say!"
Networking Facilitation	Connecting participants to people, or groups	"Through him I joined an international research group—now I'm on a collaborative paper."

Appendix B. An overview of Ahmad's Academic Network.

Node	Tie and node types	Node's contribution to the tie	Ahmad's contribution to the tie	How entered	How sustained	Resulting products/activities
Julia	Local, formal, strong, durable, became symmetrical, direct	Text- production network disciplinary publishing	Network disciplinary	Co- workers in Syria	Colleagues, continuous collaboration, emails, Skype calls	14 English- medium articles national and international conference presentations
Emily	Local, formal, strong, durable, symmetrical, direct	Network disciplinary publishing	Network disciplinary	Via CARA	Face-to-face meetings, emails	4 English- medium articles, 1 conference presentation
Mary	Local, formal, strong, durable, asymmetrical, direct	Text- production network disciplinary publishing	Network disciplinary publishing	Via CARA	Colleagues, continuous collaboration, emails, Skype calls	10 English- medium articles
Girma	Local, informal, weak, temporary, asymmetrical, indirect	Network disciplinary publishing	Disciplinary	Via Julia	One collaboration via emails	1 English- medium article
U.S. scholars	Transnational, informal, weak, temporary, asymmetrical, indirect	Disciplinary	—	Via Girma	Emails	Improving knowledge
Julia's PhD students	Transnational, informal, weak, durable, asymmetrical, indirect	Disciplinary	Text- production network disciplinary publishing	Via Julia	Emails	3 English- medium articles
Emily's PhD students	Local, informal, weak, durable asymmetrical, indirect	Disciplinary	Text- production network disciplinary publishing	Via Emily	Face-to-face meetings, emails	1 English- medium article
Shady	Local, informal, weak, durable, symmetrical, direct	Disciplinary	Disciplinary	Friends in Syria	Skype calls, emails	Improved knowledge
Colleagues in Syria	Local, formal, weak, durable, symmetrical, direct	Disciplinary	Text- production network disciplinary publishing	Co- workers in Syria	Skype calls	2 English- medium articles
African colleagues	Local, formal, weak, durable symmetrical, direct	Disciplinary	Text- production network disciplinary publishing	Co- workers in Africa	Skype calls, emails	3 English- medium articles
James	Local, formal, weak, temporary asymmetrical, direct	Text- production	—	Co- workers in Africa	Emails	No product as Ahmad rejected all James's edits

Appendix C. An Overview of Amer's Academic Network.

Node	Tie and node types	Node's contribution to the network	Amer's contribution to the network	How entered	How sustained	Resulting products/activities
Jamie (ANP1)	Local, formal, weak, temporary, asymmetrical, direct	Text- production disciplinary publishing	Disciplinary	Via CARA	Colleagues, then stopped after moving to a new university	I English- medium article
Linda (ANP1)	Local, formal, weak, temporary, asymmetrical, direct	Text- production disciplinary publishing	Disciplinary	Via CARA	Colleagues, then stopped after moving to a new university	I English- medium article
Ihsan (ANP1)	Local, formal, weak, temporary, asymmetrical, direct	Disciplinary	Disciplinary	Via CARA	Colleagues, then stopped after moving to a new university	I English- medium article
John (ANP2) (ANP3)	Local, formal, weak, durable, asymmetrical, direct	Text- production disciplinary publishing network	Disciplinary	Via new job context	Co-workers, emails	I English- medium article + I grant application
Robert (ANP2) (ANP3)	Local, formal, weak, durable, asymmetrical, direct	Disciplinary	Disciplinary	Via new job context	Co-workers, emails	I English- medium article + I grant application
James (ANP2) (ANP3)	Local, formal, weak, durable, asymmetrical, direct	Disciplinary publishing network	Disciplinary	Via new job context	Co-workers, emails	I English- medium article + I grant application
Rashed (ANP2)	Transnational, informal, weak, temporary, asymmetrical, indirect	Disciplinary publishing	Disciplinary	Via John	Via emails	I grant application
James's PhD students (ANP2)	Local, informal, weak, temporary, asymmetrical, indirect	—	Disciplinary publishing	Via James	Meetings and emails	Helping out with research ideas
Iyad (ANP3)	Transnational, informal, strong, temporary, symmetrical, direct	Disciplinary publishing research network	Text- production disciplinary publishing	Met in a local conference	Via emails	I English- medium article published in a local journal
Mohannad (ANP3)	Transnational, informal, strong, temporary, symmetrical, direct	Disciplinary publishing	Text- production disciplinary publishing	Via Iyad	Via emails	I English- medium article published in a local journal

Appendix D. An Overview of Mubarak's Academic Network.

Node	Tie and node types	Node's contribution to the Network	Mubarak's contribution to the network	How entered	How sustained	Resulting products/ activities
Four Syrian academics (ANP1 + ANP2 + ANP3)	Local, informal, strong, durable, asymmetrical, direct	Disciplinary networking	Text- production disciplinary publishing networking	Previous colleagues	Via online meetings	5 English- medium articles published in local journals and 1 English-medium article published in an international journal
Three Turkish academics (ANP2 + ANP3)	Local, formal, strong, durable, symmetrical, direct.	Disciplinary	Text- production disciplinary publishing networking	University colleagues	Via meetings at work and emails	2 English- medium articles published in local journals and 1 English-medium article published in an international journal
Two UK- based non-Syrian academics (ANP3)	Transnational, formal, strong, durable, asymmetrical, direct	Text- production publishing	—	Via CARA	Via meetings in workshops and emails	Developing knowledge
Thaer A UK-based Syrian academic (ANP3)	Transnational, formal, strong, durable, symmetrical, direct	Text- production disciplinary publishing networking	Disciplinary		He was Mubarak's student in Syria	1 English- medium article published in an international journal
UK-based English language tutor (ANP3)	Transnational, formal, strong, durable, asymmetrical, direct	Text- production	—	Via CARA	Via emails and online meetings	Developing text- production knowledge