Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes

Edited by

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Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes

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In this series:

Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes

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Contents

of use, and restore rhetoric, in a new and more precise form, to its rightful place in the teaching of language.

<div align="right">(original emphasis, 1979: 17)</div>

These four elements, oral discourses, discourse analysis, rhetorical modelling and rules of use, were to prove to be emancipatory for EAP as it moved into the final two decades of the century. They provided some freedom of manoeuvre outside of the rise of formal generative linguistics and variationist sociolinguistics, and opened the door for more multidisciplinary approaches and influences.

One of the first and most long-lasting of these emancipations was the emergence of the concept of genre. As far as I am aware, the term 'genre' first occurred in EAP literature in 1981. It was used that year (independently) in the important paper by Tarone *et al.* in the second issue of the journal *English for Specific Purposes* (or the *ESP Journal* as it was originally called) and by myself in the local Birmingham monograph, *Aspects of Article Introductions*. The concept has given rise to very considerable theoretical, pedagogical and ideological debate, the details of which cannot be reviewed here, but are discussed in such volumes as Swales (1990), Freedman and Medway (1994), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) and Johns (1997a). In effect, a focus on genre redrew the map of academic discourse by replacing rhetorical modes such as exposition or registral labels such as scientific language with text-types such as research article, term paper, final examination, MA thesis and conference abstract. The consequences were fairly dramatic. The genre categories had a self-evident validity (although within blurred definitional boundaries) for the academy in general and for the students in it. Dialogue became easier, and in hindsight it is probably no accident that the 1981 Tarone *et al.* study of two astrophysics papers included an astrophysicist co-author as a 'specialist informant'. The replacement of randomised sampling of texts by generic whole ones then led to separate analyses of 'parts' of a genre (such as the IMRD structure in many scientific papers) and the development of accounts of what seems to be happening within them, such as 'the move analysis' in Swales (1981).

As Flowerdew (in press) notes, approaches to genre can be essentially divided into those that are grounded in the textual and those that are grounded in the context or community situation. The former proponents by the end of the 1980s could number many of the contributors to *English for Specific Purposes* as well as a number of leading figures in the 'Sydney School' of systemic-functional linguistics, such as Hasan and Martin. (It has never been fully clear

show that the supposed differences in attainment levels between native and non-native speakers (NNSs) are exaggerated and that near-native levels are indistinguishable from native.

If the levels of expertise in a language do not automatically correlate with the NS/NNS boundary, is the NS user of scientific English in a more secure position than the NNS? As Rampton points out, expertise (as opposed to an innate concept of nativespeakerhood) is learned, partial and relative. This means that not only the NNS but also the NS must learn how to do science. Science is a craft that can only be learned by doing and is not just a matter of knowledge, as stressed by current sociologists of science (e.g. Pickering, 1992; see also Fujimura, 1996; Collins, 1992). Part of this learning of a craft is the acculturation process of learning how to write in the way deemed appropriate by the mature practitioners of the craft (Bazerman and Paradis, 1991). This is true both for the NS and the NNS, so that Dudley-Evans discovered that errors made by an NS 'scientific apprentice' learning her trade by writing her PhD dissertation were no different in kind from those of NNSs. She too had difficulty with cohesion, lexical choice, sentence order and tense choice, and Dudley-Evans concluded that 'there is only quantitative rather than qualitative difference between production in L1 and L2' (Dudley-Evans, 1991: 50).

This similarity between NSs and NNSs in the problems they face in academic writing is supported by other researchers: it has been noted that higher level discourse problems are more significant than are the grammatical problems of practising scientist NNSs writing for international journals (e.g. Dudley-Evans, 1994a; Mauranen, 1993b; St John, 1987; Swales, 1990; Swales and Feak, 1994). Even NNSs may often be aware that language is not a significant problem, so that among the Hong Kong academics investigated by Flowerdew, 32% thought they were at no disadvantage vis-à-vis NSs, while among those who did think they were at a disadvantage, only 51% said they had technical problems with the language (Flowerdew, forthcoming).

NNSs must, of course, still overcome the obstacle of acceptance by the gate-keepers of journal editors and referees. Myers (1990) has shown that this is a significant hurdle and requires a lot of negotiation even among NSs, while a glance at the date of submission and acceptance of any scientific journal will show that papers are rarely accepted without revision. In some cases, as evidenced by Carter-Sigglow (1996), it may be that perception of possible language problems by NNSs will impede publication. However, Flowerdew notes that journal editors are not usually worried about grammatical errors, since these can be edited out easily (Flowerdew, forthcoming).

pretive attitude. Her discursive background thus accounts for this remarkably judicious reading strategy. The type of sources she uses and the modes of reading them thus differ from the other two writers discussed.

Her writing also displays the sharpest use of language among the dissertations received. This is not to deny that she too has some sections which are badly edited or contain a more personal use of language. She begins her first words in the thesis with the following words in her Acknowledgments: 'I thank my Lord and Master Jesus Christ for enabling me to complete this study with very limited sources at my disposal.' Though this language is permissible in this somewhat more personal section of the dissertation, it is eschewed in the body of the text. Thus, there is a recognition of the appropriate genres of discourse to be employed in the different sections of the dissertation. She also finds a permissible way of expressing her religious identity in the pages of the work. The next page, which presents her Abstract, suggests a scholarly prose with a more detached tone: 'This is an attempt at tracing the approaches of the American Mission in teaching the English language during the British period in Jaffna. From most of the findings the course has been a successful one. In fact it could be pointed out that at a certain period of time the cry for English and more English came from the natives themselves . . .' The impersonal syntactic structures, the hedging devices and the qualifications here suggest a switch to more research oriented discourse in the body of the dissertation. Viji's relative closeness to the literate, Anglicised discourse conventions helps her to be detached from her writing when she desires.

The creative fusion of these divergent discourses is also found in her use of citations in the first chapter:

'Ye shall be witnesses unto me unto the utmost part of the earth' (Holy Bible, Acts 1:8) – the final command of the Master to the disciples of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled through the centuries ultimately paving the way for a band of missionaries from the American Board to reach the shores of Jaffna in 1813. Though the supreme goal of the missionaries was to evangelise, they found themselves being compelled 'to seek the aids of learning' (Plan: 1823) in order to prepare the ground for sowing the seed of the Gospel. (p. 1)

It is interesting that the quotation from the Bible which was cited in earlier drafts as a proud announcement of the educational endeavours of the missionaries is cited here dispassionately to indicate the rationale for their educational activities. The quotation that follows is from the proposal by a school board for starting one of the first missionary educational institutions. This bureaucratic text is in

PART II

THE ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES CURRICULUM

taught the necessary steps and procedures in secondary school (Reid and Lindstrom, 1985). EAP students need to be able to plan for writing, select and organise content before writing, review and revise successive drafts and proof-read to ensure that the product is improved, based on their knowledge of the subject and their knowledge of the language.

As Leki (1995a) points out, it is difficult to design writing tasks for students that take account of the linguistic and conceptual stages they have reached, and to give the appropriate amount of guidance. Writing activities for the early stages might include gap-filling, sentence completion, dictation and information transfer; in the next or intermediate stage, instruction can focus on cross-disciplinary genres – the narrative, procedures, reports, explanations, exposition and discussion of their subject. Each academic discipline differs in its ways of arguing for a particular point of view, interpreting data, considering different sides of an argument and drawing conclusions. EAP writing, certainly at the more specific levels, places emphasis on the *socially constructed* nature of writing, how the norms and values of the target discipline shape the features of the target genres (Dudley-Evans, 1984a). Swales and Feak (1994) is a good example of an advanced writing course that focuses on disciplinary differences as well as general writing and research skills for postgraduate students.

Much discussion in EAP writing revolves around the question of whether to focus on product or process – to view writing as a single production or as a process (see Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991). A typical product-oriented classroom writing cycle (Reid, 1988) is setting up a context (exploring the situations that require a particular register/genre audience, purpose, topic), modelling (by reading texts of the appropriate genre), noticing (setting tasks that draw students' attention to typical features of the texts, including staging, functions and grammatical features), explicit genre analysis (when students, prompted by the teacher, work out the major features of the text – the function, styles, schematic stages and linguistic features of the genre), information transfer (often pairwork), and text comparison. This can be followed by controlled production, e.g. text completion, text reconstruction and text reordering; and finally independent production of drafts, when students individually or in groups choose a topic within the target genre, do the necessary research and write the text. Feedback might include a degree of individual and group conferencing before publishing the final draft.

A typical process-oriented classroom writing cycle, has the following steps, generally with students working in pairs or groups: taking preliminary decisions, composing a rough draft, revising the

These exercises are easy to make and, as well as improving knowledge of particular words, they get learners used to the idea that words 'stretch' their meanings. The sample sentences come from the COBUILD dictionary.

The main purpose in isolating an academic vocabulary or a technical vocabulary is to provide a sound basis for planning teaching and learning. By focusing attention on items that have been shown to be frequent, and in the case of academic vocabulary of wide range, learners and teachers can get the best return for their effort.

The research on academic vocabulary is encouraging, although much still remains to be done. It has been shown that it is possible to devise lists of academic words which are small enough to be feasible learning goals and which provide enough coverage of academic text to make them a very valuable part of a learner's vocabulary.

Research is needed on the way the particular words behave in certain subject areas and the general discourse functions of academic vocabulary. For example, it may be interesting to take an academic function, like defining or referring to previous research, and see what role academic vocabulary plays in this. This research would confirm or question the value of courses for academic purposes for students from a variety of disciplines, and would suggest how attention could be most usefully directed towards academic vocabulary.

We shall first describe our context: the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and its international student population. Then, we shall describe three major historical eras of the EFL testing at UIUC, each of which followed a major model of EAP instruction and/or practice in educational assessment.[1] In the first era, a structuralist model of language ability dominated UIUC EFL tests during a time when no particular strong model of language testing, test quality control or test development existed there – this corresponds to Spolsky's (1978) prescientific era of language tests. The second era also yielded an EFL test which adhered to a language ability model (albeit a new communicative model), but more importantly, concerns of psychometric quality control were implemented. Finally, the third and present era continues the psychometric quality controls implemented in Era Two and attention to a language model (as in both Eras One and Two) while adding an accountability-oriented, criterion-referenced, specification-driven test development procedure. Each era thus retains the persona of the previous era, but responds to new influences.

The context: ESL students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

In 1867, the US government provided a 'land grant' for a university in east-central Illinois. Located approximately 200 km south of downtown Chicago, what was then called Illinois Industrial University grew to become a major academic institution in the central part of the US. Today, 'The [UIUC] campus includes some 200 major buildings on 1,470 acres, serving more than 2,000 faculty members, 26,000 undergraduates and 10,000 graduate [i.e., post-graduate] and professional students' (<www.uiuc.edu/admin2/about.html>). In the most recently completed academic year, 1998–99,[2] there were 3,245 international students enrolled at UIUC (Office of International Student Affairs, 1998).

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[1] In one sense, all three eras were 'EAP' testing, because all three concerned a common academic context and a similar mandate. However, only the third era (and to some extent the second) correspond to 'EAP' in the modern technical sense of the term.

[2] UIUC's academic year is divided into a sixteen-week fall semester, a sixteen-week spring semester, an intensive three-week 'Summer Session I', and a longer eight-week intensive 'Summer Session II'. The test discussed in this paper is given at various dates throughout the year, with large administrations at the start of the fall, spring, and Summer Session II terms. ESL service courses which depend on the test's results are offered in those same three terms. (Generally, there are no Summer Session I ESL classes.)