Journal of English for Academic Purposes 20 (2015) 58–68

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of English for Academic Purposes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jeap

Using corpus-based research and online academic corpora to inform writing of the discussion section of a thesis

Lynne Flowerdew

Formerly of the Center for Language Education, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 22 December 2014
Received in revised form 7 May 2015
Accepted 11 June 2015
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Thesis writing
Academic writing
Novice writing
Concordancing
Lexico-grammar
Rhetorical functions
Corpus pedagogy
Software tools

ABSTRACT

This paper shows how corpus-based research on academic writing has been used to inform a variety of concordancing activities designed to help postgraduate science and engineering students write the Discussion section of their theses. The concordancing tasks were integrated into a two-part workshop and made use of a freely-available corpus of research articles. In Part 1 of the workshop students first analyzed printed extracts of discussion sections from theses and identified prototypical move structure patterning. These top-down, genre-based pen-and-paper activities were followed by more bottom-up corpus tasks designed to familiarize students with search strategies for identifying useful lexico-grammatical patterns for particular rhetorical functions. In Part 2 of the workshop students were introduced to variation of move structure patterning in the Discussion section. Concordancing tasks focused on problematic areas identified in students' drafts of the discussion sections of their own theses. The corpus enquiries were also designed to familiarize students with more sophisticated searches to exploit the functionality of the software used. In the last section of the article, I suggest a range of freely-available corpora and tools that are suitable for use in second-language academic writing programs for advanced-level students.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In view of the growing internationalization of universities around the globe and the pressure on academic staff and their postgraduate students to publish in high-impact journals, it is not surprising that academic writing programmes, specifically targeted to help postgraduate students write research articles (RAs), theses and dissertations, are assuming increasing importance (Hyland, 2009, 2013; Thompson, 2013). Swales' (1990, 2004) landmark research on move structure patterning of the RA genre has inspired a wealth of research studies, many taking a corpus-based approach to linguistic analyses of the RA (see Flowerdew, 2013 for an overview). The Swalesian approach to genre also underpins a number of corpus-based pedagogic initiatives for writing the RA (see, for example, Bianchi & Pazzaglia, 2007; Birch-Bécaas & Cooke, 2012; Burgess & Cargill, 2013; Chang & Kuo, 2011; Cortes, 2007). Thesis writing (which I use as an umbrella term to cover both masters and doctoral postgraduate-level writing), while a less researched area than the RA, has also been investigated from a corpus-based, genre-analytic perspective. Most of these studies are of a contrastive nature, as outlined below (see Thompson, 2013 for an overview of recent studies). Importantly, they take a phraseological approach to the analysis, broadly defined as recurrent multi-word expressions, often categorized functionally (Tutin, 2010).

E-mail address: flowerdewlynne@gmail.com.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2015.06.001
1475-1585/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Metadiscourse, i.e. the linguistic expressions writers employ to guide their readers through the unfolding discourse and to engage them in understanding and interpreting the text (Hyland, 2005b), has been researched by Hyland (2004) in post-graduate writing at masters and doctoral levels across six disciplines. The metadiscourse study by Lee and Casal (2014), based on Hyland's model, adopts a cross-linguistic perspective. Lee and Casal's analysis of a corpus of 200 master's thesis results and discussion chapters in engineering written by English and Spanish writers, indicates that interpersonal features of writing are bound by specific lingua-cultural contexts in which texts are produced, even within the same discipline. Koutsantoni (2006) compared rhetorical strategies in research articles and thesis writing, while Hyland (2008a) explored differences in lexical bundle use, usually three- or four-word grams computed automatically (Hyland, 2008b), in published and postgraduate writing. Disciplinary differences have been investigated by Charles (2003, 2006, 2011a) in two corpora of theses compiled from the fields of materials science and politics: the use of nouns to construct stance (Charles, 2003), the phraseology and functions of adverbials of result in the Problem-Solution pattern (Charles, 2006), and the phraseological patterns in reporting clauses used in citations (Charles, 2011a). Thompson's (1999, 2005) research highlights differences in citation practices in theses from the field of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Botany. Disciplinary variation in advanced student writing in the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP) has been revealed in imperative usage across 16 different disciplines (Neiderhiser et al., in press).

While a substantial amount of corpus research on thesis writing, together with useful pedagogic implications, is reported in the literature, there are only a few accounts on corpus-pedagogic applications specifically for doctoral students (most reports focus on helping postgraduate students write research articles). For example, Charles (2007) introduces students to the two-part rhetorical function of defending your work against criticisms, i.e. anticipated criticisms and writer's defense, in her self-compiled corpora of theses from two disciplines, materials science and politics. Lee and Swales (2006) made use of available specialized corpora, including academic texts from the *British National Corpus* (*BNC*), to instruct doctoral students in concordancing techniques, after which participants compiled their own corpora, one of their own writing (terms papers, dissertation drafts) and one of expert writing from electronic versions of research papers in their own field or sub-field. Likewise, Eriksson's (2012) PhD students, all from the discipline of Biochemistry, made use of corpora of their own writing, but this corpus was compiled by Eriksson and not the students. Eriksson also compiled a small corpus of 25 research articles from the fields of biochemistry and biotechnology. Hands-on concordancing tasks focused on comparisons of 3- to 5-word lexical bundles found in these corpora, with students having to draw conclusions about their usage/functions.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how corpus consultation has been integrated into a two-part workshop to train postgraduate science and engineering students in writing the Discussion section of their theses. The workshop materials are grounded in the literature on writing a thesis, motivated by corpus-based findings on academic writing, and also incorporate insights from the exemplary pedagogic initiatives described in Charles (2007), Lee and Swales (2006) and Eriksson (2012) for the corpus consultations. To note is that ESP tutors often find themselves working under time and resource constraints, aspects which need to be taken into account when conducting needs analyses and preparing materials for second language academic writing programs (see Flowerdew, in press, 2016). I thus seek to illustrate how making use of a freely-available corpus can help, to some extent, alleviate these demands on time and lack of resources.

2. Background to two-part workshop

2.1. Workshop structure and participants

The two-part workshop session on writing the Discussion section of a thesis is part of a series of voluntary workshops offered to postgraduate science and engineering students at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong. The other workshops in the series focus on writing the introduction, literature review, experimental results and conclusion of a thesis, with all workshops

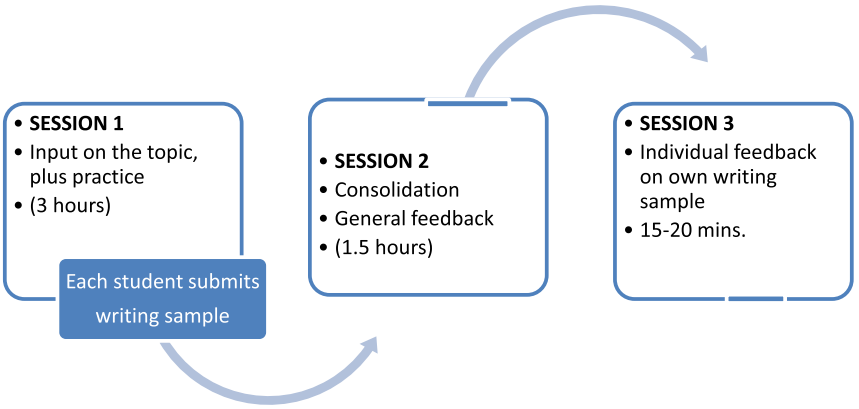

Fig. 1. Structure of two-part thesis writing workshop and feedback session.

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6843200

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/6843200

Daneshyari.com