



## Changes to English as an Additional Language writers' research articles: From spoken to written register

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### ABSTRACT

The process of writing journal articles is increasingly being seen as a collaborative process, especially where the authors are English as an Additional Language (EAL) academics. This study examines the changes made in terms of register to EAL writers' journal articles by a native-speaker writing centre advisor at a private university in Turkey. An innovative five category framework focusing specifically on nouns and associated elements is described and used to classify the advisor's changes to a sample of nine research articles in the field of social science. An analysis of these changes concludes that non-finite clauses are especially underused by the writers in this study. The implications of EAL writers' underuse of this structure and other academic written register forms are considered, and suggestions are made for raising awareness of register, both for EAL writers and the language professionals who help them.

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## 1. Introduction

As the need for academics to publish in English worldwide increases, questions inevitably arise regarding standards of English in academic publication, and this language requirement is a challenge for many English as an Additional Language (EAL) writers. Flowerdew (2008, p. 77), for example, notes the growing pressure on academics to publish in international English language journals and the difficulties for EAL writers in producing language of an acceptable quality.

EAL authors' need to publish has led to the development of two areas of research. The first is the collaborative nature of the writing process. For many EAL writers, where possible, a language specialist editor or proof-reader will need to be involved in the process at some stage. The role of native-speaker editors has been described in Burrough-Boenisch (2003, p. 227), who concludes that an article is actually a collaborative effort by the writer, colleagues, reviewers, proof-readers and editors. Similarly, Li and Flowerdew (2007, p. 102) describe academic articles as "the product involving a range of other people who participate in the editorial process." Lillis and Curry (2006a, b) use the term 'literacy brokers' to describe the various participants who assist in the publication process, including content and language specialists, and stress the collaborative nature of the academic writing process. It is not only the work on redrafting papers that is collaborative; Curry and Lillis (2010) have described the importance of academic networks for bringing together authors from different countries to collaborate right from the beginning of the writing process.

Another major theme in EAL writing research is the difficulties and prejudices faced by EAL academics working in non-English speaking countries. Employing a suitably qualified NS editor, assuming that one can be found, incurs extra cost and

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extra time (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003, p. 230). In addition, Flowerdew (2008, p. 84) reports that EAL researchers can feel stigmatised, since their work can be seen as of lower standard, and suggests that, rather than conformity to native-speaker norms, EAL writers' work should be accepted on the basis of intelligibility, with a corpora of EAL authored texts used to identify academic prose of an acceptable level.

In the same study Flowerdew (2008, p. 83) cites Ammon (2001, pp. vii–viii), asserting EAL writers' "right to linguistic peculiarities." Editors and reviewers are thus being encouraged to re-evaluate the 'standards' and 'variety' of English considered acceptable for publication (Belcher, 2007, p. 19). Rajagopalan (2006, p. 329) goes even further in asserting EAL writers' right to use non-standard academic forms, claiming that editors may dramatically change meaning in the name of language editing. Thus, it is claimed that the way to redress the balance is to accept 'intelligibility' as the criteria for accepting journal articles whose content meets journals' requirements for publication.

There is general agreement on the importance of intelligibility in EAL writing, in terms of writing that is not only free of surface errors, but also free from the problems of 'convoluted syntax' that can lead to 'difficulties in comprehension', as pointed out by the editors in Flowerdew's (2001) study. Intelligibility is clearly a necessary condition in the acceptability of writing, but in itself, it may be an insufficient one, because it does not take register into account. This study focuses on this significant, but somewhat neglected area. A number of researchers have noted the influence of a register more typical of spoken discourse in EAL writers' academic prose, including Hinkel (2003, p. 297), Shaw and Liu (1998, p. 246), Granger and Rayson (1998), described in Gilquin, Granger, and Paquot (2007, p. 323). In spite of these observations, there seems to be a lack of research on EAL writers' academic prose in terms of its similarities to a more informal style associated with the spoken register. This study focuses on register, in particular the role of nouns and noun phrases, and considers how revisions by a native speaker to EAL author's texts can create a more formal register.

This study is set in Izmir University of Economics (IUE), an English-medium University in Turkey, a country where English is a foreign language. The majority of faculty staff are Turkish, teaching and writing in English. As can be seen from Table 1, they are experienced teachers and researchers. The main purpose of this study is to develop a framework with which to document, count, classify and analyse the changes made by an NS editor to these EAL writers' academic prose in terms of spoken and written registers. This study focuses on the role of the native speaker editor in general, and in particular of the specialist writing centre aimed specifically at faculty staff members, as a possible solution to the challenges faced by these and other academics.

The study is structured as follows: Section 2 examines the background to research into EAL academic writing. Section 4 describes the work of the Writing Centre from which the editing work is carried out. Section 5 describes the rationale for categorisation of register changes made during editing. In Section 6, the changes made to EAL writers' papers are classified and quantified, and example extracts from EAL academics' writing and a native speaker's revisions are analysed in terms of spoken vs. written register. Section 7 considers the significance of findings in the light of previous research, and makes suggestions for raising awareness of register among EAL writers and the language professionals who work with them.

## 2. Literature review

This study takes a descriptive approach in comparing EAL writers' academic language to that of native speakers. This is a common approach used in previous studies, many of which have focused mainly on verb forms, for example, lexical choice and verb tenses (Santos, 1988), modality and modal verbs (Flowerdew, 2001), tenses, aspects and passive voice (Hinkel, 2004), the passive voice (Hacker, 2003) and epistemic modality (Gabrielatos & McNery, 2005). Also there has been interest in wider textual issues: Ventola and Mauranten's (1991) comparison of academic texts by Finnish and English writers in terms of textlinguistic orientation, which found cultural differences between the two groups of writers, including the use of metalanguage; "deletive strategies, repetition and insertive strategies, reference-derived strategies" (Yli-Jokipii & Jorgensen, 2004, p. 345); "features imparting uncertainty" (Burrough-Boenisch, 2005, p. 29); and language management issues (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005). The last of these examines the role of editing in promoting text coherence and cohesion, rather than sentence level changes.

**Table 1**  
Details of the corpus.

Author's dept.	Approx. word length	No. of authors	Yrs. in academic life	No. of articles published
Architecture	5200	1	7	5
Management	3700	1	5	9
Management	4400	1	14	4
Fashion	5700	1	10	5
Marketing	10,600	1	6	8
International Relations	3500	2	10 + 10	15 + 12
Logistics	3600	1	6	5
School of Foreign Languages	5600	1	4	5
School of Foreign Languages	3200	1	6	11

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