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ELFA vs. Genre: A new paradigm war in EAP writing instruction?

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ABSTRACT

Genre approaches to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing instruction have recently been challenged by proponents of what is claimed to be a new paradigm for EAP – English as a Lingua Franca Academic (ELFA). From an ELFA perspective, EAP programmes are described as unfairly imposing national or native models on non-native speakers of English, and the genre-based paradigm which informs many EAP writing instruction programmes is characterised as *conforming* to rather than *challenging* the status quo. This paper looks critically at this characterisation, drawing on recent research literature and the first stage of a larger empirical study of published academic writing in scientific communication and associated communities of practice. Conclusions reported here indicate that an ELFA paradigm which depends on dichotomies such as Native Speaker (NS) vs. Non Native Speaker (NNS), or NS vs. ELFA is, at the very least, open to question as a starting point for the development of EAP writing programmes. By contrast, a Genre informed paradigm which draws on an apprentice vs. expert dichotomy is considered to offer a more useful basis for both syllabus design and pedagogy in EAP writing instruction. (186 words).

1. Introduction

This paper has two starting points. The first of these is a long term personal involvement in research and practice in English for Academic Purposes Writing Instruction (EAPWI). The second arises from some recent exchanges (Tribble, 2015; Jenkins 2015) regarding the relevance of the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) to EAP writing, and what constitutes good practice in EAPWI today.

First, the long term perspective. In the early 1990s, when I was responsible for courses in academic writing at what is now Queen Mary, University of London, the cutting edge of EAP pedagogy was represented by two strongly contrasting paradigms. Swales' (1990) *Genre Analysis* situated academic writing in disciplinary practices and encouraged students (and their teachers) to develop their capacities by engaging analytically with the written genres they aspired to control, and by building a critical understanding of their contexts of production and reception. This was a stance which aligned with emerging practices in Australia (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Martin, 1989) – these practices being directly influenced by Systemic

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Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1989). White & Arndt's (1991) *Process Writing* offered a different approach. Rather than focusing on texts and contexts, it drew on the experience of teachers on Freshman Composition programs in North American universities, research into writing processes such as that of Flower and Hayes (1977), and practices in rhetoric-based teaching that were common on US campuses at the time (see Raimes, 1993 for a useful survey). In brief, Process Writing theorists took the behaviours of successful *writers* as the starting point for pedagogy, and focused on students' need to produce a written performance within an essayist tradition which values individual inventiveness and control of rhetorical conventions over specific disciplinary requirements.

My challenge as a teacher at this time was to find ways of helping students from disciplines as far apart as Law and Electrical Engineering to meet the challenge of achieving success in disciplinary writing. I soon discovered that my previous experience of writing in the humanities and social sciences, and my so-called "native speaker intuition" were of little help when it came to knowing how best to deal with a law problem essay or a laboratory report. I also found that in my own practice, frameworks such as Swales' Create A Research Space (CARS) account of research report introductions (Swales, 1990), and Hoey's (1983) minimal discourse structure SPRE (Situation/Problem/Response/Evaluation) were of more use to my students than process writing techniques or the sentence > paragraph > essay approach (e.g. Jordan, 1990) which were typically associated with academic writing instruction at that time. My conclusion then was that my best way forward as an EAP writing teacher and materials developer was to build a curriculum focused on contextualised accounts of relevant instances of what Bazerman (1994: 131) has called *expert performances* (texts which exemplify the kinds of written performance that my students wanted to achieve). Without fully realising it I had made a paradigm choice which prioritised the reader over the writer, and saw texts and their contexts as the best foundation for pedagogy. To a very large extent I still find this paradigm to be the one that offers the most productive basis for EAPWI.

The second starting point for this paper is a concern regarding the relevance or otherwise of a supposedly new paradigm for EAPWI – English as a Lingua Franca Academic (henceforth ELFA). Up until now, my experience as a practitioner, my understanding of key research in relation to genre informed EAPWI (e.g. Swales, 1990; 2004; Hyland, 2000; Nesi & Gardner, 2012), and my own work in the application of genre approaches in writing instruction (e.g. Tribble & Wingate, 2013) have brought me to a point where I consider the first language status of the writers of the exemplars my students and I work with to have little or no relevance when it comes to text selection or writing pedagogy. What matters from my current perspective is the extent to which exemplar texts are adequate expert performances (or pedagogically useful counter exemplars), and the extent to which they can constitute resources that will support my students' learning. A contemporary approach to EAPWI which demonstrates how such thinking can be applied is found in Maggie Charles' recent work (e.g. Charles, 2012) in which post graduate students build their own corpora of exemplars of writing that are relevant to their disciplines, and then draw on these as resources for writing development. Taking such a position appears to have put me in conflict with at least three current sets of researchers (see Jenkins, 2014). First there are those who have criticised the majority of EAPWI programmes for being premised on an implicit or explicit deficit model, and failing to challenge higher education institutions with regard to the un-transparent (and often conflicting) academic literacy requirements they impose on students (Lea & Street, 1998). Second, there are those who espouse a "critical" perspective on EAPWI, and who appear to see the use of textual exemplars as an inappropriate and constraining starting point for EAPWI (e.g. Benesch, 2001; Lillis, 2003; Turner, 2012). Finally, there are those who adopt a Lingua Franca perspective on academic communication (Mauranen, 2012 and, in particular, Jenkins, 2011, 2014), who, like Benesch (2001) hold that current EAPWI practices require students: " … to accommodate (to) a narrow assimilationist model of English (Jenkins, 2011, p. 927).

What I hope to do in the rest of this paper is to unpack some of these issues. Initially I will consider some of the paradigms, hierarchies and dichotomies which have been proposed by different groups of researchers and practitioners who are concerned with the nature, content and processes of EAPWI programmes in Higher Education. I will then present findings from the first stage of a larger analysis of recent instances of expert writing in published research articles in life sciences. In the concluding stages of this paper, I will comment on the relative usefulness of terms such as *native*, *non-native*, *ELFA*, *expert* and *apprentice* in describing academic written production and in developing EAPWI syllabuses and materials which have the potential to be of use to students who are embarking on the difficult task of writing for disciplinary purposes.

2. Paradigms, hierarchies and dichotomies

2.1. Paradigms and hierarchies

EAPWI has a long and diverse history. Within English Language Teaching (ELT), it has often been considered a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Swales, 1988), drawing as it does on earlier work in register analysis (e.g. Halliday et al., 1964), and later work on genre and corpus analysis (e.g. Swales, 1981, 1990, 2004; Hyland, 2000). Key to ESP/genre informed EAPWI is the idea of the *exemplar*, a textual instance which is required for the realisation of a specific written genre and which can be used as a resource for syllabus and materials development, as a direct input to classroom instruction (Tribble, 2010), or as a constituent of wide or narrow spectrum EAP corpora (e.g. Biber, 2006; Charles, 2012) which will inform syllabus development and classroom learning. Preceding, and then developing alongside this ESP paradigm in EAPWI, and characterised as *Social/Genre* in Tribble (2009), are what I have described as *Intellectual/Rhetorical* approaches (ibid). These have their