



Learning how to write effectively for academic journals: A case study investigating the design and development of a genre-based writing tutorial system



Hsiang-Yee Lo ^{a, b}, Gi-Zen Liu ^{a, b, *}, Tzone-I Wang ^c

^a Department of Foreign Languages & Literature, National Cheng Kung University, 1, University Road, Tainan City 701, Taiwan

^b Foreign Language Center, National Cheng Kung University, 1, University Road, Tainan City 701, Taiwan

^c Department of Engineering Science, National Cheng Kung University, 1, University Road, Tainan City 701, Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Genre-based writing instruction (GBWI) has been used for English journal paper writing both in classroom teaching and in the development of materials utilizing move analysis and corpus-based analysis. Some writing systems and tutorials have also been developed to improve the writing of non-native English speakers (NNES), as well as to assist academics and researchers for their publications. However, most of these systems had been developed for certain aspects of academic journal writing, such as organizing references, preventing plagiarism, or finding appropriate collocations. Accordingly, *EJP-Write*, a Chinese-interfaced writing system for English academic journal writing, was developed based on GBWI to teach and assist journal writing in a user-friendly environment.

The present study aimed to investigate the perceived usefulness (content effectiveness) and perceived usability (system functionality) of *EJP-Write*, and identify other factors that might influence user attitudes and continued usage intention. Data was collected via questionnaire ($N = 35$) and structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted for fitness estimation on the modified Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to collect additional information for usefulness and usability evaluation ($N = 14$). Regarding perceived usefulness, the results show that participants felt the *EJP-Write* content was useful and effective in teaching genre and move structure because of the aid of various forms of support and examples such as phrase and paragraph templates. Additionally, the learning materials for verb tenses and citation formats were informative and practical for the participants to avoid grammatical and technical errors. However, the move structure provided was limited to the discipline of e-learning and education; thus, move analysis for different fields was suggested. Regarding perceived usability, the citation-related features in *EJP-Write* were particularly well-regarded. Participants also provided suggestions to improve online editing and outline developing features in the system. Factors found to influence user attitudes, and thus the intention of continued use, were usefulness and usability, while writing anxiety and personalization had less impact.

Findings of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis in the study suggest that *EJP-Write* can play multiple roles inside or outside of the classroom, both as a platform integrating most features essential for journal paper writing, and as a teacher providing guidance and learning materials necessary for this specific genre. It is anticipated that this study will contribute to the knowledge base about both content and interface design for journal paper writing in the discipline of e-learning and education. For program designers of web-based writing tutorials, the involvement of users in the development of move structure could both strengthen various GBWI approaches and solve issues related to disciplinary differences.

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* Corresponding author. Department of Foreign Languages & Literature, National Cheng Kung University, 1, University Road, Tainan City 701, Taiwan. Tel.: +886 952 179024; fax: +886 6 2387730.

E-mail addresses: hyl.ncku@gmail.com (H.-Y. Lo), gizen@mail.ncku.edu.tw, gizenliu@gmail.com (G.-Z. Liu), wti535@mail.ncku.edu.tw (T.-I. Wang).

1. Introduction

It is well known that research publications help gain access to degrees, job offers and administrative roles in various capacities; in short, “we are what we write” (Hyland, 2013, p. 53). Further, internationally indexed publications are now a common graduate student requirement, which has led to various forms of writing training to improve journal writing skills. Collaborative Interdisciplinary Publication Skills Education (CIPSE, Cargill, O’Connor, & Li, 2012) is one such method and includes three components: genre analysis, gatekeeper awareness, and story development. However, CIPSE requires institutional support for both language and content/subject experts to form successful collaborations and benefit writers.

Regarding integrating technology into curriculum design, Web-based instruction (WBI) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have become part and parcel of ESL/EFL pedagogy (Chen, Shih, & Liu, 2013; Chiu & Liu, 2013; Liu, Hwang, Kuo, & Lee, 2014; Liu, Liu, & Hwang, 2011). Hence, software and corpus-based approaches to helping improve both writing skills and the chances of publication have been developed (Carrió-Pastor, 2013; Cortes, 2013; Hyland, 2009; Hyland & Tse, 2009; Loncar, Barrett, & Liu, 2014; Relles & Tierney, 2013; Zheng, Warschauer, & Farkas, 2013). However, most writing systems are not specifically designed for the needs of English learners regarding academic journal paper writing and publication. In response to this shortcoming, *EJP-Write*, a Chinese-interfaced writing system for English academic Journal Paper Writing, was thus developed to empower native-Chinese writers with the knowledge and writing skills needed for this genre of writing.

The present study investigated the perceived usefulness (content effectiveness) and usability (interface and feature functionality) of, as well as user attitude toward and future intention to use *EJP-Write* via a modified Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), drawing upon a range of qualitative and quantitative data. It is anticipated that the results may help improve not only software design for academic writing, but also online writing and e-learning pedagogies.

1.1. Elements for the establishment of a successful writing system

Differing from traditional writing courses where in-class lectures and feedback from the instructor are the key components of learning, a self-directed online writing system can play various roles to meet user needs for academic writing. These roles include acting as an instructor to provide writing guidance and learning materials, offering a user-friendly writing environment (Waes, Weijten, & Leijten, 2014), and helping to organize references for academic writing. The following subsections introduce the key elements related to designing a writing system, namely the various approaches of existing writing instructions and systems.

1.1.1. Pedagogical approaches to English writing instruction

Academic Literacies (ACLit) in the UK higher education system emphasizes literacy practices that aim to raise critical awareness of power relations, writer identity and agency (Lea & Street, 2006; Wingate, 2012). However, research has suggested that students might not be as ready as expected to explicate and criticize their work with regard to disciplinary writing conventions (Deane & O’Neill, 2011; Wingate, 2012). Novice writers might be disoriented when they are unfamiliar with the genre but asked to “own” it and to challenge the power relations or find writer identity. Rather, only when the students develop an understanding toward their own disciplinary conventions can the writing practices be challenged and the writer find his/her own voice and identity.

Writing in Disciplines (WiD) has long been applied in the U.S. education system, where subject teachers are responsible for teaching writing (Wingate, 2012). Students in WiD training learn about the writing formats and styles of a given discipline, and learn to meet specific writing criteria (Deane & O’Neill, 2011). The advantages of WiD are that it includes students from all disciplines, provides discipline-specific discourses and conventions from experts (i.e., subject teachers), and is able to clearly explain disciplinary writing criteria to avoid misunderstandings (Wingate, 2011). Nevertheless, constraints such as heavy workloads and a lack of resources may render subject teachers reluctant to teach writing in this manner (Bailey, 2010).

Genre-based writing instruction (GBWI) includes a number of different branches regarding both theory and practice (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Bazerman, Bonini, & Figueiredo, 2009; Englander, 2014; Johns, 2011); examples of which are the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement with “moves analysis” (Johns, 2008; Swales, 1990), the Sydney School (Hyon, 1996) and New Rhetoric School (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). These approaches consider different genres with specific communicative purposes; thus, the emphasis is on analyzing texts in contexts. Therefore, it differs from WiD in that GBWI distinguishes different genres (e.g. essays, term papers, lab reports, grant proposals, thesis, journal articles) and analyzes the text to form teaching materials and learning opportunities. For instance, employing Swales’ move analysis, researchers analyze numerous texts of a specific genre to identify rhetorical sequences, or *moves*, in different parts of the writing. Students then learn about these moves to meet their disciplinary writing conventions and criteria. In the Sydney School approach, however, both the teacher and students conduct text analysis jointly and individually to develop the contextual linguistic features best suited for their social functions (Wingate, 2012). Lastly, adapting Activity Theory (Russell, 1995, 1997), the New Rhetorical approach focuses on genre awareness in the writing classroom by analyzing the immediate context, the situation, the writer, the reader, their interaction and ideology, and factors relevant to the setting to accomplish the writing task (Johns, 2008; Russell, 1997). Among these GBWI approaches, Swales’ moves analysis in ESP and the Sydney School have been applied more commonly in ESL/EFL settings, enabling leaning materials to be more scaffolded for novice writers (Johns, 2008).

1.1.2. Genre and move structures for the instruction of journal article writing

GBWI can be used to help identify genre and move structures for different sections of research papers, as well as the linguistic features and rhetorical functions that can benefit learners and improve their writing skills (Feak & Swales, 2009; Hyland, 2009; Johns, 2008, 2011, 2012; Johns et al., 2006; Khodabandeh, Jafarigohar, Soleimani, & Hemmati, 2013; Martín & León Pérez, 2014; Samraj, 2013; Samraj & Monk, 2008; Swales & Feak, 2009; Swales, 2011). Empirical research examining GBWI has reported positive outcomes that suggest the explicit teaching of genre, move structure and linguistic features and forms can be very beneficial for learners (Chang & Kuo, 2011; Cheng, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Costino & Hyon, 2011; Driscoll & Aquilina, 2011; Henry, 2007; Johns et al., 2006; Khodabandeh et al., 2013; Kuteeva, 2013; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Samraj & Monk, 2008; Stoller & Robinson, 2013; Wingate, 2012).

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