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NNES RAs: How ELF RAs inform literacy brokers and English for research publication instructors[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Non-native English speaking (NNES) researchers often depend on language professionals to translate or edit research articles (RAs). Genre study can identify the types of changes likely to improve RAs' acceptability. Previously, the reference texts for this analysis have been RAs written by NS authors. In this study, the reference texts were Animal Husbandry RAs published by NNES authors in international journals ranked in the second quartile (Q₂) for their field. These RAs were compared to RAs written by Indonesian academics in English and in Indonesian with respect to features posited to be barriers to publication (justification for research, use of citations, structure of the Discussion, non-standard English usage, parochialism and conciseness). In each of these areas differences were found between the Indonesian written and reference RAs. Nevertheless, the reference RAs show significant accommodations to ELF styles. Non-standard English that does not hinder clarity, absence of strong justifying arguments or claims regarding the importance of the work are apparently not major barriers to publication in these Q₂ journals. In this field, literacy brokers do not need to impose a Western style on authors' work but should focus on clarity of meaning, quality of explanations, transnational relevance and conciseness.

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1. Introduction

The pressure to publish research articles (RAs) in English is a well documented challenge for non-native English speaking (NNES) academics in many countries (Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Flowerdew, 1999; Ge, 2015; Uzuner, 2008) including Indonesia, where failure to publish in Scopus-listed English language journals is a barrier to promotion (Adnan, 2014). To publish in such a journal entails being a member of a wider discourse community, which requires not only a high level of expertise in the discipline and the sharing of common goals, but also the exchange of information using a specific genre and specialized terminology (Swales, 1990, p. 29). In the case of English language RAs, a fairly defined style is required. This depends on the academic discipline and may be further delineated by the style guide of individual journals.

NNES writers often engage a 'literacy broker' (Lillis & Curry, 2006) in the process of preparing their manuscript. In Indonesia, and elsewhere (Burrough-Boenisch & Matarese, 2013; McKenny & Bennett, 2011), this literacy broker's role often includes translation and/or negotiation of substantial rewriting in order to produce a manuscript that conforms to the Western rhetorical style required by the editors of the authors' target journal. Helping EAP teachers and literacy brokers understand what is needed is the most useful function of genre research into RAs (Burrough-Boenisch, 2013; Peacock, 2002).

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Much of this research has aimed to identify the structure of RA genres by analysis of NS RAs and then, by comparison with NNES RAs, identify features ('barriers') that might hinder acceptance of the latter by international journals.

One common tool used to teach and analyse the rhetorical style of RA Introductions is Swales' (1990, 2004) Create-a-Research-Space (CARS) model. This divides the Introduction into a series of communication 'Moves' made up of smaller 'Steps'. Move 1 (establishing a territory) provides general background. The focus then narrows in Move 2 as a niche or space in the state of current research is delineated either by 'indicating a gap' (Step 1A) or 'adding to what is known' (Step 1B). This may, or may not, be followed by some positive justification for the research. Finally, (Move 3) this niche is 'occupied' as the writer explains how the present research fills the gap. Previous studies suggest that some NNES academic writing deviates from this model, particularly in Move 2. Lack of conformity to this model has been posited as a barrier to publication in international journals (Adnan, 2011; Safnil, 2013; Sheldon, 2011; Árvay & Tankó, 2004) but this conclusion may be due to the set of reference RAs selected for the analysis.

The Discussion section in RAs is more fluid, dependent on discipline, and the Move structure harder to classify. Several Move models have been proposed, Dudley-Evans' (1994) nine Move model, or slight modifications of it, being commonly used to analyse RA Discussions over a range of disciplines. Moves relating to previous research, significance of the study, limitations and recommendations have been found to be less frequent in some NNES Discussions (Jalilifar, Hayati, & Namdari, 2012; Loi, Evans, Akkakoson, Ahmed, & Ahmed, 2015; Mirahayuni, 2002). Failure to relate research findings to the wider context or other research in their field may make these NNES RAs less acceptable to editors of international journals (Adnan, 2014).

'Reference to previous research' also involves the use of citations, which can be either integral, where the author's name occurs in the body of the text, or non-integral where it is included in brackets or referenced using an endnote (Swales, 1986). The latter allows for a more condensed writing style and tends to be more frequent in science where the focus is on results or ideas rather than the originators (Thompson & Tribble, 2001). The former provides authors opportunities to signal their evaluation of sources (Swales, 1990) but presents extra challenges to NNES as it involves mastering the subtle difference of meaning between the use of different tenses and choice of controlling verbs such as 'explains' and 'suggests'. The functions that RA citations perform, the date of publication and frequency of use have also been a focus of cross-cultural research (Adnan, 2009; Loi, 2012; Yeh, 2010). If citations are too sparse, dated or used uncritically or inappropriately this may also present a barrier to publication.

Poor standard of English (Adnan, 2014; Flowerdew, 2008; Uzuner, 2008) can result in immediate rejection especially if the clarity of the text is compromised and the results not obviously highly significant (Flowerdew, 2000, 2001). NNES writing can be less linear and more repetitious than Western academic discourse (Bennett, 2007; Mirahayuni, 2002; Safnil, 2003) but editors of international journals expect RAs to be written economically, without redundancies, so the expert reader can scan and extract salient information quickly (Biber & Gray, 2010). Deviations from this style are another possible barrier to publication.

NNES academics, particularly those living in Asian countries, may lack mentoring or feedback from colleagues who have a global perspective (Adnan, 2014; Flowerdew, 2000) but where research is focused exclusively on local contexts, events and policies its persuasiveness and potential audience is limited. Uzuner (2008) and Adnan (2014) both mention this 'parochialism' as another barrier to publication.

The identification of most of these putative barriers to publication is a result of comparisons between NNES RAs and those written by NS in leading journals (Adnan, 2014; Arsyad & Arono, 2016; Jaroongkhongdach, Todd, Keyuravong, & Hall, 2012; McKenny & Bennett, 2011; Mirahayuni, 2002; Sheldon, 2011). However, these NS RAs may not be the best models for literacy brokers, who are entrusted to retain as much of the voice of the author as possible (Burrough-Boenisch & Matarese, 2013). An increasing proportion of global research communicated in English is now written and read by NNES (Flowerdew, 2008). Proponents of the use of ELF suggest that elevating NS models as the standard is imposing an Anglo-American ethnocentrism that perpetuates a bias against NNES and marginalises their insights (Baker, 2013; Bennett, 2013). Literacy brokers may be better informed of the "real world constraints" (Bennett, 2013) they operate under by a comparison with a range of NNES RAs that have been successfully published in influential international journals. It appears, however, that no such comparative studies have been conducted in which the reference texts are RAs from non-Western linguistic or cultural communities. This research begins to address that gap by interrogating a set of reputable NNES RAs (the reference RAs) using linguistic and rhetorical features identified in RAs written by Indonesian academics that a literacy broker might consider changing to improve the acceptability of an RA for publication. The incidence of these features in the reference RAs gives an indication of whether or not changes are likely to be necessary.

Flowerdew (2005) states that a small but representative sample of RAs from the relevant discourse community's socio-cultural environment can inform teachers as they help the students adapt their writing practices. Burrough-Boenisch (2013) suggests that such collections of RAs are also informative for literacy brokers assisting NNES researchers to prepare work for publication in a particular field. A small sample of NNES articles from widely quoted journals in a specialized subject area is sufficient to reveal any common ELF features that are acceptable to the editors of these journals. This data will help literacy brokers to avoid imposing unnecessary alterations on NNES work, allowing more of the writers' voice to be heard. It will also identify what should be included in English for Research Publication courses.

For this study, I selected animal husbandry RAs because I am often asked to help prepare RAs from the agricultural sciences. This is a strategic field of research in tropical Asia. For example, research in agricultural sciences, including animal husbandry, forms a significant percentage of the research published by Indonesians internationally. In the period 1996–2016, more Indonesian RAs were published in Agricultural and Biological Sciences than in any other field, except Engineering

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