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Gender and academic writing

1. Introduction

The relationship between gender and discourse has been a focus of theoretical and empirical attention in the fields of applied and sociolinguistics for some 30 years (for overviews see Cameron, 2006, 2007, 2010; Coates, 2004; Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2002; Talbot, 2010; Wodak, 1997), with debates continuing around the extent and specific ways in which language and discourse are gendered and how such gendering is enacted and sustained, often taking spoken language as the empirical object (Swann, 2002; for recent examples, see; Baxter, 2014; Grohosky, 2014; Hultgren, 2017). The significance of gender for writing and specifically academic writing has received less attention in sociolinguistic and discourse studies but there are a number of important strands of work which this Special Issue seeks to bring together. These include:

a) feminist writings on what it means to 'write' across all discourses and genres, particularly what it means to inscribe and re-inscribe as a woman (e.g. de Beauvoir 1997; Irigary, 1993; Spender, 1980; Threadgold, 1997; Liu, Karl, & Ko, 2013) and as a feminist (Belsey, 2000; Handforth & Taylor, 2016);
b) academic writing research which has foregrounded gender as a key aspect of identity work in the production, reception and teaching of academic writing (e.g. Flynn, 1988; Nye, 1990; Kirsch, 1993; Dixon, 1995; Haswell & Haswell, 1995; Holbrook, 1991; Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Belcher, 2009; Tse & Hyland, 2008, 2012);
c) academic writing research which has explored the specific ways in which the labour surrounding the production of academic writing, notably the teaching of student writing, is gendered (e.g. Blythman & Orr, 2006; Horner, 2007; Schell, 1998; Tuell, 1992; Turner, 2011);
d) research which documents the material conditions of academic work, including scholarly writing, and their continuing gendered impacts on career trajectories (e.g. Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Appleby, 2014; Grummell, Devine, & Lynch, 2009; Hey, 2001; Leathwood and Read, 2009; Moi, 2008; Prozesky, 2008).

The seven papers in this SI engage with these literatures, bringing them into dialogue with work in a number of fields, including EAP, academic literacies, bibliometrics, applied linguistics, new literacy studies, feminist higher education studies and transgender studies. The papers report on research focusing on what it means to do academic writing – in terms of production, uptake and pedagogy—in a range of distinct contexts. The overarching question that the SI seeks to explore is as follows:

> *What is the significance of gender in and for the production, evaluation and teaching of academic writing in the contemporary academy?*

Why is this question of interest to JEAP readers and EAP more generally? EAP, as a research and pedagogic project, rather than a transnational commercial enterprise (British Council, 2013; Graddol, 2000), is driven by a central concern to facilitate access to English medium academic language and literacy practices. Whilst there are many debates around what constitutes 'access' and the extent to which the goal of EAP pedagogy and curriculum design is not only 'accommodationist' (helping students and scholars to work within existing regimes of academic discursive practice) but also 'transformative' (to problematize and open up existing discursive regimes), a fundamental imperative is to enable people from a wide diversity of linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds to engage in English medium rhetorical practices for the purposes of participating in academia (for discussions, see Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Lillis & Tuck, 2016). There are therefore strong academic, social and ethical reasons why EAP practitioners and researchers are likely to be interested in critically re-examining contemporary understandings about the ways in which such participation is mediated by gender.

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The many reasons for exploring the particular significance of gender in and for *academic writing* including the following. Firstly, women academics continue to lag behind men in academia: only 20% hold professorships in UK universities even though they account for more than 45% of the workforce (Black & Islam, 2014). In the EU as a whole, women represent only 20% of 'grade A' academic staff (European Union, 2013) and the lowest proportion of women researchers is in countries with the highest research and development expenditure (Morley, 2014; for statistics on women's underrepresentation globally see http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-academia). Recent research studies on women in higher education have concluded that this continued vertical segregation is not accounted for in full by 'pipeline' issues – i.e. a lack of women 'coming through' the system to obtain higher positions (e.g. Dobele, Rundle-Thiele, & Kopanidis, 2014) or by greater family responsibilities (e.g. Aiston & Jung, 2015) with a number of authors arguing for continued research into the profoundly gendered practices of academia, in order to throw light on the persistent inequalities they give rise to (Acker, 2014; Blackmore, 2014). Issues of academic status and esteem, particularly in relation to prestigious forms of academic production and knowledge-making, such as the conference keynote speech, as well high status written research outputs, are a matter of live debate in professional associations (for example, in 2014 a vigorous discussion took place amongst British Association for Applied Linguistics members concerning the gender makeup of conference speaking panels). Debates currently surface regularly in the public media about sexism across all professional domains, including academic domains (for examples of reports on sexism in academia in different parts of the world, covered in the media, see http://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/heinous-sexist-culture-inside-stem-industries-exposed/news-story/3956b3a88df843f63655260fdabe2a3e. Accessed 25/2/18- Australia; https://mg.co.za/article/2014-08-12-universities-remain-a-bastion-of-gender-discrimination-too-. Accessed 28/2/18- South Africa; https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/24/sexism-women-in-university-academics-feminism-U.K. Accessed 1/318.). The public expressions of misogyny directed at women experts are discussed in a recently published book by Mary Beard (2017), a senior UK classicist, who anchors the current abuse women face when speaking publically (including extreme abuse with threats of rape on social media) to long established cultural assumptions that women do (and should) not have a legitimate claim to discourse publically.

Secondly, and more closely linked to the focus of this SI, academic writing for publication is central to academic work for an increasing proportion of academics, constituting cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) towards securing academic posts and promotion. Yet women are less likely to be first named as authors in multiple-authored papers, to be cited in top-rated journals (Wilson, 2012) and to take on prestigious roles in the production of academic texts, such as being journal editors (Tight, 2008). Women academics are less well represented in national assessment regimes, e.g. in the UK RAE and REF (Blackmore, 2010). For example, in Read, Robson, and Francis, 2008, 67% of men were selected compared with 48% of women (HEFCE [Higher Education Funding Council of England] 2009, p.8 & 9), and data from HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) indicated "a marked difference between the rate of selection for men and women in 2014; 67 per cent of men were selected, compared with 51 per cent of women" (HEFCE, 2015). The 2009 HEFCE report concludes that they believe it is not so much a "bias in the selection process" that accounts for these differences but may be as "… a result of deeply rooted inequalities in the research careers of men and women" (p.25). At the same time, reports evaluating the equality and diversity practices of UK higher education institutions around REF 2014, stated that there was a need to "improve gender equality within academia" (EDAP [Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel], 2015) and explicitly signalled a potential gender bias in the process itself (HEFCE, 2017, p. 43).

Thirdly, powerful binaries framing what counts as academic writing/discourse, rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, prevail: these include rational-emotional, objective-subjective, mind-body, with the less prestigious of the binaries (emotional, subjective, body) frequently culturally marked as feminine/female. The specific ways in which the 'unmarked' or prestigious pairs of these binaries are entextualised in the particular genres and rhetorics of essayist literacy, such as argument rather than poetry or linearity rather than circularity and digression, standard over vernacular, have been critiqued as 'masculinist' discourse (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987; Elbow, 1991; Frey, 1990) as well as being Anglo-centric (e.g. Bennett, 2015; Canagarajah, 2002). The binaries have long since been discussed by major feminist philosophers e.g. de Beauvoir, (1997), Kristeva, (1986) and Irigary, (1993), and are currently being revisited, e.g. in the work of Moi, (2008, pp. 23–34), Kirsch and Royster, (2010), Royster and Kirsch, (2012). New forms of academic writing, such as the academic blog and reflexive writing (usually required more of students than publishing scholars) and changing institutional demands (e.g. the requirement for greater 'impact' work alongside academic work in the UK) are challenging conventional assumptions about what kinds of writing should be valued and desired in the academy by students, scholars and teachers (see e.g. Hamilton & Pitt, 2009; Lillis, 2011; Mauranen, 2013; Schroeder, Fox, & and Bizzell, 2002) signalling that it is timely to open up debate about the kinds of conventions that should underpin academic writing (and textualised academic knowledge more generally) in the twenty first century (see *Kairos* as an initiative at journal level, http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/about.html).

The papers in this SI engage with key aspects of the many issues raised above, foregrounding in particular the following; the challenges surrounding the securing of access, participation and visibility in academia by women (Appleby, McMullan, Lillis and Curry, Nygaard and Bahgat), working class men (Preece) and transgender scholars (Thieme and Saunders); the importance of an ethics of care in intellectual work (Lillis and Curry, Tuck, Thieme and Saunders); desires for other ways of writing and engaging in academia (all papers).

In the spirit of 'writing otherwise' (Stacey & Wolff, 2013), in this Introduction we also include brief personal reflections by the editors of this SI.

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