

THE TESOLANZ JOURNAL

VOLUME 13, 2005

ISSN 1172-9694

The TESOLANZ Journal is published once a year by TESOLANZ, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Aotearoa/New Zealand (Incorporated), Te Ropu Kaiwhakaako Reo Ingarihi ki Iwi Reo Ke. The journal is double blind peer reviewed. A subscription to the journal is included in the annual membership fee of the Association. Enquiries about membership and subscription to the journal should be addressed to:

TESOLANZ
Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Tel: (04) 463 5600
Fax: (04) 463 5604

Those interested in submitting an article or book review should consult the *Notes for Contributors* printed at the back of this volume and be a current member of TESOLANZ.

EDITOR

Dr John Bitchener
School of Languages
Auckland University of Technology

REVIEWS EDITOR

Dr Martin Andrew
School of English & Applied Linguistics
UNITEC Institute of Technology

EDITORIAL BOARD

Dr Gary Barkhuizen
Applied Language Studies & Linguistics
University of Auckland

Dr Stephen May
Language & Literacy Education
University of Waikato

Dr Rob Batstone
Applied Language Studies & Linguistics
University of Auckland

Dr Jonathan Newton
Linguistics & Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington

David Crabbe
Linguistics & Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington

Dr John Read
Applied Language Studies & Linguistics
University of Auckland

Susan Gray
School of Education
University of Auckland

Gillian Skryme
School of Languages
Massey University

Angela Joe
Linguistics & Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington

Dr Cynthia White
School of Languages
Massey University

CONTENTS

Editorial

Articles

| | |
|---|-----|
| Does a shared cultural background influence student initiated interactions with teachers? Maree Jeurissen | 1 |
| An investigation of discipline-specific university assessments: Implications for undergraduate EAP curriculum design and writing assessments. Elizabeth Turner | 21 |
| Making meaning in academic contexts. David Cooke | 32 |
| Some principles of good pedagogical practice for tertiary international students. Margaret Franken | 43 |
| Marking for process, self-reflection and autonomy: Designing item specifications for business writing. Martin Andrew | 57 |
| Sociocultural theory and the teaching of process writing: The scaffolding of learning in a university context. Roger Barnard & Lucy Campbell | 76 |
| Complexity without integration. Heather Meyer | 89 |
| Book Reviews | 100 |
| Notes for Contributors | 110 |

EDITORIAL

The majority of articles selected for publication in this year's journal focus on issues concerning the written discourse of international students at secondary and tertiary levels of study. For a number of years, teachers and researchers have been debating the best ways to help EAL (English as an additional language) students meet the requirements of a new academic discourse community. Six of our seven articles address this issue and offer practical suggestions that have been tested in a variety of contexts.

However, the first article by Maree Jeurissen reports the results of an exploratory study, carried out in culturally diverse inner city primary school classrooms, of the discourse of small group mathematics lessons to see if students who have teachers of the same cultural background initiate talk more often and experience more success as learners of both language and curriculum content than students with teachers of other cultural backgrounds. The findings of the study did not reveal that this is the case but highlighted the importance of the explicit teaching of cognitive and metacognitive thinking strategies to all students. Jeurissen concludes that a classroom where students are encouraged to initiate talk and ask questions is one in which significant learning will take place.

The second article by Elizabeth Turner reports on a study that was designed to investigate discipline-specific assessment tasks in the Humanities as well as their requirements in order to inform development and writing assessment in EAP (English for Academic Purposes). The findings show that assessment task types and requirements vary between discipline areas. They identify a new type of task (the literature review) and also the fact that significant numbers of students have difficulties in understanding discipline-specific assessment instructions and marking criteria. From the point of view of practical applications, the study identifies writing task types and associated cognitive and rhetorical skills that need to be addressed in EAP curriculum and assessment design for students in these discipline areas.

Focusing also on academic writing, David Cooke argues for the central importance of meaning and argument in creating and interpreting text rather than the traditional focus on formulaic approaches to writing. Drawing upon insights from several dynamic texts where there is direction in the discussion, a development of case and a commitment to viewpoint, Cooke challenges teachers to focus their attention on helping students 'develop a critical stance of "reflective scepticism" to the messages around (them)'. The article serves as a guide for respecting the dynamism of text, detailing the dimensions of reading and writing tasks, and questioning the criteria for marking written assessments.

In our fourth article, Margaret Franken presents and explains a set of principles of good pedagogical practice for tertiary international students that arose from reflection on and analysis of the design and teaching of an adult literacy course for Chinese international students enrolled in an M.Ed programme at a New Zealand university. The course was designed as a result of a concern that students arriving from China were not ready to undertake postgraduate courses that assumed content knowledge, language and discourse knowledge, and knowledge of academic literacy practices.

Also concerned with the academic writing skills of international students, Martin Andrew, in our fifth article, describes assessment and pedagogical issues that course designers and teachers would do well to keep in mind when devising item specifications for assessing advanced writing in English as an additional language (EAL). He provides a case study of the design process in the context of a new second year degree course – Business Writing in International Contexts. He argues that well-designed user-oriented item specifications can simultaneously be assessor-constructed scales and, as such, save considerable teacher marking time without devaluing the feedback process. Andrew explains that item specifications can also work as pro formas or curriculum guidelines describing and prescribing key aspects of a course to ensure (1) concordance between lesson input and student output and (2) student understanding of the set tasks. He concludes that item specifications are invaluable teaching and learning aids and that they have applications in many areas of EAL beyond business writing.

Continuing the tertiary level writing theme, Roger Barnard and Lucy Campbell consider how independent and interdependent learning can be fostered through a process approach to the teaching of writing. This case study report of a university academic skills programme illustrates how scaffolding can be effected by teachers and students. Consideration is given to the way in which six scaffolding principles, informed by sociocultural theory, can be applied (1) throughout a particular course and (2) within broader pedagogical contexts.

The final article of this volume by Heather Meyer reports on part of a study which looked at the relationship between the cognitive development of senior high school students (native and non-native speakers) and the linguistic complexity of their written texts. In particular, it highlights some of the key linguistic and cognitive differences between *excellent native* writers and *excellent non-native* writers. Meyer concludes her article with a number of practical suggestions for helping non-native speakers approach the kind of linguistic-cognitive integration that native speakers enjoy.

The book reviews that follow have been selected to cover a range of areas relevant to teachers and researchers, and to reflect the kind of issues currently being published in the literature.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all those teachers and researchers who submitted manuscripts for consideration for this year's issue of the journal. It has been wonderful to receive so many manuscripts from emerging researchers (Masters and doctoral graduates) and young teachers in the profession. Part of the process involved in producing a manuscript ready for publication involves a response to advice and suggestions from experienced peers. In this respect, I am extremely grateful to members of the Editorial Board for the generous and detailed suggestions offered in their reports.

To readers of the journal who have so far not considered writing for this publication, may I encourage you to do so in the year ahead. You will find *Notes for Contributors* at the end of the journal but always feel free to contact me by email (john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz) if you require any additional information. The closing date for receiving manuscripts will be **Friday 1 September 2006**.

DOES A SHARED CULTURAL BACKGROUND INFLUENCE STUDENT INITIATED INTERACTIONS WITH TEACHERS?

Maree Jeurissen
Faculty of Education
University of Auckland

Abstract

People involved in education today generally accept that students from minority cultures are disadvantaged in New Zealand mainstream classrooms because “historically the knowledge base and pedagogical preferences of the dominant culture have overridden and marginalized the distinctiveness and world-view of minority cultures” (Berryman, Walker, Reweti, O’Brien & Weiss, 2000:35). This article reports on findings from a small exploratory study carried out in culturally diverse inner city primary school classrooms examining the discourse of small group mathematics lessons. Teachers and students from the same and different cultural backgrounds were the focus of the study which examined the nature and frequency of student initiated interactions. Findings signal that whilst the importance of ‘cultural capital’ should not be discounted, all teachers can implement specific strategies to assist students in maximizing learning opportunities in the classroom.

Introduction

New Zealand classrooms are places of intercultural contact. Linguistic and cultural diversity of both teachers and students has become the norm in many schools, particularly in the cities. Census figures show that between 1991 and 2001 the number of Europeans in New Zealand decreased from 83.2% to 80% of the total population, whilst Maori increased from 13% to 14.1%, Pacific Island from 5% to 6.5% and Asian from 3% to 6% of the total population (Statistics NZ, 2001). Current projections indicate that by 2040, Maori and Pacific Island students will be the largest ethnic groups in New Zealand primary schools (Alton-Lee, 2003). As the number of people identifying themselves as belonging to ethnic groups other than New Zealand European increases, so too does the presence of languages other than English. Census figures suggest that in New Zealand there are more than 100,000 speakers of Pasifika languages, approximately 95,000 speakers of Chinese languages, 50,000 speakers of languages from India, 20,000 speakers of Japanese and 15,000 speakers of Korean (Statistics NZ 2002c, cited in May 2002).

The vast majority of students speaking these and other languages, are enrolled in mainstream schools and are therefore faced with the task of learning the language of instruction, English, at the same time as learning the content of the curriculum [the exception being those students who are brought up bilingually, speaking English and their home language]. For these teachers and students language learning *intersects* with content learning throughout the school day.

Mathematics is one content area which is a central part of core curricula in New Zealand and indeed throughout the world (Barwell, 2005, p.97). Interest in the discourse of mathematics

from linguists dates back to Halliday's discussion of the mathematics register (1978, cited in Barwell 2005, p.97). Recent research, Cazden and Beck (2003), signals the importance of teaching methods which encourage discourse structures other than the typical initiation-response-feedback [IRF] sequence identified as the most common pattern in classrooms by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, cited in McCarthy 1991). In New Zealand the introduction of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement [NCEA] in secondary schools along with the Early Numeracy Project [ENP] and the Advanced Numeracy Project [ANP] in primary schools, has seen a greater emphasis placed on the need for students to explain and justify their mathematics reasoning orally. This has resulted in "a more explicit valuation of language in mathematics" (Meaney, 2002, p.2). This valuation of language is signaled in the Mathematics Curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 9) in the achievement aim which states that students will have opportunities to "develop the skills and confidence to use their own language, and the language of mathematics to express ideas."

This study takes the sociocultural viewpoint of language learning which assumes that action is mediated and situated in cultural, historical, and institutional settings (Wertsch, 1991). Baker, Street and Tomlin (2003 cited in Barwell, Leung, Morgan, and Street, 2005) argue that researchers should adopt the 'social' approach which is applied to language learning to the analysis of mathematics learning. This 'social' approach is premised by the belief that learning is constructed or reconstructed through social practice. Breen (2001b, p.127) explains that "teacher and learners can be viewed as thinking social actors and not reduced to generators of input-output nor analysed as dualities of either conceptual or social beings." When investigating the performance of students in minority ethnic groups who do not achieve as well in our education system as those in the majority culture, such an approach may reveal the invisible dynamics of power and domination, which permeate the fabric of classroom life (Auerbach, cited in Tollefson, 1995).

One such underachieving group is Pacific Island students. Evidence from the National Education Monitoring Programme along with external examination results and assessment data provided by schools themselves indicate that these students are not achieving as well as their non-Pacific counterparts (Education Review Office, 2002). Much has been written both locally (for example Alton-Lee, 2003; Barnard, 1998; Berryman, Walker, Rewiti, O'Brien & Weiss, 2000; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Mc Naughton, 2002) and internationally (for example Au, 1993; Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1982; Norton, 2001; Tollefson, 1995; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995) about the mismatch of the 'culture of the school' and the cultural practices and beliefs of minority students. A recurring theme pervades this literature and is encapsulated by Delpit who argues that success in institutions such as schools and workplaces "is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power" (1995, p.25). Children whose culture 'matches' that of the school, will therefore be more successful than those whose culture does not. Some have even suggested that the largely mono-cultural teacher workforce does not currently have the skill and knowledge to cope with an increasingly diverse student population (Rata, O'Brien, Murray, Mara, Gray, & Rawlinson, 2001). Such suggestions provoke the need for further research involving teachers and students who do not share the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Anecdotal observations of Pacific Island students during my own teaching of mathematics lessons was that they seldom asked for help or initiated learning focused interaction. Informal conversations with other teachers suggested that these observations were not isolated. Most of these teachers [including myself] were not from a Pacific Island background. This

situation was not unique to the school I was working in; statistics showed that in 2001 1.7% of teachers identified themselves as Pacific compared with 7.8% of students (Education Review Office, 2002). Pacific Island students were unlikely then, to be taught by a teacher who shared their cultural background. It was important to investigate whether or not shared student- teacher cultural background could be a factor in educational outcomes.

The Study

This article reports on a small exploratory study which investigated an aspect of discourse – student initiated interactions with teachers - which occurred during small group mathematics lessons. Students and teachers of Pacific Island and New Zealand European cultural backgrounds were observed to ascertain whether a shared cultural background influenced student initiated interactions with teachers. School enrolment records include ethnic group[s] students identify with and this was used to select participants. Teachers indicated their own ethnicity. It is acknowledged that ‘ethnic group’ does not necessarily correlate to ‘cultural background’ and that a person’s identity is “multi-layered and overlapping” (Giampapa, 2004, p.195). Ethnicity and language are merely ‘entry points’ in understanding a person’s identity (Giampapa, 2004), but for the purposes of this study provided identity markers for ‘cultural background’.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated:

1. To what extent is cultural background of teachers and students a factor in determining the number of student initiated interactions that occur during focus group mathematics lessons?
2. To what extent is cultural background of teachers and students a factor in determining the function of the student initiated interactions?

The Participants and Setting

The participants were three New Zealand European teachers and one Tongan teacher, along with 11 Pacific Island, and seven New Zealand European students in a multi-cultural central Auckland school. All students were in year three or four, aged between seven and nine years. The Tongan teacher worked with a ‘Tongan Emphasis’ class where all students were Tongan. Six of the 11 Pacific Island students were Tongan and members of this class. The parents of these students had chosen this option for their children which indicates a strong affiliation with the Tongan culture. It was reasonable to assume therefore, that the teacher and children in this classroom, shared cultural beliefs and practices. In this classroom English is the predominant language of instruction, but the teacher switches between Tongan and English when she thinks this will enhance students’ understanding. In the other three classrooms, Pacific Island and New Zealand European students were observed working with New Zealand European teachers.

The Method

As the classroom communication system is “a problematic medium that cannot be ignored or viewed as transparent” (Cazden, 2001, p.3) a range of data collection methods were used in

order to gain a ‘thick’ description of classroom events. It was important to look beyond the surface level of communicative performance and examine the “complex and competing world of discourses that exist in the classroom” (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, p 181). Thus, a ‘qualitative inquiry’ approach which seeks to “understand better some aspects of the lived world” (Richards, 2003, p.10) was the overall approach adopted for the research.

Classroom observations provided the initial source of data. Students were observed working in small maths groups with their teachers, each of whom was working on numeracy and following the ENP [Early numeracy project] lesson guidelines. Each teacher and maths group was observed and audio-taped twice. The interactions which the students initiated, were transcribed, as were the teacher’s subsequent response(s), and the utterances which occurred immediately before the initiation. The purpose of these observations was to quantify student initiated interactions, and then to analyse them according to their language function. The students were also observed carrying out the follow up independent activity which followed the lesson, in order to ascertain whether or not they had understood the concepts that had been introduced.

Semi-structured interviews with the teachers were conducted after the classroom observations had been transcribed and analysed. The teachers were asked to respond to the findings which emerged from the classroom observations and give possible explanations for the findings. In addition, the interview sought to explore teachers’ attitudes and understandings about issues such as explicit rules surrounding talk and behaviour during maths lessons and the impact of cultural capital on teaching and learning [see Appendix A for the complete interview guide].

Semi-structured interviews with some students [two from each group – a total of eight] enabled the researcher to gain insights into their understandings and beliefs about their own cultural backgrounds and those of their teachers. Since one of the aims of the research was to determine whether or not teachers’ cultural background had an impact on the amount and nature of student initiated interactions, it made sense to explore the children’s perspectives surrounding this. Furthermore, it was important to find out what the students’ understanding of rules and procedures surrounding talk in their classrooms during maths lessons [see Appendix B for the complete interview guide].

Results and Discussion

A frequency count of the student initiated interactions revealed that shared cultural background did not influence the number of interactions with teachers. This is illustrated in Table one.

The total number of initiations made by each student over two lessons is shown. There was considerable variation between students in terms of how often they initiated interaction with the teacher. Total number of initiations for a student ranged from one to 29 and frequency was not dependent on shared cultural background with a teacher. For example, the most frequent initiator, Olly who is Niuean worked with a New Zealand European teacher whilst Samuel, who is Tongan, only initiated one interaction even though he worked with a Tongan teacher.

Table 1: Number of student-initiated interactions

| Student | Ethnicity | Lesson 1 Initiations | Lesson 2 Initiations | Total initiations |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Bill's class | NZE | | | |
| Erica | NZE | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Patsy | NZE | 2 | absent | 2 |
| Kim | NZE | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Essie | Samoan | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| | | | | |
| Karen's class | NZE | | | |
| Jenny | NZE | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Abby | NZE | 11 | 1 | 12 |
| Luke | NZE | 17 | 7 | 24 |
| Olly | Niuean | 17 | 12 | 29 |
| Andy | Cook Island Maori | 8 | 3 | 11 |
| | | | | |
| Jose's class | NZE | | | |
| Gina | NZE | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| Daniel | Cook Island Maori | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| Evan | Samoan | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | | | | |
| Mele's class | Tongan | | | |
| Joseph | Tongan | 24 | 2 | 26 |
| Dan | Tongan | 5 | absent | 5 |
| Maxwell | Tongan | 9 | 3 | 12 |
| Sammuel | Tongan | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Rita | Tongan | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| Celia | Tongan | absent | 2 | 2 |

NZE = New Zealand European

The teachers were shown the frequency counts pertaining to their own lessons during the interviews and asked to comment about differences in levels of student initiated interactions. All believed that students' personalities and home backgrounds, rather than cultural

backgrounds, were more likely to influence whether or not they would initiate interaction with a teacher. All the teachers talked about the importance of establishing positive relationships with children to encourage risk taking and thus the possibility of more frequent student initiated interaction. Other New Zealand studies have found that teachers did not have to be of any particular ethnicity to relate effectively to Pasifika students (see Hawk, Tumama Cowley, Hill, & Sutherland, 2002) and this would seem to support the findings of this study which show that ethnicity and cultural background do not affect how often students interact with their teachers.

Student initiated interactions comprised only a small fraction of the discourse moves occurring during the lesson observations. Other studies examining interaction patterns between students and teachers have not provided specific data of the frequency counts of student initiated interactions. It is therefore not possible to state that levels of initiations in this study are universally 'low', 'medium', or 'high'. However, previous studies have found that students rarely structure their own utterances and are primarily positioned in a responsive role (Breen 2001; Politzer, Ramirez, & Lewis, 1981) as was the case with this study. There was considerable variation between teachers in the frequency of student initiated teacher interaction, which can be seen in Table two on the following page.

It can be seen from Table two that the amount of time observed for each group was similar, but that during this time the average number of initiations per student varied between teachers. It was important to investigate reasons for these differences in the interviews and establish how teachers felt about the levels of student initiated interactions which occurred during their lessons.

All of the teachers felt that the levels of student initiation were low, even Karen and Mele, who had more frequent initiations than Jose and Bill. During their interviews they provided valuable insights into possible reasons for what they perceived to be low levels of initiation. None of the teachers were particularly surprised at the frequency counts and were aware that teacher talk and direction predominated but felt this approach was necessary to meet the objectives of the lesson. All wanted to provide more opportunities for students to initiate talk, but felt constrained by time, the demands of the curriculum, and the number of children in their classrooms. Bill was clearly concerned about the amount of 'content' he had to cover as the following interview extracts illustrate.

The way the curriculum is at the moment, if they understand you just move on.

If the kids have a question they'll ask, but it's sort of so structured that you do this and then, ok, then you might get them to share with you how they might solve it so the interaction sort of comes from you, yeah...

Jose too was very aware of 'getting through' the lesson, and also quite concerned about management and control.

*As I read these [the interview questions] I thought oh, they don't really ask a lot of questions, maybe I'm not facilitating... maybe I'm not really allowing them **TO** ask*

questions... or maybe they're scared if they ask me I'll growl at them and say you weren't listening...

Table 2: Average number of initiations per student with each teacher

| Teacher | Initiations made by chn over 2 lessons | Chn participating in 2 lessons | Average initiations per child over 2 lessons | Total length of 2 lessons in minutes |
|---------|--|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Karen | 76 | 10 | 7.6 | 42 |
| Bill | 19 | 7 | 2.7 | 43 |
| Jose | 28 | 6 | 4.6 | 41 |
| Mele | 52 | 10 | 5.2 | 44 |

Concerns about classroom management and ‘covering’ the curriculum may be particularly applicable to beginning teachers, as Jose and Bill were in their first two years of teaching. This relative inexperience, may account in part for Jose and Bill having lower levels of student initiated interactions in their classrooms. Karen and Mele had both been teaching for more than eight years and were more tolerant of interruptions and able to listen to and be directed by students’ needs. It is understandable that beginning teachers may feel less able to relinquish control and allow lessons to be more student-centred than more experienced teachers. If we acknowledge, however, that “learning and language acquisition are realized through a collaborative interactional process in which learners begin to appropriate the language of the interaction for their own purposes” (Gibbons, 2003, p.248) then it is important to find ways to support teachers in this collaboration. It may mean that beginning teachers have smaller classes to enable time for exploratory talk as conversation partners. Furthermore, Gibbons (2003, p.269) states that teacher education courses should pay more attention to “developing teachers’ understandings of the role of discourse in mediating learning.”

The second research question was concerned with the nature or function of student initiated interactions. A taxonomy of language functions which was adapted from Finocchiaro’s functional categories (Brumfit & Finocchiaro, 1983) was used to analyse the nature of the student initiated interactions [see Appendix C]. There were 16 functional categories, and the numbers of student initiations ranged from one to 29. Few clear patterns emerged from this data. What is clear however, is that those students who initiated most frequently – Luke, Olly, and Joseph, - tended to do so in order to provide an answer or display knowledge, even though this was not in response to a teacher question. A clearer picture of what occurred with the initiations can be seen from Table three which outlines how often each function was used with individual teachers.

Table 3: Frequency of language functions for each teacher, and percentage of total number of initiations

| Teacher | Karen | Bill | Jose | Mele | Total | % of total initiations |
|----------------------|-------|------|------|------|-------|------------------------|
| Personal | | | | | | |
| EF | | | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1.7 |
| SA | 6 | 1 | 3 | | 10 | 5.9 |
| EE | 6 | 4 | 1 | | 11 | 6.5 |
| Interpersonal | | | | | | |
| GA | 2 | | | 7 | 9 | 5.3 |
| EG | | | | 4 | 4 | 2.3 |
| EU | 6 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 13 | 7.7 |
| IA | 9 | 2 | 3 | | 14 | 8.3 |
| MJ | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | 1.1 |
| Directive | | | | | | |
| AGC | 2 | | | 4 | 6 | 3.5 |
| AGP | 13 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 21 | 12.5 |
| RC | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 13 | 7.7 |
| D | 2 | | | | 2 | 1.1 |
| GI | 3 | | 1 | | 4 | 2.3 |
| Referential | | | | | | |
| PA | 16 | 1 | 3 | 25 | 45 | 26.7 |
| EXP E | | 1 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 4.1 |
| II | 4 | 1 | 1 | | 6 | 3.5 |
| Totals | | | | | 170 | 100 |

Functions

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|-------|---|
| EF | expressing frustration | AGC | asking for guidance with mathematical content |
| SA | seeking approval | AGP | asking for guidance with procedures |
| EE | expressing excitement | RC | requesting clarification |
| GA | getting teacher's attention | D | disagreeing |
| EG | expressing gratitude | GI | giving instructions |
| EU | expressing understanding | PA | providing answers/ displaying knowledge |
| IA | indicating agreement | EXP E | explaining an event |
| MJ | making a joke | II | identifying items |

The most frequent language function students used when initiating was to provide an answer or display knowledge. This finding was unexpected as it had been assumed that maths lessons would have provided opportunities for children to ask questions about what they were learning, and request clarification when they didn't understand. Close analysis, however, of the teachers' interview responses yielded a possible explanation for this finding. When asked about the rules, procedures, and guidelines teachers expected students to adhere to during maths lessons, it became clear that almost all of the responses they gave related to what students should do when they **did know** the answer, but very few responses related to what students should do when they **didn't know** the answer. When analysing the frequency counts pertaining to language functions in light of the teacher interviews, it was no longer surprising

that when students did initiate an interaction it was to provide an answer. Teachers, after all, had been very explicit about the importance of giving answers. They were not, for the most part, explicit about how or when to ask questions. All students need to know how and when to ask questions and have specific strategies for when they are finding tasks difficult. Teachers should not assume that students know how to request assistance. Barnard suggests that students from language backgrounds other than English need to have a “systematic induction into New Zealand’s learning culture” (1998, p.5). Findings from this study indicate that all students would benefit from explicit instruction in how to ask for clarification or help when tasks are too difficult.

All students have beliefs about what to do in school in order to learn (Lampert, Rittenhouse & Crumbaugh, 1996) and clearly the students observed in this study believe that providing answers is the appropriate and acceptable mode of behaviour during maths lessons. Students believe that teachers want them to give answers, not ask questions. Lampert et al (1996, p.759) offers this explanation of why students find it difficult to adopt discursive practices different to those they believe to be most appropriate in the classroom.

“The school classroom is a place where friends are made and lost, where identity is developed, where pride and shame and caring and hurting happens to kids.”

The importance of identity is also emphasized by Toohey (1998) who argues that in stratified communities such as classrooms some students become defined as deficient and are then excluded from the very practices which may assist them to grow in competence and expertise. If we acknowledge that classrooms are communities “whose practices contribute to constructing children as individuals” (Toohey, 1998, p.81) then we should not be surprised when students take the risk of initiating an interaction, it will be to display their knowledge. By so doing they are being constructed as knowledgeable and competent. After all, children do not easily separate the quality of ideas from the person expressing them (Olson & Astington, 1993 cited in Lampert et al 1996, p.740). As Miller (2000, p.72) precisely states “what seems inescapable is the understanding that our identities are shaped by and through our use of language.”

Analysis of the data revealed that from this albeit small exploratory study, the cultural background of teachers and students did not seem to be a factor in determining the frequency or nature of student initiated interactions. Could it be that it was the culture of the classroom, that is, the culture of ‘the community of practice’ that Toohey (1998) talks about, which was pivotal in determining the nature of student initiated interactions rather than the cultural backgrounds of the students and teachers themselves? As a researcher I was beginning to wonder whether I had asked the wrong questions; was there a more important factor I should have been looking for? I began to wonder if students’ initiating behaviour was important at all.

Fortunately, my observations of the maths lessons included the independent follow up activity directly after the small group teaching session. Analysis of this data revealed that some students had easily grasped the maths concepts, some had a fair understanding but would still require support, and others had a poor understanding. These students were categorized as high, medium, or low achievers. It soon became apparent that frequency of initiation did not appear to be related to students’ understanding and ability to complete tasks. If students’ initiating behaviour was not a factor in their ability to understand and complete mathematics tasks, the question needed to be asked: what were the successful students doing that was

different from the less successful students? The interviews with the students yielded some interesting possibilities.

The children were asked about the rules they had to remember when working in their maths groups with the teacher, and when working independently. They were also asked what they did when they knew the answers, and what they did when they didn't know the answers. Analysis of the interviews revealed that the responses could be categorised according to the type of strategy employed. Three strategy types were identified:

1. learning strategies – these were specific actions the student could take that would actually help them to solve a problem e.g. look at the instructions on the worksheet;
2. non-specific general strategies – these were more general strategies, which on their own, would not help them to solve a problem e.g. try your best;
3. procedural strategies – these were strategies which would ensure the group and class would work in a cooperative and cohesive manner e.g. take turns.

Table four shows the number of strategies students talked about in each category. A complete list of the strategies is provided in Appendix D.

Table 4: Students, ability to complete maths tasks, strategy use

| Student & Ethnicity | Ability to complete maths tasks | Specific learning strategies | Non specific general strategies | Procedural strategies | Total number of strategies |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Kim [NZ Euro] | H | 5 | | 5 | 10 |
| Essie [Samoan] | H | 8 | 2 | 1 | 11 |
| Gina [NZ Euro] | H | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Evan [Samoan] | M | 3 | 2 | 6 | 11 |
| Andy [Cook Island] | L | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Luke [NZ Euro] | M | 3 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| Rita [Tongan] | L | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Maxwell [Tongan] | M | 2 | 5 | 5 | 12 |

H high ability to complete maths tasks

M medium ability to complete maths tasks

L low ability to complete maths tasks

The two students identified as low achievers, Rita and Andy, clearly reported fewer strategies overall than the more able students and were able to identify only one specific learning strategy. For Rita this was to *ask the teacher for help*, and Andy reported that he would *ask someone for help*. Kim and Essie, both high achievers, reported the highest number of specific learning strategies. The following interview extracts illustrate the types of specific learning strategies the girls talk about using.

R: What do you think the teacher wants you to do if you're finding the work a little bit hard? What do you think Mr B would want you to be doing?

E: Maybe if we're just doing the answer he might want us to think in our heads how you might do it or how you might show your working if you were doing, showing your working.

Then later on,

R: Why don't you need to ask questions?

E: Maybe because (15 seconds) sometimes it might be easy, or when it hard I mostly ask questions when it's hard because sometimes he asks the question like how do we show our working then he wants me, then he checks with me, and I get how to show my working.

These examples show that Essie is capable of independent work but knows she can ask the teacher if she needs assistance. Andy's strategies are notably different as can be seen in this example.

R: If you don't know how to do something, what would you normally do?

A: (10 seconds) Try to think about it?

R: What do you think Karen would like you to do when you're finding something a bit hard on the mat there? What do you think she'd want you to do?

A: Sit up?

R: Sit up, yeah ... is there anything else that she might want you to do?

A: Cross my legs?

R: Mmm, anything else?

A: ((shrugged shoulders))

Evan and Maxwell had a high number of strategies overall [11 and 12 respectively], but most of these were in the procedural category. The following example illustrates Evan's perception that following rules and procedures is very important at maths time.

R: What do you think the teacher wants you to do when you're finding the work a bit hard?

E: Maths corner ((very quick answer))

R: Just go to the maths corner?

E: Yeah, cos she always tells that.

R: She always tells you what?

E: She always tells us to go to the maths corner.

In Evan's view it was more important to go to the maths corner and occupy himself quietly, than to try and solve a maths problem, or ask the teacher for help.

As previously mentioned, the frequency of student initiated interactions did not appear to correlate with successful completion of maths tasks. However, findings from the student interviews revealed that those students who most needed to initiate interaction, particularly to ask for assistance, did not identify this as a learning strategy. These students are adhering to what they perceive to be the normative conventions of classroom discourse and role relationships in which teachers ask questions and students answer them (Ciardiello, 1998). We must be mindful then, not to discount the importance of student initiated interactions and to consider ways of making this happen, particularly for students who are not experiencing success in their learning.

The findings concerning learning strategies which emerged from the student interviews were unexpected but show quite clearly that the more able students can talk about a greater range of specific learning strategies than the less able students. Learners who are aware of these specific learning strategies are said to be 'metacognitively aware' which simply means they "know

what to do when they don't know what to do; that is, they have strategies for finding out or figuring out what they need to do" (Anderson, 2002, p.1). Ability to draw upon metacognitive strategies was not confined to students from a particular cultural background. Where less proficient students have a high number of strategies, these are mainly concerned with behaviour and classroom procedures. These findings confirm those of previous research which has shown that low achieving students can attend to procedural matters such as neatness and compliance, but not to curriculum learning (Bennett & Desforjes, 1985; Bennett, Desforjes & Cockburn, 1984, cited in Alton-Lee, 2003).

Clearly, the implication of these findings is that teachers must explicitly teach specific learning strategies to all students. Anderson (2002) outlines ways of teaching students to plan, select, monitor, orchestrate, and evaluate strategy use and he believes that "when learners reflect upon their learning strategies, they become better prepared to make conscious decisions about what they can do to improve their learning" (Anderson, 2002, p.4). Extensive research on effective learning strategies for second and foreign language students has resulted in the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning (Chamot, A., Barnhardt, S., Beard El-Dinary, P., & Robbins, L., 1999). The findings of this study should signal to all teachers, not just those involved in language teaching, the importance of explicitly teaching learning strategies. 'The learning strategies handbook' (Chamot et al, 1999) provides an excellent starting point for teachers who would like more detailed information about how to implement these strategies with their learners.

Conclusion

Examining an aspect of classroom discourse through the lens of mathematics lessons has amplified the importance of such interdisciplinary approaches to research. While teachers of mathematics understand that language is important, "there is much less consensus about what this might mean, about its practical implications, or even about what mathematical language is" (Barwell et al, 2005, p.144). Hence it is important that research in culturally diverse classrooms continues to examine discourse which occurs when both language and content are being learnt at the same time.

This study has highlighted the fact that if students are going to be successful in learning mathematics, they need to be able to use the language of instruction, English. This language is more than just words. It has been shown that knowing how and when to use particular words is as important as the words themselves. This is language that is specific to classroom learning and it must be explicitly taught. But before teachers can successfully and explicitly teach such language, they need to reflect on the nature of their 'classroom culture'. Is it one in which asking questions is valued as much if not more than providing answers? Is it one in which student initiated interactions are considered valuable starting points and stepping stones in both language and content learning? Gibbons (2003) explains that learning and language acquisition are realized when learners begin to appropriate the language of interaction for their own purposes. 'Classroom cultures' must provide space for learners to do this rather than being places where learners devote "their discursive energies to keeping track of the teacher's text and being alert to the moments when they have to contribute to it and to the teacher's reactions to their contributions" (Breen 2001c, p.310).

The close investigation of an aspect of classroom discourse involving students working with teachers from similar and different cultural backgrounds was motivated by a belief that 'cultural capital' held the key to success for minority group students in mainstream schools. I believed that

cultural differences between students and teachers would be reflected in interactional styles (Au, 1993) and that therefore students who had teachers of the same cultural background would initiate talk more often and experience more success as learners of both language and curriculum content. The findings did not support this belief, but highlighted the importance of the explicit teaching of cognitive and metacognitive thinking strategies to all students. Hattie (2003, p.7) states that although many of the non-achievers in our schools are Pacific Islanders we must not see them as the problem, “we must invest in improving the chances of these students now.” All teachers, regardless of cultural background, can improve the chances of all of their students by ensuring they explicitly teach specific learning strategies. Having a ‘classroom culture’ which provides space for students to initiate talk and ask questions will enable students and teachers to be involved in genuine learning conversations with each other.

References

- Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Anderson, N. (2002). The role of metacognition in second language teaching and learning. *ERIC Digest*, 1 – 4.
- Au, K. (1993). *Literacy instruction in multicultural settings*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Barwell, R. (2005). Language in the mathematics classroom. *Language and Education*, 19 (2), 97-102.
- Barwell, R., Leung, C., Morgan, C., & Street, B. (2005). Applied Linguistics and Mathematics Education: More than words and numbers. *Language and Education*, 19 (2), 142-147.
- Barwell, R., Leung, C., Morgan, C., & Street, B. (2002). The language dimension of mathematics teaching. *Mathematics Teaching*, 180, 12-15.
- Barnard, R. (1998). NESB students: The need for systematic induction to the learning culture of our schools. *Many Voices*, 13, 4-7.
- Berryman, M., Walker, R., Rewiti, M., O'Brien, K., & Weiss, S. (2000). An ecological approach to understanding behaviour: Comprehensive and culturally appropriate strategies towards student success. *Set*, 2, 35-38.
- Bishop, R., & Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Ltd.
- Breen, M. (2001a). Overt participation and covert acquisition in the language classroom. In M. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning*. (pp.112-140). Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited

- Breen, M. (2001b). The social context for language learning: A neglected situation? In C. Candlin & N. Mercer (Eds.), *English language teaching in its social context* (pp.122-144). London: Routledge.
- Breen, M. (2001c). Navigating the discourse: On what is learned in the language classroom. In C. Candlin & N. Mercer (Eds.), *English language teaching in its social context* (pp.306-322). London: Routledge.
- Brumfit, C., & Finocchiaro, M. (1983). *The functional-notional approach: From theory to practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cazden, C. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cazden, C., & Beck, S. (2003). Classroom Discourse. In A. Graesser & S. Goldman (Eds.), *Handbook of discourse processes*. Mahwah: Laurence Erlbaum.
- Chamot, A., Barnhardt, S. Beard El-Dinary, P. & Robbins, L. (1999). *The learning strategies handbook*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Ciardiello, A. (1998). Did you ask a good question today? Alternative cognitive and metacognitive strategies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42 (3), 210-219.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Giampapa, F. (2004). The politics of identity, representation, and the discourses of self-identification: Negotiating the periphery and the center. In Pavlenko, A. & Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Education Review Office. (2002). *Education of Pacific students in New Zealand schools*. Wellington: Education Review Office.
- Ely, C. (1986). An analysis of discomfort, risktaking, sociability, and motivation in the L2 classroom. *Language Learning*, 36, 1-25.
- Gibbons, P. (2003). Mediating language learning: Teacher interactions with ESL students in a content-based classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(2), 247-273.
- Hattie, J. (2003). *New Zealand education snapshot*. Paper presented at the Knowledge Wave 2003 The Leadership Forum, University of Auckland.
- Hawk, K., Tumama Cowley, E., Hill, J., & Sutherland, S. (2002). The importance of the teacher/student relationship for Maori and Pasifika students. *Set*, 3, 44-49.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (1999). Critical classroom discourse analysis. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 453-484.

- Lampert, B., Rittenhouse, P., & Crumbaugh, C. (1996). Agreeing to disagree: developing sociable mathematical discourse. In D. Olsen & N. Torrance (Eds.), *The handbook of education and human development: New models of learning, teaching and schooling*. (pp.731-765). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McNaughton, S. (2002). *Meeting of minds*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Meaney, T. (2002). *Does speaking improve students' writing in mathematics?* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education., Brisbane, Australia.
- Miller, J. (2000). Language use, identity, and social interaction: Migrant students in Australia. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 33(1), 69-101.
- Norton, B. (2001). Non-participation, imagined communities and the language classroom. In M. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp.159-171). Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education.
- Politzer, R., Ramirez, A., & Lewis, S. (1981). Teaching standard English in the third grade: Classroom functions of language. *Language Learning*, 31(1), 171-193.
- Rata, E., O'Brien, P., Murray, R., Mara, D., Gray, S., & Rawlinson, C. (2001). Diversity. In V. Carpenter & H. Dixon & E. Rata & C. Rawlinson (Eds.), *Theory in practice for educators* (pp. 189 - 210). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Ltd.
- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Statistics NZ. (2001). *Ethnic disparities in maths and sciences* [website]. Statistics New Zealand. Retrieved 3 April, 2004, from the World Wide Web: www.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/web/nzstories.nsf/Response/Ethnic+disparities+i
- Tollefson, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Power and inequality in language education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Toohey, K. (1998). "Breaking them up, take them away": ESL students in grade 1. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(1), 61-83.
- Wertsch, J. (1991). *Voices of the mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wlodkowski, R., & Ginsberg, M. (1995). A framework for culturally responsive teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 53 (1), 17-21.

Appendix A Interview guide for teachers

As you know, one of the aims of this research has been to find out what students do, when they don't know what to do in maths lessons. Ideally, what would you like to see happening when this occurs?

What guidelines / rules / procedures (if any) do you have surrounding talk and discussion during maths lessons. How do you make sure that the children know about these?

In general, how often do you think students initiate interaction with you during maths (e.g. ask you a question, give you an instruction, tell you about something unprompted)?

Do you find some students talk with you more often than others? Why might this be? Can you think of an example?

Why do you think students might initiate interaction with you in a maths lesson?

Do you think children would be more comfortable initiating interaction with a teacher, if the teacher was from the same culture as him/her? Why, why not?

Do you think any of your own cultural practices and beliefs impact on the way you teach and interact with students in your classroom? Explain.

Tell me what you understand about cultural values and practices of people from the Pacific Islands such as Tonga, Niue, Samoa, and the Cook Islands that might have an impact on how these students behave and learn in the classroom.

Tell me what you know about cultural practices of NZ European people that might have an impact on how these students behave and learn in the classroom.

Do you think students who come from minority cultures have the same opportunities to interact in New Zealand mainstream classrooms, as NZ European students? Why or why not?

I will give you a summary of findings from your lessons during the interview.

[Each teacher has specific questions pertaining to their students]

In light of what we have talked about today, is there anything you will continue to reflect on?

Appendix B Questions for semi-structured interviews with students

Tell me about where you and your family come from.

When someone asks you what country you come from, what do you say? Why?

Do you know what country _____ (teacher) comes from?

Would you (do you) like having a teacher from the same country as you? Why or why not?

Who looks after you at home? Does _____ (mum, dad, aunty, grandpa etc) tell you how to behave at school?

(If yes) What do they say?

Does _____ (mum,dad, aunty, grandpa etc) tell you about talking and asking questions in the classroom?

(If yes) What do they say?

Now I want you to think about when you are doing maths in your group, and you are sitting on the mat and _____ (teacher) is doing some work with you.

Are there any rules that you have to remember when you are in this group?

(If yes) What are they?

If you know an answer, or you *can* do something, what do you normally do?

If you don't know how to do something, what do you normally do?

Is maths easy or hard for you? Why?

Now I want you to think about when you are doing a maths activity on your own (like a worksheet), and the teacher is not working with your group.

Are there any rules that you have to remember when you are doing this work?

(If yes) What are they?

If you can't do the activity, or some of it is a bit hard, what do you normally do?

What do you think the teacher wants you to do, when you find the work a bit hard?

Do you ask many questions at maths time? Why/ why not?

Appendix C Functional categories for analysis of student initiated interactions

| Function code | Function explanation | An example from the data |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Personal | | |
| EF | Expressing frustration | <i>Oh please!</i> |
| SA | Seeking approval | <i>I've finished Miss T.</i> |
| EE | Expressing excitement | <i>Oooh cool!</i> |
| Interpersonal | | |
| GA | Getting teacher's attention / attempting to get teacher's attention | <i>I know, I know, I know!</i> |
| EG | Expressing gratitude | <i>Thank you Mele.</i> |
| EU | Expressing understanding | <i>I think I got it now.</i> |
| IA | Indicating agreement | <i>I thought it was.</i> |
| MJ | Making a joke | <i>Shall we turn them (ears) on?</i> |
| Directive | | |
| AGC | Asking for guidance with mathematical content | <i>Miss B, I don't know what to do.</i> |
| AGP | Asking for guidance with procedures | <i>Can I have a piece of paper?</i> |
| RC | Requesting clarification | <i>Is that right Karen?</i> |
| D | disagreeing | <i>Oh no, they're supposed to be on the ten's column.</i> |
| GI | Giving instructions | <i>Wait wait wait, he needs more.</i> |
| Referential | | |
| PA | Providing an answer / displaying knowledge | <i>It's a hundred and ten.</i> |
| EXP E | Explaining an event | <i>Miss B, I'm going to "tongan word for homework centre sounds like foako" where you do different things.</i> |
| II | Identifying items | <i>I got all red.</i> |

Appendix D Strategies students reported using during maths lessons

| Name of student | Learning strategies | Non specific general strategies | Procedural strategies |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| Kim | <p>Specific strategies for adding and subtracting.</p> <p>Ask the teacher for help.</p> <p>Work with a buddy but don't copy.</p> <p>Ask someone in your group for help.</p> <p>Use the strategies the teacher has taught.</p> | | <p>Put your hand up or put your hand on your nose or ears and don't call out.</p> <p>Sit up, don't lie down.</p> <p>Be quiet so you don't disturb the teacher.</p> <p>Play fair</p> <p>Include everyone.</p> |
| Essie | <p>Ask teacher for help.</p> <p>Ask someone near you for help if the teacher is busy.</p> <p>Stay on the mat for extra help.</p> <p>Refer to instructions on the worksheet.</p> <p>Refer to the examples on the worksheet.</p> <p>Think in your head how to do it.</p> <p>Show your working out.</p> <p>Ask questions when it's hard.</p> | <p>Try hard.</p> <p>Concentrate.</p> | <p>Skip it if it's too hard.</p> |
| Gina | <p>Use equipment (e.g. cubes) to help you.</p> <p>Try to ask the teacher for help.</p> | <p>Try to figure it out.</p> | <p>Try to get everything finished on time.</p> <p>Put your finger on your nose when you have the answer</p> |
| Evan | <p>Work with your fingers.</p> <p>Ask another person for help.</p> <p>Ask the teacher for help.</p> | <p>Try your best.</p> <p>Just work it out.</p> | <p>Look at the teacher when she's teaching you something.</p> <p>Don't tell tales when the teacher is with another group.</p> |

| | | | |
|---------|---|--|--|
| | | | <p>Don't disturb the teacher.</p> <p>Don't shout out.</p> <p>Don't hide the mobilo.</p> <p>Go to the maths corner if the work is too hard.</p> |
| Andy | Ask somebody to help you. | Try to think about it. | <p>Sit up.</p> <p>Cross your legs.</p> |
| Luke | <p>Ask someone to help you.</p> <p>Ask Karen to help you.</p> <p>Ask questions at maths time, to get the answers.</p> | <p>Listen to the teacher when she's talking.</p> <p>Concentrate.</p> | <p>Don't get up and talk to other people.</p> <p>Don't flick the pencils around.</p> |
| Rita | Ask the teacher for help. | Listen to the teacher. | <p>Get your books and pencils and write what the teacher tells you.</p> <p>Colour in and underline things.</p> |
| Maxwell | <p>Remember what's been taught before.</p> <p>Ask the teacher if you don't understand.</p> | <p>Concentrate.</p> <p>Try your best.</p> <p>Don't be nervous to tell your answer.</p> <p>Try to figure it out.</p> <p>Jesus helps us.</p> | <p>Don't look at other people's work.</p> <p>Don't cheat.</p> <p>If people are looking at your work say "Stop it I don't like it."</p> <p>Put your hand up and wait for your turn.</p> <p>Share.</p> |

AN INVESTIGATION OF DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE EAP CURRICULUM DESIGN AND WRITING ASSESSMENTS

Elizabeth Turner
School of Languages
Auckland University of Technology

Abstract

Writing assessments in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for ESOL or EAL students need to be relevant to the realities these students face in discipline-specific courses. Research shows that the writing requirements and assessment demands of such courses vary between disciplines. Furthermore, an analysis of earlier studies also indicates that assessed writing requirements and cognitive demands change over time. These findings suggest the need for EAP teachers and researchers to investigate discipline-specific assessment demands in order to ensure that EAP curricula and assessment design are relevant. This article reports findings from an investigation of assessed writing requirements in three first-year undergraduate papers in the Humanities, focusing on assessment types and associated cognitive and rhetorical demands. The article also suggests implications for EAP curriculum design and writing assessments at undergraduate level.

Introduction

There is an ongoing debate about approaches to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course design. This centres on the degree to which such courses for EAL students should be based on an ‘ideology of pragmatism’, and on the assumption that students should be required to “...accommodate themselves to the demands of academic assignments...”, and other expectations and assumptions of academic institutions (Benesch, 2001, p.41). Benesch, for example, criticizes the pragmatic approach as seeking merely to accommodate the demands of discipline-specific assessments and thus simply to “...provide students with the writing skills and cultural information that will allow them to perform successfully” (Reid, 1989, p.232). Rather than the unquestioning acceptance and promotion of the target goals of other disciplines, a ‘critical pragmatic’ approach is advocated (Benesch, 2001; Pennycook, 1997). The proponents of the critical pragmatic approach argue that EAP practitioners should question the “...pedagogical or intellectual soundness of the activities observed” in discipline-specific courses (Benesch, 2001, p. 41). This implies that those involved in EAP need to engage in scrutinising and thus critiquing discipline-specific goals and assessment requirements. Wherever individual EAP teachers and researchers may position themselves within this debate, it is suggested here that neither a purely pragmatic approach, nor a critical approach can be effective without up-to-date information about those target goals. With such information, EAP practitioners are better able to design curricula that include discipline-relevant learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities that reflect and develop those outcomes, and assessment tasks that confirm the extent to which those outcomes are achieved (Biggs, J., www.johnbiggs.com.au/academic.html).

This article reports on an investigation of undergraduate assessments in the Humanities. The overall purpose of the study was to inform the review and development of a specific, first-year undergraduate EAP paper in the Faculty of Applied Humanities at Auckland University of Technology. The course is one of six core papers taken by students studying for undergraduate degrees in a range of discipline areas within the Faculty. At the time of the study the majority of students taking the EAP paper were EAL students, and most were studying for Bachelor degrees in international languages, social sciences or communication studies. The study investigated written assessments in these three discipline areas. This article focuses on findings related to assessment types identified by the study, and the associated cognitive and rhetorical demands of these assessments. The following sections summarise the background to the study.

Background

The following sections create the context for the study. The first aim is to place the present study within the framework of previous skills needs analyses and assessment task analyses. A further aim is to identify significant principles for EAP curriculum and writing assessment design, that have been established by earlier studies. These cover findings related to discourse requirements, the foci of discipline-specific assessment tasks, specifications of task instructions, and the skills involved in the preparation and production of written assessment tasks. Thirdly, the final section identifies the need for further research, and indicates the ways in which the present study attempts to extend knowledge in this area.

Investigating EAP students' academic needs: skills and task analysis

Earlier studies of discipline-specific target needs (needs analysis studies) can be divided broadly into two main categories – academic *skills* needs analysis and *task* analysis. The former strand has focused on a range of areas in investigating English academic literacies and skills required in discipline-specific courses at undergraduate level, and in some cases also at graduate level. These include: the importance to teachers of reading and writing, as well as aural and oral skills (Johns, 1981), and the importance of these skills to students (Ostler, 1980); teachers' requirements and expectations in terms of academic speaking skills (Ferris & Tagg, 1996); students' perceptions of listening and speaking skills requirements (Ferris, 1998); students' writing experience in discipline-specific classes (Leki & Carson, 1997); the relative importance of reading and writing skills (Carson, 2001); and the analysis of conceptual requirements for academic writing (Currie, 1993).

The majority of studies in the second strand have investigated university assessment tasks, and the writing requirements associated with these in particular (Braine, 1989; Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Hale et al., 1996; Horowitz, 1986; Moore & Morton, 2005; Zhu, 2004). The rationale for this focus on task analysis relates perhaps to the fundamental purpose of EAP, in preparing students for, and supporting students in their academic studies. Educational research has shown that students tend to take an instrumental approach to learning, and therefore to direct their learning activities in terms of the assessment requirements. Assessment is seen therefore to “define what students regard as important” (Brown & Knight, 1994, p.12) and as the principal ‘driver’ of student learning (Schwartz & Webb, 2002). The specific focus on writing requirements may reflect the perception that academic writing skills are a particularly significant indication that students have developed and acquired mastery of the cognitive skills required for work at university level (Weigle, 2002). If writing is seen as a key indicator

of students' mastery of the cognitive skills required to succeed in their university studies, and if most assessments require some form of writing, it is logical that much EAP research will have a primary focus on the types and nature of assessed writing requirements, and on associated English academic literacies and skills.

The following paragraphs discuss task analysis studies, which incorporate one, or more discipline areas related to the social sciences or humanities at undergraduate level, as these fields are particularly relevant to the study described here. An analysis of the findings of the most significant studies in this area establishes a useful set of principles for EAP course curriculum design and for EAP writing assessments.

Studies of discourse requirements

Early studies established the general principle that there is a need for EAP courses to expose students to the types of discourse required of them in discipline-specific papers (Horowitz, 1986; Kroll, 1979). While acknowledging the argument that EAP practitioners should adopt a critical pragmatic approach to the requirements of discipline-specific papers, the proposition that EAP courses should support students in coping with the discourse demands of discipline-specific courses is perhaps compelling. The findings of earlier studies show that assignment tasks vary between discipline areas, and between undergraduate and graduate levels (Hale et al., 1996; Moore & Morton, 2005). The most recent of these studies reveals 12 different genres of writing task across 28 subject areas (Moore and Morton, 2005), where the written genre or task discourse type is identified by the name given in the task rubric for the required written response – for example 'essay'. Analysis of earlier studies also shows that the most frequent task types change over time, ranging for example from laboratory reports (Kroll, 1979), through more generalised written reports (Gravatt, Richards, & Lewis, 1997) to research-based essays (Moore & Morton, 2005). These variations in terms of written discourse types indicate the need for ongoing research into significant discourse requirements in different discipline areas.

Studies of assessment foci of discipline-specific tasks

A recent study of written assessment tasks found more specifically that written assessment tasks focus on the assessment of students' understanding of significant areas of discipline knowledge, methods of analysis, and patterns of discourse (Moore & Morton 2005). In connection with this finding, studies have also identified priorities for academic staff in discipline-specific assessment of students' writing. For academic staff, discourse level characteristics – such as quality of content and organisation - are reported as more significant than sentence or word level features, such as grammar and spelling (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Gravatt et al., 1997; Moore & Morton, 2005). This suggests that in EAP courses and writing assessments at undergraduate level, there should be a focus on relevant areas of discipline knowledge and methods of analysis, as well as on appropriate written discourse features.

Studies of specifications of assessment task instructions

In terms of task instructions, Horowitz (1986) found that discipline-specific writing tasks tend to be controlled, in that content and organisation are specified in some way. This finding suggests that EAP assessment task instructions should include similar types of specification in order to

pose comparable demands on students. The need for students to develop the skills involved in interpreting task instructions, addressing the relevant topic and meeting the specific requirements of assessments has also been identified in principle (Gravatt et al., 1997; Carson, 2001). EAP assessment task instructions that are comparable to those in relevant discipline-specific papers therefore, allow students to have some practice in analysing and interpreting relevant task instruction types, as well as providing opportunities for feedback on their analysis.

Preparation and production of written assessment tasks: literacy and skill requirements. Other relevant findings of previous studies relate to the English academic literacies and skills required by assessed writing tasks. Studies have shown that academic writing is in general terms 'text-responsible' (Leki & Carson, 1997). More specifically, valid evidence in any piece of student writing (or support for knowledge statements made by students) is most often seen as relating to research findings or information from authorities in the discipline area (Moore & Morton, 2005). Academic writing is also often based on some degree of student research (Moore & Morton, 2005), and the preparation of writing tasks tends therefore to involve reading relevant academic sources (Carson, 2001). Consequently, text production involves the sub-skills of paraphrasing, summarising, synthesizing, and citation (Carson, 2001).

Studies have also investigated the cognitive and rhetorical skills involved in discipline-specific assessment tasks. In one of the earlier studies, Horowitz (1986) identified that assessments tend to emphasise the cognitive skills of recognition and reorganisation of relevant information. In addition Carson's analysis (2001) showed that essay writing requires analysis, synthesis and interpretation of textual information. In terms of rhetorical skills, Hale, Taylor, Bridgeman, Carson, Kroll and Kantor (1996) found that almost all essay writing tasks analysed in their study involved exposition rather than description or narration, with only a moderate degree of argumentation. In contrast, Moore and Morton (2005) found that evaluation was the most common rhetorical function in the assessments analysed, followed by description, summarisation and comparison.

In general terms these findings related to required literacies and skills offer two further principles to be considered in the design of writing tasks in EAP assessments. Firstly, such tasks should require students' writing to be text responsible, which means that students should be required to demonstrate their understanding of relevant information from academic source texts, as well as their ability to integrate and cite such information (Turner, Jackson-Potter, & Jenner, 2005). Secondly, tasks should, where possible, involve students in searching for relevant texts, and should elicit discipline-relevant rhetorical and cognitive skills.

The need for further research

It has been suggested that the findings of the studies reviewed create a useful set of principles for the design of EAP curricula and writing assessments. A number of these findings also indicate the need for EAP practitioners to continue to investigate assessment tasks undertaken by EAP students in discipline-specific courses. These are: (1) the fact that assessment tasks vary between discipline areas, and between undergraduate and graduate levels; (2) differences in the most frequent written assessment types or written genres identified; (3) the fact that these appear to change over time; and (4) the fact that cognitive and rhetorical skill requirements appear to vary. These suggest that for EAP courses to be relevant to discipline-specific demands, there is a need to investigate assessed discourse types and their associated cognitive and rhetorical demands in particular.

The study

Aims

The study reported (in part) here extends the framework created by earlier investigations of discipline-specific written assessments. The study focused on assessments in three courses in the Humanities, and had three main aims. The first was to investigate the type and form of written assessment tasks and their associated requirements. The second was to investigate the rationales for assessment choices as well as the meanings and interpretations of the lecturers responsible for assessment design. The third aim was to investigate students' understandings of the assessment instructions and marking criteria, as well as their experiences in completing the tasks.

Methodology

The study investigated written assessment tasks in three undergraduate papers - one each from social sciences, international languages and from communications studies - representing the three main discipline areas in the Faculty at the time. The papers were selected on the basis that they were representative of the papers taken by students who were also enrolled on the EAP paper at that time.

The focus of the study was on investigating assessments from the point of view of the assessment documents themselves, the intentions and interpretations of the lecturers who were responsible for them, and the interpretations and experiences of the students who completed them. Data relating to the assessment tasks was therefore collected from three sources in three ways: (1) by the initial analysis of assessment documents, including task instructions, marking criteria, and other related documents; (2) through semi-structured interviews with the three paper coordinators; and (3) by means of three separate questionnaires administered to each target student group of enrolled students.

This methodology differs from earlier studies in terms of the specific triangulated data collection methods. Of the studies reviewed earlier, only one (Carson, 2001) involved a triangulated methodology in which task documents and samples of students' work were examined, staff on each of six courses were interviewed, and up to eight students on each of the courses were also interviewed.

This article reports findings in terms of written assessment task types and related cognitive and rhetorical demands. The investigation and analysis of assessment tasks is therefore most relevant here. Task instructions were analysed for a number of features. These included the written assessment task type or genre (Moore & Morton, 2005). This category reflected the title of the task or its written product as given in the task instructions, where given. Where the task type was not named, the task was identified by prompt-type (for example, gap-fill exercise). Other features examined were the form of the instructions, marking criteria, required word length of the written task product, task weightings as a percentage of the final grade, and the distribution of marks for each question. Wording which implied specific cognitive or rhetorical skills was noted. In addition, wording or phrasing from task instructions, which might be open to different interpretations, was identified and noted.

The methodology was largely qualitative in that it involved the analysis of documents and interview transcripts and the identification of significant themes. The interviews consisted predominantly of open-ended questions. Although the questionnaires to students included closed-response questions, multi-choice and questions involving a Likert-type 5-point scale, others were open-ended. The initial analysis of assessment documents allowed for inferences to be made in terms of cognitive requirements. However, the fact that the interviews with lecturers were informed by the document

analysis meant that initial inferences on the part of the researcher could be investigated, verified or corrected. Furthermore, data from the student questionnaires and interviews with staff allowed for comparisons to be made in terms of student and staff interpretations of instructions and marking criteria.

Findings

The following sections summarise and comment on significant findings related to assessment task types and their associated requirements, as well as student difficulties in understanding task instructions and/or marking criteria.

Written task types and associated cognitive and rhetorical demands

Table One outlines the type of assessment in each of the three papers, the weighting of each assessment, and where given, the distribution of marks for each question type. The table also indicates the length of each course in the first column. Table One reinforces the findings of earlier studies in that the written assessment tasks vary between the three discipline areas. The range of writing task types includes gap-fill assignment exercises and brief expository answers (Paper One), paragraph-based data analysis and conclusion (Paper Two), short essay answers (Paper One), to 1,500 word literature review assignments based on between four and eight texts (Papers Two and Three), to a 2,500 word text-responsible essay, and one timed, essay-based examination (Paper Three). Apart from these written genres, one assessment focused on information research literacies, with three 200-word text summaries (Paper Two), and two explicitly assessed referencing skills.

An important finding is the fact that two papers included a ‘free-standing’ literature review assessment. This assessment type has not been identified as a genre of task type in earlier studies, and is not equivalent to the library research assessment type identified by Kroll (1979) and Horowitz (1986). Given that these were all first year undergraduate assessments, it is also noteworthy that the initial analysis of assessment documents indicated a disparity in terms of the levels of cognitive demands of this range of assessment task types.

In Paper One, all four assessments followed the same form with gap-fill and brief answer questions, apart from Assignment Two, which had an additional “short essay” section. The interview with the responsible lecturer for Paper One clarified that the brief answers questions required short paragraph answers. Cognitive demands implied by the instructions were inferred as the recognition of correct responses, identification and retrieval of relevant information from memory, and organising information according to short essay topics (Carson, 2001). Further investigation in the interview with the lecturer however revealed that these assessment tasks were in fact ‘out of class’ assignments. The gap-fill questions, for example, simply required students to select the correct information from handouts and other materials, and the focus of (tacit) marking criteria was on correct content. Given this fact, it can be argued that what is being assessed is largely the ability to identify and retrieve information from given sources. The key rhetorical tasks or rhetorical writing functions inferred from the brief answer questions and essay topics, and confirmed in the interview with the lecturer, were explanation and description.

In Paper Two, initial analysis of the instructions suggested that the key cognitive demands involved in these assignments were recognition, identification, retrieval and organisation of relevant information (Assignments One and Three), and analysis of relationships between data (Assignment Two). The instructions for the literature review implied the need to evaluate and synthesise information from a number of sources. Otherwise the main rhetorical tasks

identified were explanation or justification (in Assignment One), summarising (Assignments One and Three) and analysis (Assignment Two). Students also needed to read and interpret relevant information sources. Writing sub-skills included paraphrasing, summarising, synthesis, the provision of relevant support, logical organisation, citation and referencing. The interview with the lecturer responsible for the assessments in Paper Two revealed, however, that the (tacit) marking criteria for these assessments emphasised the students' ability to fulfil research tasks, present figures and a data presentation table accurately, and to organise the literature review according to the structure indicated in the instructions.

In Paper Three, analysis of the assignment instructions indicated that Assessment One involved similar cognitive skills to those implied by the literature review assignment in Paper Two. Inferred cognitive demands were recognition, identification, retrieval, evaluation (by comparison) and logical organisation of relevant information. Key rhetorical tasks for this assessment appeared to involve summarising, synthesis and analysis. In all three assessments, students also needed to read and interpret relevant information sources and to paraphrase, summarise, synthesise, cite, and reference information from multiple sources. For assessments Two and Three, the essays appeared to require similar cognitive skills in terms of identification, retrieval, evaluation (in the case of some topics) and organisation of relevant information. Inferred rhetorical tasks involved description or explanation, synthesis, and the application of information as well as analysis in some cases. In addition, the timed exams required the retrieval of information from memory. The interview with the lecturer confirmed the researcher's interpretation of the cognitive demands of these assessments.

Table 1: Written Assessment Types in Papers One, Two and Three

| Paper | Assessment Type |
|--------------------|--|
| One 30 weeks | Assignment 25%: <i>gap-fill questions</i> 50% [$\frac{1}{2}$ mark per answer] + <i>brief answers</i> 50% [5x10] |
| | Assignment 25%: <i>gap-fill questions</i> 50% [1 mark per answer] + <i>brief answers</i> [3x10] & <i>short essay answers</i> 50% [2x10] |
| | Assignment 25%: <i>gap-fill questions</i> 60% [1 mark per answer] + <i>brief answers</i> 40% [4x10] |
| | Assignment 25%: <i>gap-fill questions</i> 40% [1 mark per answer] + <i>brief answers</i> 60% [2x10 + 5x5 + 3x5] |
| Two 13 weeks | Assignment 30%: <i>3 library & Internet research tasks</i> [10 marks each] 1. catalogue search for articles & books on topic chosen out of 4; 200 word summary of one text + APA reference 2. key-word search of given database; 200 word summary of article + APA reference 3. key-words Internet search with chosen search engine; 200 word summary of one text + APA reference |
| | Assignment 30%: <i>research data presentation task</i> <input type="checkbox"/> presentation of data <input type="checkbox"/> written analysis <input type="checkbox"/> conclusions re data & methods of analysis |
| | Assignment 40%: <i>literature review</i> on given topic <input type="checkbox"/> 1500 words <input type="checkbox"/> minimum 8 texts <input type="checkbox"/> APA reference list |
| 11.5 | Assignment 15%: <i>literature review</i> 1500 words; based on topic selected from lectures weeks 3 ^{to} 7; 4 to 5 texts |
| | Assignment 25%: <i>essay</i> 2,500 words; topic chosen from 6 |
| | Exam 60%: [3 hours + 10 minutes reading time] 4 <i>essay questions</i> chosen from 11 15 marks each |

Student difficulties

One final area of relevant findings relates to the students' self-reported understanding of task instructions and marking criteria. Questionnaires were administered (in the case of Paper One) or sent to a total of 337 enrolled students. 69 students completed and returned the questionnaires (21 EAL and 48 ESB students). With the exception of the gap-fill and brief answer tasks in Paper One, and the exam essay questions in Paper Three, a proportion of students either did not fully understand the assessment task instructions or the marking criteria. For example, in Paper One, 39% of student respondents found the instructions difficult to understand in Assessment Two, and 60% reported confusion about the marking criteria for the short essay questions. In Paper Two, although 75% of students found the instructions for Assessment One easy to understand, 45% were unclear about the marking criteria. As a further example, in Paper Three, 76% reported that they did not understand the instructions for Assessment One, and 66% did not understand the most significant marking criterion. In the case of the literature review assignment in Paper Two, none of the EAL students and only a third of ESB students reported that they understood the instructions. Similarly, for the literature assignment in Paper Three, less than a quarter of students reported understanding the instructions (including only one EAL student). EAL students also appeared to find essay questions particularly problematic.

The most significant reasons for student difficulties can be categorised as: lack of clarity in assessment instructions; differences between students' understanding of key words and phrases and the meanings intended by the lecturers – such as “critically evaluate the arguments”; and either inadequate marking criteria included with task instructions, or the absence of marking criteria. In addition, a number of student respondents appeared to have a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept, purposes and functions of an academic literature review. One commented, for example: *“Usually if I read a literature review (in the ‘Herald’ or ‘Listener’) it does not focus so much on comparison with other literature.”*

Implications for EAP

This study is limited by the fact that it was located in a single site, and investigated only 10 assessment tasks in three discipline areas. Furthermore the response rate to the postal surveys of students made for an overall response rate of 18%, which is predictably low (Simmons, 2001). Nonetheless, the findings have value for those involved in EAP curriculum and assessment design. In general terms, writing tasks do appear, as Moore and Morton (2005) argue, to focus on assessment of students' understanding of what are regarded as significant areas of discipline knowledge (Paper One), methods of analysis and research (Paper Two), and patterns of discourse (Paper Three).

The findings indicate that for these discipline areas at least, the significant writing task types are paragraph answers, short essays, extended essays, literature reviews (of 1,500 words) and perhaps timed exam essays. In all cases, these tasks required students to read, interpret, manipulate, organise and integrate information from texts. There also appears to be a need to prepare students for the writing of literature reviews as a new genre of written discourse in assessments at this level. This preparation should include the concept, purposes and functions of the academic literature review. The findings also suggest strongly that students need experience in analysing and interpreting authentic discipline-specific task instructions and marking criteria.

The findings serve also as a reminder that the preparation and production of academic texts involve specific cognitive and rhetorical demands, and that these vary between task types. In this study, the most frequently occurring cognitive skills are the identification, retrieval, and organisation of relevant information. The next most significant demands are analysis and evaluation (largely involving comparison). In addition, exam essay questions required the retrieval of information from memory, and one assessment required the analysis of relationships between data. In terms of rhetorical demands, assessments in all three papers required either explanation and/or description. The literature review assignments required summarisation, analysis and synthesis of information from a number of sources. Essay tasks in Paper Three also required analysis and synthesis as well as the application of information in some cases.

As the literature and this study show, written assessment tasks vary between discipline areas. EAP teachers, in designing courses and writing assessments, need to be aware of these differences. Teachers also have a responsibility to help students to develop relevant cognitive abilities and skills of critical analysis. It can be argued that assessments in Paper One do little if anything in this regard, even though learning outcomes for this paper referred to the ability to “discuss and analyse”, and the university’s overall graduate profile identifies the need for students to graduate with the skills of critical analysis. The study has also shown significant discrepancies between papers in terms of the levels of cognitive demands, and in the provision of clear assessment instructions and marking criteria.

Teachers and researchers in the field of EAP tasks analysis have a further responsibility to take a critical pragmatic approach (Benesch, 2001; Pennycook, 1997; Turner, 2005; Turner et al., 2005) - to draw attention to shortcomings in assessment practices and to advocate on behalf of students, whose performance in assessments may be affected by such problems. As for the impact of this study, the findings have been used to inform the development of the EAP paper concerned. In addition, the implications for assessment policy in the faculty concerned have been presented as part of a recent review, resulting in changes to the university’s guidelines on assessment. Discussions of the study’s results with colleagues in the international languages programme have also helped lead to a review of learning outcomes and a move to criterion-based assessment for some papers. Finally, new opportunities have also opened up for shared teaching on a proposed second year EAP paper targeted at a specific discipline area. Joint approaches to course design and delivery offer valuable possibilities for mutual understanding of teaching aims and achieving best practice in assessment design.

References

- Benesch, S. (2001). *Critical English for Academic Purposes: Theory, Politics, and Practice*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Braine, G. (1989). Writing in Science and Technology: An Analysis of Assignments from Ten Undergraduate Courses. *English for Specific Purposes*, 8, 3-15.
- Bridgeman, B., & Carlson, S. B. (1984). Survey of Academic Writing Tasks. *Written Communication*, 1(2), 247-280.

- Brown, S., & Knight, P. (1994). *Assessing Learners in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Canseco, G., & Byrd, P. (1989). Writing Required in Graduate Courses in Business Administration. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(2), 305-316.
- Carson, J. G. (2001). A Task Analysis of Reading and Writing in Academic Contexts. In D. Belcher & A. Hirvela (Eds.), *Linking Literacies: Perspectives on L2 Reading-Writing Connections* (pp. 48-83). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Currie, P. (1993). Entering a Disciplinary Community: Conceptual Activities Required to Write for One Introductory University Course. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 2(2), 101-117.
- Ferris, D. (1998). Students' Views of Academic Aural/Oral Skills: A Comparative Needs Analysis. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(2), 289-318.
- Ferris, D., & Tagg, T. (1996). Academic oral communication needs of EAP learners: What subject-matter instructors actually require. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30, 31-58.
- Gravatt, B., Richards, J. C., & Lewis, M. (1997). *Language Needs In Tertiary Studies: ESL Students at the University of Auckland*. Auckland: Institute of Language Teaching and Learning, The University of Auckland.
- Hale, G., Taylor, C., Bridgeman, B., Carlson, J., Kroll, B., & Kantor, R. (1996). *A study of writing tasks assigned in academic degree programs*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Horowitz, D. M. (1986). What Professors Actually Require: Academic Tasks for the ESL Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(3), 445-462.
- Johns, A. M. (1981). Necessary English: A faculty survey. *TESOL Quarterly*, 15, 51-57.
- Kroll, B. (1979). A survey of the writing needs of foreign and American college freshmen. *ELT Journal*, 33, 219-227.
- Leki, I., & Carson, J. (1997). "Completely Different Worlds": EAP and the Writing Experiences of ESL Students in University Courses. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(1), 39-69.
- Moore, T., & Morton, J. (2005). Dimensions of difference: a comparison of university writing and IELTS writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4, 43-66.
- Ostler, S. (1980). A survey of academic needs for advanced ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 14, 489-502.
- Pennycook, A. (1997). Vulgar pragmatism, critical pragmatism and E.A.P. *English for Specific Purposes*, 16, 253-269.

- Reid, J. (1989). English as a second language composition in higher education: The expectations of the academic audience. In D. M. Johnson & D. H. Roen (Eds.), *Richness in writing: Empowering ESL students* (pp. 220-234). New York: Longman.
- Simmons, R. (2001). Questionnaires. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching Social Life* (2nd ed., pp. 6-104). London: Sage Publications.
- Turner, E. (2005). *An Investigation of Assessed Writing Requirements at Undergraduate Level in the Humanities*. Unpublished thesis for Master of Applied Language Studies, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland.
- Turner, E., Jackson-Potter, E., & Jenner, C. (2005). Framing Writing Tasks in the EAP Context: Strategies for Culturally Responsive Assessment. *The TESOLANZ Journal*, 12, 39-49.
- Weigle, S. (2002). *Assessing Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zhu, W. (2004). Writing in business courses: an analysis of assignment types, their characteristics, and required skills. *English for Specific Purposes*, 23(2), 111-135.

MAKING MEANING IN ACADEMIC CONTEXTS

David Cooke
School of English and Applied Linguistics
Unitec New Zealand

Abstract

*Meaning is central to text but can be sidelined by formulaic approaches to reading and writing. This article explores the construction of chosen texts in the public domain, contrasted with language teaching practices as illustrated in **Writing Academic English** (Oshima & Hogue, 1999). It builds a case for developing an argument in text and scrutinising the implications of meanings in essays.*

Introduction

Faced with a piece of journalism or an academic article, we typically want to ask what it means. Hence, with Margie Comrie's (2004) piece from Radio New Zealand, "Celebrities and cheque book journalism" (see Appendix A), the obvious question is, What's her angle on the media?

Comrie draws us in to her text in just the way the *Guardian Weekly* draws her in to the story on playing off the field – a small expose of human frailty. Bending it like Beckham in this case is a matter of bending the marriage vows. However, Comrie's moral fire here is directed not at Beckham's antics, but at the dangers to the media themselves of kiss-&-tell stories for money. At least, that's my interpretation of the article, and therein lies the attraction and the tension of making meaning out of text: there may be different ways of seeing the text or different levels of meaning to explore. Even mindful of these complications, I find her last lines fairly categorical:

[14] It's depressing to think that cash-fuelled fights over who's first to print gossip could ultimately imperil the freedom of the press.

Comrie seems to proceed by *movements of meaning* as the opening paragraphs unfold. Her first four paragraphs tell the celebrity story, then culminate in identifying the underlying driver – money ("[5] And money's behind it all"). Money for the celebs and for the media that cover or uncover them. (Look for instance at the language of money in paragraphs 5 and 6: circulation figures, selling details of telephone "sex text", canny marketing, cashing in on millions of dollars.) Paragraphs 1-5 then inform and frame the next section, together gathering force for the pivotal segment on chequebook journalism and the moral issues provoked (paragraphs 6-7). The interplay of themes (celebrities, money, sex, media stories) builds layers of meaning that give cogency to the critique of media for money, developed through the rest of the broadcast. Comrie's analysis has direction, flow, interaction of ideas, an accumulation of themes, an argued viewpoint, a certain complexity. It is rich in meaning.

Teaching Writing

How then, do we teach writing in ESOL courses? One way is to draw on the outline that Oshima and Hogue (1999) present in *Writing academic English* (see Appendix B). Many ESOL teachers use this formula, often without realising the source, because the model has worked its way into an un-attributed, almost iconic status in language teaching. It is often simply *assumed* to be the model for writing.

In structural terms, there's a small picture and a big picture here. The small picture consists of the structure of the paragraph (sometimes referred to in teacher-talk as the “fundamentals”), defined as

- a topic sentence
- three support sentences
- a concluding sentence

The big picture consists of

- an introduction, including thesis statement
- the body of the essay – three paragraphs supporting the thesis statement
- the conclusion

In other words, the familiar “five-paragraph theme.” As practiced in ESOL classes, the task for the students is to work individually or in groups to respond to a topic (e.g., “Dangers to the environment”), listing any items that could be used to support a thesis statement that they devise, and then filling in the blanks in Oshima and Hogue’s diagram. Often, almost any reasonable statement of points fits the formula. As David Noon (personal communication) points out, it usually doesn’t matter what order the paragraphs take, so long as they continue to make a set of declarations.

The model, then, is the written equivalent of paint by numbers and far distant from the dynamism and energy of Comrie’s argument. It is however, a convenient guide for learners battling with English writing and essays: it gives them a structure to follow, some prediction and assurance in their writing tasks, and clearly a model to follow. For tutors, the format gives a structure to teach, clear guidance to learners of English, and a set of criteria for marking, as illustrated by the following constructed example that draws on similar guides often in use:

| Criteria for Essay | Mark |
|--|------|
| Content Makes a clear statement of position Supports the statement | |
| Structure Follows model of <i>introduction – body – conclusion</i> Includes clear thesis statement Paragraphs each contain topic sentence Topic sentences are reinforced by relevant support sentences Paragraphs contain a conclusion | |
| Language Grammar is appropriate and accurate Vocabulary is appropriate and accurate | |

Notice that a marking guide of this nature is largely a structural framework concentrating on the form of the essay rather than on other relevant items like exploration of ideas or development of a case or argument. The formula doesn't necessarily exclude such elements, but by the same token, nor does it explicitly encourage them much. As a result, it is possible for a student to score reasonably well on the basis of following the formula rather than of extending their thinking or constructing a cogent viewpoint.

We should recognise that the notion of the “five-paragraph theme” goes back well before 1999 to at least Payne (1965, *The lively art of writing*). And it attracted critique soon after, as the following commentary by Bartholomae (1983) shows:

[T]he tyranny of the thesis often invalidates the very act of analysis we hope to invoke. Hence, . . . we find students asked to reduce . . . their own experience into a single sentence, and then to use the act of writing in order to defend or “support” that single sentence. Writing is used to close a subject down rather than to open it up, to put an end to discourse rather than to open up a project (p. 311). (cited in Newkirk, 1989, p. 7)

Newkirk (1989, p. 7) complains that the “thesis-control essay” is misdirected “by the clear requirement to students that the essay be used to ‘back up’ the thesis. The reader is expected to move forward in a text that is continually backing up.” In the same vein, he cites Durst (1984, p. 102) objecting that “the thesis-control paper often becomes so formulaic that ‘these structures may have eventually limited the development of these writers.’ ”

Testing out the Model

How do writers fare when measured against the above outline? We turn now to a philosopher, commenting on the prospect of war in Iraq. Ramon Das' (2003) piece, “No new war against Iraq” (see Appendix C), appears to fit right in with Oshima & Hogue's model, his opening paragraph leading the way. He starts with a strong thesis statement:

In my view, any new war against Iraq would not just be wrong: it would be morally and practically *insane*.

His next three sentences support the thesis statement, the last one also doubling as a conclusion:

Last but hardly least, [war] would vastly increase the suffering of the Iraqi people . . .

The paragraphs that follow Das' introduction contain similar structures.

But there are more vital dimensions to Das' article to consider. For one thing, there's a built-in flow from one paragraph to the next. Paragraph 2 for instance, opens with a response to the end point of paragraph 1:

[2] Why, then, would anyone want to start such an unprovoked war?

Other paragraphs follow in similar ways. This feature is also an indication of the developing case that Das constructs, dissecting the arguments presented by the US administration for going to war, analysing claims around weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and culminating

in a critique of the apparent reason for war. In so doing, Das builds upon the information and outlook of earlier sections as he proceeds through the piece. As with Comrie's article, Das' text is dynamic. His article, in brief, goes well beyond the format of Oshima & Hogue, or to put it another way, it is distinctly other than the formula of *Writing academic English*. Das uses his text to inquire into a crucial issue of our time, or in Bartholomae's language, to "open up a project" rather than to "close it down." In short, to make an argument.

Making Argument

From the world of English literature, we get a guide to writing that stresses the importance of arguing a case (Armstrong & Lovell-Smith, 2004). This University of Auckland document of course assumes that students are analysing a literary text, which is sometimes the case with ESOL students, but in any case is related to language courses in two ways. We frequently ask our students to deal with other people's texts of various kinds. And we just as often require them to write the familiar "expository essay."

Armstrong and Lovell-Smith (2004, p 2) put their case in part in the following way:

What Makes a Good Essay?

- **Analysis of *how the text works*, rather than a paraphrase or translation**
- **A clear argument, reading, or line of discussion**
- **Textual support or evidence for every major point your essay makes**
- **Relevance to the question**
- **A coherent structure**

And they point out (p 5), "Your marker expects you . . . to construct from this material a coherent and convincing *argument*, a position that you establish and maintain."

Such a view implies that the issue in writing is not a fixed frame to be filled in but a constructive process in which the ideas drive the structure of the writing. The authors would get support from Harste (1989, p. vi) who argues that we should encourage students "to use writing as a tool for thinking rather than by giving them a formula for how 'good essays' ought to be written." He goes on to make the case that "[h]istorically the essay was a device used by learners for thinking through issues," but that "[a] schools attempted to teach the essay, they made it formulaic," in effect in the direction of the five-paragraph theme. "[W]hen the essay becomes formulaic," he concludes, "it stops critical thinking rather than fosters it." (p. vi) Far from being threatened by this concept, Harste (p. viii) describes the idea as a release:

To think of the essay as a vehicle for beginning new conversations is liberating. It suggests that the function of writing is inquiry, critical thinking and learning.

And from the point of view of the subject and orientation of writing content, Canagarajah (2002, p. 20) extends the thesis of critical reflection by claiming, "critical writing involves

interrogating received knowledge and reconstructing it through the writing process.” The emphasis, in other words, is firmly on reflective inquiry rather than on filling in the spaces in a shell framework. Hence Canagarajah objects to certain teaching procedures: “The dominant pedagogies in ESOL reading and writing,” he argues (p. 156), “are based on the assumption that the purpose of reading or writing is to show mastery over the knowledge embodied in the text.” Thus he adds a warning that in the same sentence also illustrates a contrasting and preferred outcome: “What is emphasized in literacy proficiency is knowledge display and not knowledge creation or knowledge transformation.” (p. 157)

The Model Answer

Students often ask for a writing model and *Writing academic English* delivers. An un-attributed piece in Oshima and Hogue (1999, p. 127) is titled, “Native American influences on modern American culture.” (see Appendix D) It is a compact article in six succinct paragraphs, neatly illustrating the structure of both paragraph and essay. Successive paragraphs deal separately with the “valuable contributions” that Native Americans have made to American culture in language, art, food, and government. In ESOL courses, the text often tends to be used to demonstrate the interplay of thesis statement and evidence.

Having considered the structure, what then of the content, since texts have meanings too. Reading the lines suggests a relatively benign world. The different continental groups must have been curious about each other. By virtue of different cultures coming into contact, “there was a cultural exchange,” by which the different ethnicities adopted some of each other’s ways. Europeans have picked up language items from Amerindian languages, certain native agricultural practices, even a system of governance from the Iroquois, and Native Peoples sell their crafts in America. Hence, “Modern Americans are deeply indebted to Native Americans.”

There are however, some realities below the surface that are distinctly less than benign. The text is obviously relevant to issues of native peoples in colonised countries, where the treatment of First Nations has routinely been highly dubious. North America is no exception, nor is New Zealand and Australia. To the extent that any of these countries use the text in language classrooms, we implicitly pose questions of the place of native peoples in society and we swiftly broach issues of human rights, inequities and injustices, acknowledged or otherwise. At this point, the text starts to look rather generous. For one thing, the “exchange” of cultures, implying a two-way process, turns out to be all one way, from native people to mainstream American, i.e. from subordinate to dominant cultures.

Throughout the text, there is nothing to suggest struggle, violence, appropriation (even of language and name), expropriation, force, injustice. There is no hint of aggression, destruction, disease, decimation of peoples, damage to native culture and way of life, or threat to their survival. Yet to many native peoples around the world, these are the hallmarks of their heritage and existence.

With the carefully selected topics of language, food, art, government, there are no malign forces at work. It is a sanitised world. One wonders how any First Nations peoples of post-colonial societies react to this almost determinedly positive text. There are some obvious related questions: what does such a text say about our values and awareness, about the issues we’re willing to take into account or ignore, about how we represent the world to ourselves

and others? And some would wonder what it tells us about modern American “liberal” viewpoints.

Unwittingly, one suspects, the text is however a source for critical appraisal, or for “interrogating” text and meaning. In Colin Lankshear’s words (1998, p. 369), it opens the door to “literacy practices that engage us in critique of proposals that regulate who and what we become individually and collectively.” Drawing on the work of James Gee, he suggests (p. 369) that “to be educated is to be capable of critiquing dominant Discourses, and that every person is entitled to be educated in this sense.” That therefore, is one potential practice in language classes. If language learners are capable of reading and appreciating the text for its structural framework, then we can legitimately go the next step and explore its meanings (Cooke, 2004). To put it more accurately, I’d argue we have a duty to do so. In the light of the above analysis, it seems to me to be inadequate to simply accept the text at face value, without commentary. At this point, the interaction of text and context is important, as is the knowledge that readers have of historical developments. The text can then be “situated” in time and space, in critical thought.

Last Words

Meaning, then, I have to argue most predictably, is a crucial element in both constructing and interpreting text. The thrust of this discussion is that we do our students a service if we encourage them to recognise the significance of meaning in text, and consciously explore meaning through their writing and reading. The texts of Comrie and Das suggest important features of writing: they are dynamic, there is direction in the discussion, there is development of case, and a commitment to viewpoint.

At the same time, this discussion suggests that we try to enable our students to develop a critical stance of “reflective scepticism” (McPeck, 1990, p. 42) to the messages around us. That does imply though, that we have to be willing to do so ourselves in our own approach to the constructing and interpreting of text. But then, that’s scarcely a disadvantage: it’s part of the fascination and significance of text.

References

- Armstrong, P. and Lovell-Smith, R. (2004). *A guide for writing essays*. Prepared by the Department of English, The University of Auckland.
- Bartholomae, D. (1983). Writing assignments: Where writing begins. In P. Strock, (Ed.), *Forum: Essays on theory and practice in the teaching of writing*. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2002). *Critical academic writing and multilingual students*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Comrie, M. (2004, 2 May). Celebrities and chequebook journalism. Sunday Supplement, Radio New Zealand.

- Cooke, D. (2004) What can a text mean? *New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning*. 32, 1, 52-65. .
- Das, R. (2004, 30 January). No new war against Iraq. Sunday Supplement, Radio New Zealand.
- Durst, R. (1984). The development of analytic writing. In A. Applebee, (Ed.), *Contexts for learning to write: Studies of secondary school instruction*. Norwood, N.J.: ABLEX.
- Harste, J. (1989). Introduction: Writing as inquiry. In T. Newkirk, *Critical thinking and writing: Reclaiming the essay*. Bloomington, Indiana: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills & Urbana, Ill.: NCTE.
- Lankshear, C. (1998). Meanings of literacy in contemporary educational reform proposals. *Educational Theory*, 49, 3, 351-372.
- McPeck, J. (1990). *Teaching critical thinking: dialogue and dialectic*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Newkirk, T. (1989). *Critical thinking and writing: Reclaiming the essay*. Bloomington, Indiana: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills & Urbana, Ill.: NCTE.
- Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1999). 3rd edition. *Writing academic English*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman)
- Payne, L. (1965). *The lively art of writing*. Chicago: Follett.

Appendix A Celebrities and Chequebook Journalism

(Reprinted with permission of Radio New Zealand)

Margie Comrie

Sunday Supplement, Radio New Zealand, 2 May 2004

[1] Oh no ... the one place I felt safe ... the pages of the *Guardian Weekly* ... but there's no escape...it's even a front-page teaser: "Did Beckham play away from home?" *News* p.10.

I immediately turned to page ten ... entirely in the interests of research you understand

[2] For years it's been hard to avoid "Posh and Becks" – but in case you've managed it, he's David Beckham, British soccer captain, transferred offshore in a £25 million deal to Spanish club Real Madrid. She was one of the Spice Girls, now making it as a solo artist. Beautiful, glamorous, very marketable and entirely unreal – they're actually a moneymaking venture.

[3] They're also a prime example of celebrity creep. Their life story has spread from women's magazines to news pages of tabloids and now to mainstream papers.

[4] It's a rich mix of voyeurism, fantasy and sex, spiced with what the Germans call *schadenfreude* - the guilty, secret joy one feels at others' misfortunes.

[5] And money's behind it all: circulation figures ride high on scandalous 'exposes' of dubious origin; as the media shells out big for kiss and tell, tales of trust broken, or just grubby rumours about anyone caught in the media spotlight, from felons to their victims, from presidents to footballers.

[6] In this latest saga – several women – possibly more as we speak – are claiming affairs with Beckham. Personal assistant Rebecca Loos sold details of hot telephone "sex text" messages to the *News of the World* for a million dollars. Selling stories has, her publicist claims, since made her another million. With luck and canny marketing – and stunts like posing with her cell phone at a movie premier – Loos looks to carry on cashing in for years, as is President Clinton's former intern – Monica Lewinsky.

[7] Apart from prudish objections should we care? It is a sort of game and, really, Kiwi media's nothing like those British tabloids. What's wrong with Paul Holmes or Jonah selling off coverage rights to help defray wedding expenses? And the magazine takes care of security, too, limiting the possibility of a media bunfight. The bride gets a free dress -- its designer gets a mention ...the magazine pays for her make up. What harm in that?

[8] Well, naturally, I'm going to say, "Yes, there is harm." There's growing evidence of chequebook journalism spreading well beyond the confines of women's magazines.

[9] It's not always obvious, because our news media rarely admit to money changing hands. But journalism lecturer Jim Tucker has documented local "pay to say" cases from magazines, newspapers and television. And with celebrity coverage invading the weekend press, editors will experience growing pressure to pay. Anecdote suggests that here in New Zealand it's now routine for people connected with murder cases to request payment.

[10] Smaller papers grumble that they can't compete in such an environment. They shouldn't be trying to, anyway. Chequebook journalism, as the *New Zealand Herald* recently stated, "not only impedes the free flow of information, but renders the information less reliable, because the subject has a financial interest in the story..."

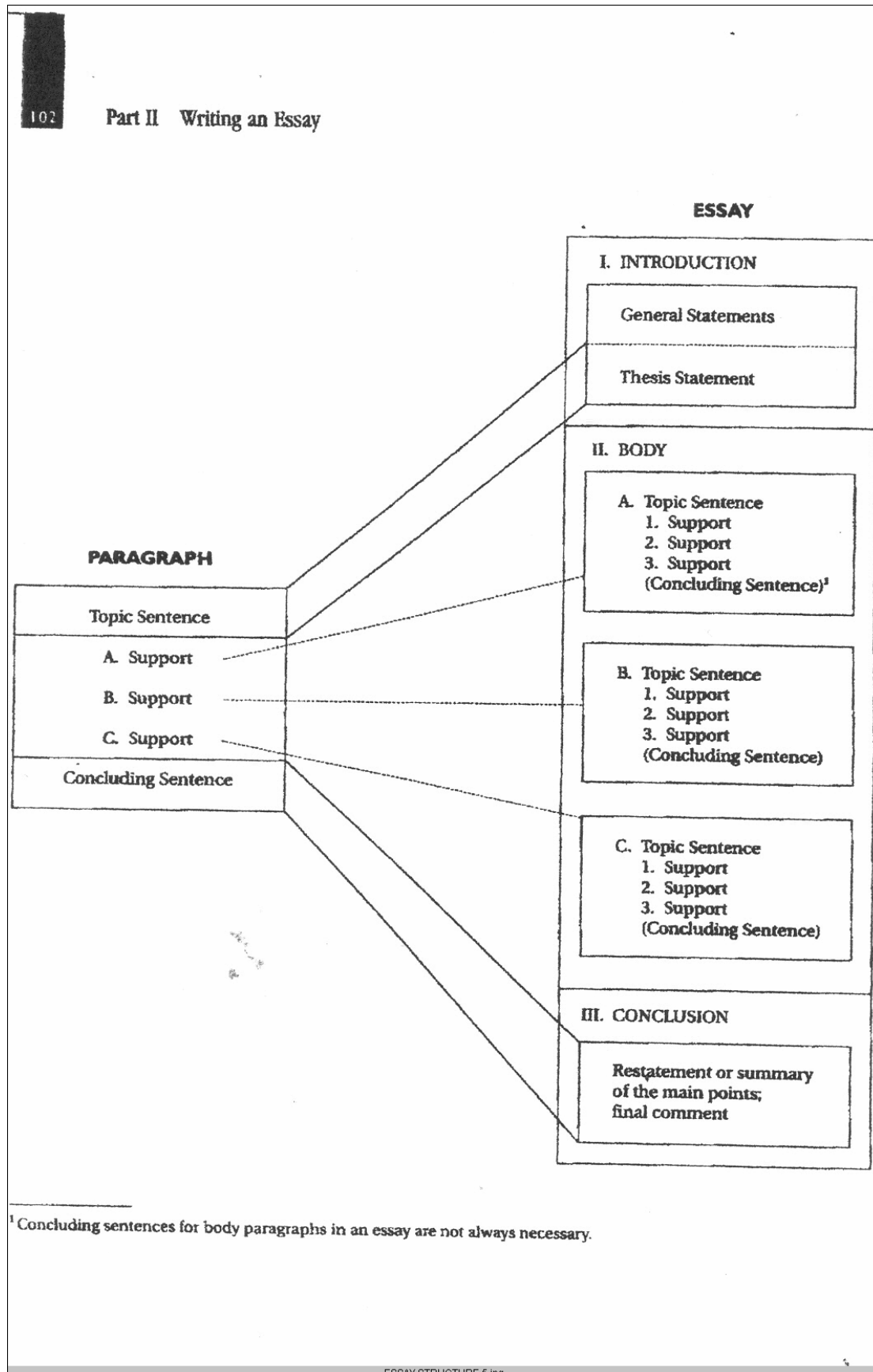
[11] And every time a "pay to say" case comes to light, it puts a further nail in the coffin of media credibility. But apart from blaming 'greedy' publicists and celebrities, or praising gatecrashing photographers as victors in a battle for press freedom – the media are doing little to stamp out the practice.

[12] Under the banner of Freedom of the Press, news media have always preferred to regulate themselves. Well, it's time they started showing willing. Unless they begin to exercise more effective self-control, the media may find it increasingly imposed. As celebrities seek to manage their lucrative reputations, a body of new privacy case law is developing.

[13] Our media must devise a clear code of conduct to control chequebook journalism, and follow it transparently, or they may find the law has done it for them.

[14] It's depressing to think that cash-fuelled fights over who's first to print gossip could ultimately imperil the freedom of the press.

Appendix B Essay Structure (Oshima and Hogue, 1990, p. 102)



Appendix C

No new war against Iraq

Ramon Das

Sunday Supplement, Radio New Zealand, 30 January 2003
(Reprinted with permission of Radio New Zealand)

[1] In my view, any new war against Iraq would not just be wrong: it would be morally and practically *insane*. For it's clear that any US-led invasion of Iraq –either with or without Security Council approval– would constitute an act of unprovoked aggression. At the very least, it would be contrary to the spirit of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use or threat of force in foreign affairs. Last but hardly least, it would vastly increase the suffering of the Iraqi people, who have already been devastated by the economic sanctions of the last 13 years.

[2] Why, then, would anyone want to start such an unprovoked war? George Bush claims to have a good reason. He tells us that Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction and that he intends to use these weapons against us. He therefore must be disarmed by force. What are we to make of this argument? First, consider the claim that Saddam possesses weapons of mass destruction. Is this true? Well, it's hard to say. What we do know is that UN inspectors have been in the country for 60 days, and their major find so far has been a couple dozen empty shells. If Iraq does have WMD, no one seems to be able to find any of them - and it's certainly not for lack of trying.

[3] But we might consider another question: why so much concern about Iraq's WMD *now*? After all, it's widely known that the US and other western countries supplied Iraq with chemical and biological weapons throughout the 1980's. The details of this connection are apparently so embarrassing that the US had to confiscate the 12,000-page weapons report that Iraq recently submitted to the UN Security Council. It then crossed out the incriminating sections before distributing the report to the non-permanent members of the Council. Some of these sections perhaps contained information about chemical weapons that were likely supplied by the US and which Saddam used to gas thousands of his own people to death at Halabja in 1988. That incident so troubled US lawmakers that several of them went to Iraq the following year to reassure Saddam that America had no problem with him.

[4] Well, what about Bush's second claim: Saddam intends to use WMD against us. What evidence is there for this? In this case, the answer is simple: there is none. Saddam's last act of international aggression was in 1990, and he apparently thought he had US approval on that one. As others have pointed out, Saddam may be many things, but suicidal is not one of them. And he truly would have to have a death wish to use WMD against the US or its allies.

[5] In fact, the real reasons behind a threatened US invasion of Iraq have nothing to do with weapons, real or imagined. Control over Iraqi oil reserves is of course very important, but even that is probably inadequate to explain what is happening. The fact is that American foreign policy is currently in the hands of a small group of very dangerous men with imperialistic ambitions that are truly global. Bush's so-called "axis of evil" was not made public for nothing: there is regular discussion in American newspapers of "who's next" on the invasion list: likely candidates include Iran, North Korea, even China. This is something that we all have much reason to fear.

[6] What, then, are we to do? The answer lies in the fact that an unprovoked war against Iraq is terribly unpopular everywhere, even in the US, where 70% of the population is opposed to any attack that doesn't have UN approval. New Zealand should take its stand with Germany, France, and the vast majority of countries that are firmly opposed to any new war with Iraq. Bush and Co. may control the greatest military power in the world, but even they cannot ignore the combined force of the rest of the world's opinion. New Zealand's role is to add its voice, loudly and clearly, to that global call for sanity.

Appendix D Native American Influences on Modern American Culture

Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1999). 3rd edition. *Writing Academic English*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, p. 127)

When the first Europeans came to the North American continent, they encountered the completely new cultures of the Native American peoples of North America. Native Americans, who had highly developed cultures in many respects, must have been as curious about the strange European manners and customs as the Europeans were curious about them. As always happens when two or more cultures come into contact, there was a cultural exchange. Native Americans adopted some of the Europeans' ways, and the Europeans adopted some of their ways. As a result, Native Americans have made many valuable contributions to American culture, particularly in the areas of language, art, food, and government.

First of all, Native Americans left a permanent imprint on the English language. The early English-speaking settlers borrowed from several different Native American languages words for the new places and new objects that they had found in this new land. All across the country, one can find cities, towns, rivers, and states with Native American names. For example, the states of Delaware, Iowa, Illinois, and Alabama are named after Native American tribes, as are the cities of Chicago, Miami, and Spokane. In addition to place names, English adopted from various Native American languages the words for animals and plants that were to be found only in the Americas and no place else. *Chipmunk*, *moose*, *raccoon*, *skunk*, *tobacco*, and *potato* are just a few examples.

Although the vocabulary of English is the area that shows the most Native American influence, it is not the only area of American culture that was shaped by contact with Native Americans. Art is another area of important Native American contributions. Wool rugs woven by women of the Navajo tribe in Arizona and New Mexico are highly valued works of art in the United States. Also, Native American jewelry made from silver and turquoise is very popular and very expensive. Especially in the western and southwestern regions of the United States, native crafts such as pottery, handcrafted leather products, and beadwork can be found in many homes. Indeed, native art and handicrafts are a treasured part of American culture.

In addition to language and art, agriculture is another area in which Native Americans had a great and lasting influence on the peoples who arrived here from Europe, Africa, and Asia. Being skilled farmers, the Native Americans of North America taught the newcomers many things about farming techniques and crops. Every American schoolchild has heard the story of how Native Americans taught the first settlers to place a dead fish in a planting hole to provide fertilizer for the growing plant. Furthermore, they taught the settlers irrigation methods and crop rotation. In addition, many of the foods Americans eat today were introduced to the Europeans by Native Americans. For example, potatoes, corn, chocolate, and peanuts were unknown in Europe. Now they are staples in the American diet.

Finally, it may surprise some people to learn that Americans are also indebted to the native people for our form of government. The Iroquois, who were an extremely large tribe with many branches called "nations," had developed a highly sophisticated system of government to settle disputes that arose between the various branches. Five of the nations had joined together in a confederation called "The League of the Iroquois." Under the League, each nation was autonomous in running its own internal affairs, but the nations acted as a unit when dealing with outsiders. The League kept the Iroquois from fighting among themselves and was also valuable in diplomatic relations with other tribes. When the thirteen American colonies were considering what kind of government to establish after they won their independence from Britain, someone suggested that they use a system similar to that of the League of the Iroquois. Under this system, each colony or future state would be autonomous in managing its own affairs but would join forces with the other states to deal with matters that concerned them all. This is exactly what happened. As a result, the present form of government of the United States can be traced directly back to a Native American model.

In conclusion, we can easily see from these few examples the extent of Native American influence on our language, our art forms, our eating habits, and our government. Modern Americans are deeply indebted to Native Americans for their contributions to United States culture.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE FOR TERTIARY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Margaret Franken
School of Education
University of Waikato

Abstract

This paper explores the area of quality teaching or good practice for international students at a tertiary level. It presents a set of four principles which aim to elaborate what good practice might, in part, mean. These principles have derived from the analysis and observation of designing and teaching a particular course for Chinese postgraduate students at a New Zealand University. The course itself draws on sociocultural theory, research in second language teaching and learning, and curriculum design.

Introduction

While acknowledging that international student numbers at a tertiary level have recently declined in New Zealand, the early 2000s saw a rapid increase which impacted on institutions and teachers within them. As Smith and Rae in 2004 stated, “Since 1999 the number of international students studying in New Zealand public universities and polytechnics has increased dramatically, by over 433 percent at universities and nearly 200 percent at polytechnics” (Smith & Rae, 2004, p.1)

In response to the rapid increase and large numbers of students, the Ministry of Education commissioned research to investigate the impact of international students on institutions, and on the local student population, and to investigate the perceptions of the international students themselves (Ward, 2001). In her report, Ward highlighted the difficulties international students experienced in interaction with local students, and vice versa. Her research represented the experience of international students as somewhat negative.

Since Ward’s report there have been a number of initiatives. Education New Zealand for instance has furthered the research agenda in the area of international education by managing research that covers a wide range of issues: demographic data (Smith & Rae, 2004), pastoral care (McGrath & Butcher, 2004), achievement (Paewai & Meyer, 2004), programme or course initiatives by individual institutions (Daly & Brown, 2004; Shackleford & Blickem, 2004)¹. In terms of guidelines for tertiary providers, these focus on institutional support and general provisions for international students (for instance the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students).

In the school sector, which experienced similar increases in international student numbers, there is a guiding document for teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse students, Alton-Lee’s (2003), *Quality teaching for diverse students*. This is a best evidence synthesis

¹ See www.educationnz.org to source all online reports.

report, commissioned by the Ministry of Education which draws together the available evidence about what works to improve education outcomes for diverse students. While the scope of the report extends beyond linguistic and cultural diversity, a great number of the pedagogical principles are of relevance to international students in schools, and can be interpreted to apply directly to them. (See for instance Franken & McComish, 2004). Such a document is lacking for the New Zealand tertiary sector.

A number of studies do exist which explore the perceptions of students and teachers about what they consider to be good practice at a tertiary level (for example see Dowds, 1999; McCallum, 2004; Mingsheng Li, 1999). Dowds reported on the perceptions of a particular literacy activity, the university tutorial. Mingsheng Li compared Chinese students' perspectives of both Chinese teachers and ex-pat teachers working in China. McCallum's research is of particular interest as it focuses on pedagogy that teachers say represents best practice and reports on what teachers say they do. She reported particular strategies that teachers used in working with international students in one private training establishment. For example to give language support, teachers identified key words prior to the lesson and created vocabulary lists. Teachers also set up contexts in which students could use communicative strategies such as group work and team competitions. Teachers focused on ways to make a supportive classroom environment and made use of a wide range of strategies for presenting information.

While McCallum's research presents helpful teaching strategies, these are not theorised with reference to research on learning and or curriculum design. This paper does attempt to account for a number of pedagogical practices with reference to sociocultural views of learning, models of academic literacy development and research on effective second language learning and teaching.

Context

The purpose of this paper is to present and explain a set of principles and give examples of the pedagogical practices that can be seen to exemplify the principles. The pedagogical practices and the principles within which they are nested, arise from reflection on and analysis of the design and teaching of a particular course for Chinese international students enrolled in an M.Ed programme at a New Zealand university. The course, entitled Academic Literacy, was a response to the fact that the writer felt that students arriving from China were not ready to be submerged into postgraduate courses that assumed content knowledge, language and discourse knowledge, and knowledge of academic literacy practices that was equivalent to that of other Masters students (New Zealand born, or New Zealand resident).

Principles

The principles which are believed to be of particular relevance to supporting the successful teaching and learning of international students beginning tertiary study in New Zealand are listed below.

1. Students have opportunities to develop an understanding of why and how academic literacy practices differ.

2. Students have opportunities to develop an understanding of how academic literacy practices are linked to epistemology, and how different practices are related to each other.
3. Students have opportunities to develop an understanding of how academic literacy develops over time.
4. Students have opportunities to experience learning arrangements and sequences that facilitate academic literacy development.
5. Students' attention is drawn to aspects of language form and conventions.

The first three of these principles are metacognitive in the sense that they focus on ways of developing students' awareness of how learning occurs in the context of tertiary academic study. Principles four and five discuss ways of enhancing that learning. Each of the principles are now discussed and pedagogical practices are presented.

Students have opportunities to develop an understanding of why and how academic literacy practices differ

The notion of discourse community

A number of useful ways of viewing the nature of academic literacy and the way it develops exist. These provide students with a frame of reference for understanding why academic literacy practices may seem to differ in a New Zealand context. One such model is that of the discourse community (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993; Flowerdew, 2000; Lave and Wenger, 1991). A discourse community can be thought of "a group of people who share a set of social conventions that is directed towards some purpose" (Swales, cited in Flowerdew, 2000, p. 129). In this case we are speaking of individuals sharing the language, beliefs and practices associated with tertiary academic work in a New Zealand university context. Of particular importance are what Berkenkotter and Huckin characterise as "textual practices" (1993, p. 498) – how we construct academic spoken and written texts (see Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd, & Helt, 2002 for a comprehensive discussion and analysis of these textual practices). The Academic Literacy course begins with the study of the notion of discourse community as presented in the work of the writers mentioned above.

A focus on textual practices and conventions

The sociocultural orientation of discourse community begins the course and frames further topics the students study and the academic literacy activities they engage in. The course progresses through a number of aspects (e.g. Genre Analysis including analysis of the discourse of academic research articles, Contrastive Discourse Analysis), skills (e.g. writing about and from sources) and contexts (e.g. lectures, tutorials) that have attracted research interest in academic literacy of international students. Students study the topics through lectures, tutorials, and readings, and they explore notions of difference, difficulty or demand in those areas. In so doing, students' awareness of the conventions associated with aspects, skills and contexts of tertiary academic study is also raised.

The keeping of a 'conventions log' in which students record their observations of conventions associated with the course is an important way in which they can reflect on their growing knowledge of textual practices within the discourse community. In their conventions log,

students may record observations made in written texts such as referencing, and they may record conventions observed in spoken language, such as the way in which they are addressed by the lecturer or tutor, or the nature of the interaction in tutorials as compared with lectures.

A focus on beliefs

Jin and Cortazzi (2001) encourage teachers to not only to clarify conventions or “expectations of practices”, but also to expose “underlying presuppositions about academic cultures of learning as they apply to the local institutional context and target disciplines” (p. 2). Academic Literacy begins with an extensive discussion of a list of premises or presuppositions about postgraduate research. As an example, two statements from the course outline are given below:

Postgraduate courses require students to be independent, organised, and self motivated...

By and large, lecturers in New Zealand universities seek to get a spread of grades. This means that it is likely that there will be students who get As, Bs and Cs, and perhaps even failing grades. (Course outline)

The beliefs that students themselves have about the nature learning (epistemological beliefs) are an important focus of the Academic Literacy course. Definitions of epistemological beliefs are often individually constructed, as in Hofer and Pintrich’s (1997) definition that epistemological beliefs are an individual’s conceptions “about the nature of knowledge and the nature or process of knowing” (p.117). However while held by individuals, they are socially educationally and culturally constructed and shared (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1993). International students therefore bring these to new learning contexts. For instance, Li (2002) found in her study on epistemological beliefs about language learning and the learning of Chinese in particular that New Zealand born Chinese students and students born in countries where Chinese is a first language differed markedly in their beliefs about the nature of language learning and what made for effective learning.

An important area that often confounds international students is that of assessment. Teachers in university contexts have particular views about the nature of assessment and what it aims to do. However, it would seem that they rarely articulate those. The fact that university teachers assign As, Bs, etc with a corresponding number value aligns with a view that that student performance can and should be represented as a range, sometimes but not always reflecting normal distribution².

In assessment, teachers often make reference to grade descriptors, what a piece of work at each grade level might look like. The descriptors often encompass a number of different dimensions. Students’ work may not necessarily manifest all of those dimensions to achieve a grade. This aligns with a view that any student’s work is an individual, complex and multi dimensional response to a task.

In order to begin to understand these beliefs and how they operate, students in the Academic Literacy course carry out a self assessment of an essay and provide an justification with

² A normal distribution of grades means that most students would be close to the average, while relatively few would be at one extreme or the other i.e. As and Cs.

reference to grade descriptors. Two examples of students' self assessment illustrating the emerging understanding of what is valued and how assessment is done, are given below.

Though I tried to write it well, it is a pity to say I haven't got enough materials to support my views. As I state in my essay, there is a lack of grounds to support the modern ideologies' influence on Chinese rhetoric, perhaps because China is changing so fast and it is not proper to have a hasty conclusion about them. I think that my essay is well organized and coherent in meaning, reader-centered with good use of subheadings and well arranged paragraphs. There is a discussion about the topic by using the Chinese as a discourse community in a contrastive rhetoric field. The language itself is okay. I'm expecting an A or an A-.

If I were Margaret, I would give me a Grade B+. Although the essay is not excellent, I did my best to finish it by reading material I could find, and revised it several times. Due to my limited vocabulary, I am not able to express exactly. Please believe me I will be a little better next time, as I am making progress every day.

As the self assessments and self reports are posted in students' private on-line folders, they can be commented on and responded to by the teacher after the grade has been assigned. It should be noted that in most instances students over-rate the quality of their work. The tendency to over estimate the quality of one's own work is not confined to international students, but is also shared by less expert native speaking students (Topping, 1998).

While only done for one essay in Academic Literacy, it would seem that a systematic and sustained use of self assessment, around which students and teachers interact and negotiate, would be a valuable addition to the course.

Students have opportunities to develop an understanding of how academic literacy practices are linked to epistemology, and how different practices are related to each other.

While it is an important principle to make explicit underlying beliefs and presuppositions, it is also important to link these specifically to the nature of academic literacy practices to fully understand the way in which the discourse community operates. One instance of this is the examination of the role of critique and argument, common textual practices in tertiary academic study. Mathison (1996, p.315) explains this further by stating that "students are often expected to read other's texts to write their own, to think through information to create their own positions, and to support these positions with convincing evidence" (Mathison, 1996, p.315). If we accept that students are somewhat novice members of a discourse community, they can be seen to practice skills that are valued in more expert members. Experts likewise read the texts of others "to construct their own positions, dismantling and reconfiguring knowledge claims..." (Mathison, 1996, p.315). Mathison explains that they do this in order to participate in "advancing disciplinary knowledge".

Students in Academic Literacy read the work of Mathison (1996) explaining the purpose of critique and argument in the discourse community, and write a number of critique texts (called summary and critique tasks in the course). In reading research articles, students are instructed to identify the particular contribution is that each author or researcher is seeking to make to understandings in the discourse community. Comparing, contrasting and generalising

of theories, methodologies, and orientations to data analysis are specific micro textual ways of practicing skills that also contribute towards the positioning of oneself in order to contribute to the advancing of disciplinary knowledge. An example of this is given on the following page.

The discussion has made reference to the value accorded to a type of thinking, writing and genre, and also to particular rhetorical skills. The strategies and tasks presented help students become aware of the value accorded to both practices and products within a discourse community, and why those practices and products are valued. A number of other connections are made more incidentally during the course of Academic Literacy such as the value accorded to accuracy of referencing. The discussion of these and yet more practices could be formalised in the course.

Students have opportunities to develop an understanding of how academic literacy develops over time

The notion of legitimate peripheral participation

Students need to appreciate that academic literacy development takes time. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) state, “Learning the genres of disciplinary or professional discourse would be similar to second language acquisition, requiring immersion into the culture, and a lengthy period of apprenticeship and enculturation” (p. 487).

Example 1: Tasks for comparing, contrasting, and generalising of theories, methodologies, and orientation to data collection and analysis.

Read the following:

Biber et al (2002, pp. 11, 12)

Approaches to academic discourse analysis

Connor (1996, pp.126-129)

The concept of genre

Canagarajah (2002, pp. 32-33)

English for academic purposes: asserting boundaries

Flowerdew (2000, pp. 129-130)

Discourse communities

All of the sections above cover research in the area of discourse analysis.

Take notes about the different approaches to discourse analysis outlined in the sections.

Map out the relationships between the different approaches.

In groups, produce one map and present to the class.

Mathison makes a distinction between:

- assimilated and original knowledge
- topic and comment (including evaluative and personal)

Read Franken (1996, p.98-99).

Write a paragraph that compares the ways in which the students’ texts are evaluated in both studies.

Would-be participants in discourse communities are seen to gradually become more expert in the textual practices valued in academic work through observation of and experience with those practices, and through interaction with others. Lave and Wenger (1991) characterise this process as “legitimate peripheral participation”, and claim that it rarely involves explicit teaching.

Students in the Academic Literacy course are introduced to the notion of legitimate peripheral participation at the beginning of the course through course readings such as Flowerdew (2000), and Spack (1997). Both these readings document an individual’s academic literacy development over a period of time, and describe the experiences and interactions that play a part in that development. Students engage in ongoing reflective tasks such as on-line learner diaries that deal with their own adjustment and understanding of different beliefs and textual practices.

Other course work and class time also provide opportunities “for facilitating and reflecting upon legitimate peripheral participation as opposed to an opportunity for the transmission of knowledge” (Flowerdew, 2000, p.132). These are outlined below.

Writing genres

One area in which students need to be encouraged to resist simple and quick or reductionist strategies and understandings is the area of writing genres. We as teachers are often responsible for what is sometimes referred to as a commodified approach to writing. Russell elaborates on why this is so. He states, “The discipline of composition studies, like other disciplines, commodifies the products of its research and theory to make them useful to practitioners, clients customers, and students” (Russell, 1999, p. 85). What is often given to and understood by students is “fixed, fruitless, organizational formulae such as the typical ‘introduction, body, conclusion’, which offer only a remote possibility that these parts will hang together” (Roca de Larios, Murphy & Marín, 2002, p. 250). Students themselves often consult alternative sources of information about writing genres, particularly from websites. Some of these are just as likely to represent reductionist or commodified genre descriptions which students attempt to apply in an inflexible way. However a critical examination of genre descriptions particularly from websites, while not done in Academic Literacy, could prove to be a very worthwhile task.

More specialized and valid genre based descriptions can be used as the basis of a set of criteria for students to evaluate their own texts. In Academic Literacy, students read material about the argument genre (Crammond, 1998), analyse argument texts, and both before and after assessment, discuss the set of criteria against which their own argument texts are evaluated. (See appendix A). In addition as mentioned above, they carry out a self assessment. Together with this self assessment is a self report on how they went about doing their argument essay.

One student’s account of how she understood requirements of the argument essay and how she integrated that in her writing process is represented below:

Before my argument essay was completed, I experienced a very hard time to get it done. At the very beginning, I intended to write an essay on the first of the three topics. Then I searched in the library website and borrowed 15 reference books and journals related to it. I took six of them to Auckland during my one-week break. After looking through them, I made the outline of my essay: Introduction with the presentation of studies of CR [Contrastive Rhetoric] & DC [Discourse Community]; the notions of CR & DC; and my thesis statement: CR does not conflict DC but promotes it. Having finished writing

the introduction, I found that I could not get enough evidence from the references to support my thesis. So I had to change my topic.

Concept and vocabulary development

With respect to concept or vocabulary learning, students in the Academic Literacy course are encouraged to understand that there is not one correct or unified understanding of a concept or word. In terms of development, students are encouraged to understand there are levels of knowing a word or concept; and that word or concept understanding develops over time. The learning of genres and other aspects of academic literacy including knowledge of concepts and vocabulary evolve “with each new occasion of use because new situations, negotiations, and activities recast it in a new, more densely textured form” (Brown, Collins & Duguid, cited in Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993, p. 485). Likewise, Biggs (1999, p. 37) states that “understanding develops gradually, becoming more articulated as it does so”.

The activities that students engage in during the course require articulation of understanding, and repetition with expansion of context. In this way, students develop a full and rich understanding of concepts and vocabulary and are aware of this process. An example of an activity which achieves this, is the ‘Say It’ task below. The grid is used as a way of identifying specific concepts the teacher wants the students to articulate. She does this by nominating students to carry out one of the tasks e.g. A1.

On the first occasion, the teacher may work with the concepts as they are initially represented in the lectures and reading materials.

Example 2a: ‘Say It’ task

| | A | B | C |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | In the term legitimate peripheral participation explain the meaning of legitimate. | In the term legitimate peripheral participation explain the meaning of peripheral. | In the term legitimate peripheral participation explain the meaning of participation. |
| 2 | Explain the notion of a discourse community. | Explain the similarities between a discourse community and a community of practice. | Explain the differences between a discourse community and a community of practice. |

On a subsequent occasion, the teacher can use the ‘Say It’ task to articulate further understandings of the concept as they arise in subsequent lectures and readings, as in the following example.

Example 2b: ‘Say It’ task

| | A | B | C |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1 | Say what is meant by the claim that discourse communities have become “decentred”. | Say what is meant by the claim that discourse communities have become “deterritorialised”. | Say what you now understand the term discourse community to mean. |

This type of task, in which articulation of concepts is carefully planned, helps students to appreciate that concepts are not fixed or immutable, but that as they read and learn, their understanding of concepts will change and develop increasing complexity. Their understandings will also reflect synthesis of the views of different writers. This exemplifies the practice advocated by Qian and Alvermann who state that, “Instead of teaching complex concepts in traditional and oversimplified ways, teachers should explore multiple ways to represent a complex concept and to foster students’ ability to criss-cross a complex concept by assembling knowledge from different sources [and perspectives]” (2000, p. 69).

Students have opportunities to experience learning arrangements and sequences that facilitate academic literacy development

Qian and Alvermann (2000, p. 69) coined the phrase “criss-crossing the landscape” to refer to the way in which secondary school science students may best achieve conceptual change needed to really succeed in Science. Conceptual change learning refers to a move from simple conceptions to complex conceptions about the nature of the learning in a particular domain. Teachers can guide students further in this process by helping them to integrate different levels of knowledge; and by giving students support and guidance to perform tasks through careful building of experiences and scaffolding. These are outlined below.

Helping students to integrate different levels of knowledge

Biggs (1999) examines the different levels of knowledge that students are required to engage in, in academic contexts. Ideally, functioning knowledge should be achieved by students. Biggs explains this below, and the relationship between functioning knowledge, declarative knowledge (knowing what) and procedural knowledge (knowing how).

Conditional knowledge incorporates both procedural and higher level declarative knowledge at a theoretical level, so that one knows when, why and under what conditions one should do this as opposed to that. The combination turns procedural knowledge into functioning knowledge, which is flexible and wide ranging... In sum, functioning knowledge involves declarative knowledge (the academic knowledge base), procedural knowledge (having the skills), and conditional knowledge (knowing the circumstances for using them). (Biggs, 1999, p. 41)

However Biggs claims that most teaching focuses on declarative knowledge, with procedural knowledge “taught separately in practice” (1999, p.41). He goes on to say, “The problem here is that integrating the two domains is then left up to the student” (Biggs, 1999, p.41).

In the sequence outlined below (Figure 1), students come to integrate levels of knowing about the role and demands of critique in academic work. The students listen to a lecture, are involved in a tutorial and read about critique, This is declarative knowledge. Students engage in critique by doing summary and critique talks and by writing an argument essay. During this process they may make reference back to what they know declaratively. At the towards the end of the course the students need to combine these types of knowledge and represent this together with their personal experience when they come to write a report on an aspect of academic literacy which may well be on critique.

Figure 1: Plan of how types of knowledge are sequenced and integrated

| Declarative → | Procedural → | Declarative, Procedural & Conditional leads to Functioning knowledge |
|--|--|---|
| Lecture and tutorial explanation and analysis Reading: Crammond, J.G. (1998). The uses and complexity of argument structures in expert and student persuasive writing. <i>Written Communication</i> , 15, 230-268. | Summary and Critique tasks Argument essay | Report on an aspect of academic literacy e.g. academic writing, with recommendations for colleagues on strategies for dealing with demands. |

Giving students guidance to perform tasks through scaffolding and careful building of experiences

In scaffolding, teachers assist “learners move towards new skills, concepts or levels of understandings. Scaffolding is (...) the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something, so that the learner will be able to do a similar task alone” (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10).

In the Academic Literacy course, scaffolding is achieved in reading and in notetaking from lectures. Students are guided in how they might approach particular reading material. The example below illustrates a reading guide given to students in the early weeks of the course. Gradually students are expected to use a variety of strategies and types of reading skills independently.

Example 3: Reading guide for topic 4: Writing from and about sources

| Mathison (1996) | Yamada (2003) | De Voss & Rosati (2002) |
|--|---|---|
| Read pp. 314-319 closely. Skim read pp. 320-324. Read pp. 324-328 (section on text measures). Skim read pp. 328-329. Read pp. 329-335 closely. You do not need to read pp. 335-342. Skim read pp. 342-346. Read Appendix A and B closely. | Read pp. 247-251 closely. Skim read pp. 251-254. Read p. 254 (from second paragraph) to p. 255 closely. | Skim read pp. 191-193. Read pp. 194-196 closely. Skim read pp. 196-203. |

With respect to scaffolding in notetaking from lectures, students move from the guided support of detailed handouts, to the more schematic outline presented in PowerPoint presentation. In the last third of the course students are given neither but expected to try to make notes from lectures independently. The teacher’s lecture notes are then posted on the course website after the lecture for students to compare with their own.

Other aspects of the course design reflect careful building and recycling. As explained above, ‘Say It’ exercises serve to help students to articulate their own understandings of concepts. Exercises that support and guide students to articulate their thinking allows them to engage in the necessary process of putting “their knowledge on display” (Coxhead & Nation, 2001, p.259). When they are used to prepare students for subsequent related writing tasks, they also provide a foundation needed to perform “textual transformations” that Yamada (2003) claims is important in avoiding plagiarism.

During the course, students repeat task types such as the summary and critique task. This allows for productive recycling of vocabulary and other elements of language structure, which results in better fluency. As Coxhead & Nation (2001, p. 259) state, “Fluency is encouraged by repeated opportunity to work with texts that are within the learner’s proficiency”. While not all texts are within the students’ proficiency, a number of other strategies are in place, discussed earlier which make the content in texts more accessible and familiar.

While students do repeat the types of tasks in the course, support and guidance decreases and expectations of performance (made explicit) increase. One example is that initially when students write a critique, they can present the summary statements separately from the critique statements but later are required to integrate the critique statements with their summary statements. These two rhetorical differences are expressed as the topic-comment separate configuration vs. topic comment integrated configuration by Mathison (1996).

There is also careful building of tasks. For instance students move from summary and critique to argument essays. The transfer of skills is facilitated by discussing each of the task types or genres and analysing the connections between them.

Students’ attention is drawn to aspects of language form and conventions

Coxhead (2000, p.228) states, “Courses that involve direct attention to language features have been found to result in better learning than courses that rely solely on incidental learning (Ellis, 1990; Long, 1988)”. While this statement applies to language courses, it is equally true of contexts such as these - content courses which take a type of ‘embedded’³ language and literacy approach.

In order to draw students’ attention to vocabulary meaning and structural aspects such as collocation, vocabulary items are systematically but unobtrusively recorded in a specific location on the whiteboard. Students are encouraged to record these and vocabulary items encountered in any activities, in a log. Students share these at the beginning of each tutorial. In the middle of the course and at the end of the course, analysis is done on the completed to categorise the words with reference to the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000).

³ A term used in much of the research in adult literacy where literacy skills are not taught in a discrete manner, but rather, are integrated with content.

Example 4: Part of the vocabulary list compiled by students in the Academic Literacy course

| Words from word families in AWL | | Words for Education | Words for Language Education | Other useful words |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| academic acquisition citation conceptualize... | dislocation dynamism editorial elimination... | abstract apprenticeship conventions cognition ... | acculturation Anglophone bilingual collocation... | characterize chronology configuration continuum... |

Conclusion

In summary, what has been described in this paper is one response to the challenge of helping international students to become part of the postgraduate New Zealand university discourse community. As Flowerdew states, “One way of conceptualizing graduate education is as the facilitation of legitimate peripheral participation for young scholars” [in the academic discourse community] (2000, p.131).

The principles presented in this paper are by no means exhaustive, and are derived from reflection on practice, rather than from an evidence base. They could usefully be the starting point of research on effectiveness of particular pedagogical practices for tertiary international students engaged in tertiary study.

Note: A version of this paper was given as a keynote presentation at the Tertiary Writing Network Colloquium, Victoria University, 2-3 December, 2004.

References

- Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Berkenkotter, C. and Huckin, T. N. (1993). Rethinking genre from a sociocognitive perspective. *Written Communication*, 10, 475-509.
- Biber, D., Conrad, S., Reppen, R., Byrd, P. & Helt, M. (2002). Speaking and writing in the university: A multi-dimensional comparison. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 9-48.
- Biggs, J. (1999). *Teaching for quality learning at university. What the student does*. Buckingham, UK & Philadelphia, USA: Society for research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Coxhead, A. (2000). A new academic word list. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34, 213-238.
- Coxhead, A. & Nation, P. (2001). The specialised vocabulary of English for academic purposes. In J. Flowerdew & M. Peacock (Eds), *Research perspectives on English for academic purposes* (p.252-267). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crammond, J. G. (1998). The uses and complexity of argument structures in expert and student persuasive writing. *Written Communication*, 15, 230-268.

- Daly, A. & Brown, J. (2004). *Enhancing classroom success for international students through the ExcelL Internacultural Skills Program*. Retrieved 28 November 2004, from www.educationnz.org.nz/levy/2003-2004/reports/A1.7.pdf.
- Dowds, D. A. (1999). *A comparative analysis of student and tutor expectations and experiences within a university tutorial setting*. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Arts in Second Language Massey University, Palmerston North.
- Flowerdew, J. (2000). Discourse community, legitimate peripheral participation, and the non-native-English-speaking scholar. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34, 127-150.
- Franken, M. (2004, May). *Principles to guide effective literacy practices for NESB students*. Paper presented at Pinpointing Practice: A Learning Media National Symposium, Wellington Convention Centre.
- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language. Scaffolding learning. Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hofer, B. K. & Pintrich, P. R. (1997). The development of epistemological theories: Beliefs about knowledge and knowing and their relation to learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 67, 88-140.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Li, Aiqun (2002). *Epistemological beliefs and language learning beliefs of students learning Chinese*. Unpublished MA Thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North.
- Mathison, M. A. (1996). Writing a critique, a text about a text. *Written Communication*, 13, 314-354.
- McCallum, A. (2004). *Best practice teaching strategies for international students*. Retrieved 28 November 2004, from www.educationnz.org.nz/levy/2003-2004/reports/A1.8.pdf.
- McGrath, T. & Bucher, A. (2004). *Campus-community linkages in pastoral care of international students with particular reference to Palmerston North, Wellington and Christchurch*. Retrieved 28 November 2004, from www.educationnz.org.nz/levy/2003-2004/reports/A1.1.pdf.
- Mingsheng Li. (1999). *Discourse and culture of learning: Communication challenges*. Paper presented at the joint AARE-NZARE 1999 Conference, Melbourne, 27 November – 2 December.
- Paewai, S. & Meyer, L. (2004). *Academic achievement levels of international students*. Retrieved 28 November 2004, from www.educationnz.org.nz/levy/2003-2004/reports/A3.pdf.
- Qian, G. & Alvermann, D. E. (2000). Relationship between epistemological beliefs and conceptual change learning. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 16, 59-74.
- Roca De Larios, J., Murphy, L. & Marin, J. (2002) A critical examination of L2 writing process research. In S. Ransdell & M. L. Barbier (Eds), *Studies in writing, Volume 11: New directions for research in L2 writing* (pp. 11-47). Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers
- Russell, D. (1999). Activity theory and process approaches: Writing (power) in school and society. In T. Kent, (Ed.), *Post-process theory. Beyond the writing-process paradigm* (pp. 80-95). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Shackleford, N. & Blickem, C. (2004). *The UNITEC language learning development programme for first year students of business. Strategies for success*. Retrieved 28 November 2004, from www.educationnz.org.nz/levy/2003-2004/reports/A1.2.pdf.
- Smith, L. & Rae, A. (2004). *Managing international student numbers at New Zealand public universities and polytechnics*. Report to the Ministry of Education. Retrieved 28 November 2004, from www.educationnz.org.nz/levy/2003-2004/reports/A1.4.pdf.
- Spack, R. (1997). The acquisition of academic literacy in a second language. A longitudinal case study. *Written Communication*, 14, 3-62.
- Topping, K. (1998). Peer assessment between students in colleges and universities *Review of Educational Research*, 68, 3, 249-276.
- Ward, C. (2001). *The impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions*. Ministry of Education Wellington.
- Yamada, K. (2003). What prevents ESL/EFL writers from avoiding plagiarism?: Analyses of 10 North-American college websites. *System*, 31, 247-258

Appendix A: Criteria against which argument texts are evaluated

| |
|--|
| Overall argument structure |
| Clear statement of claim |
| Quality of grounds |
| Selection of information from reading which provides grounds to support your claim |
| Quality of backing |
| Selection of information from reading which provides backing for your grounds |
| Scope of reading |
| Use of specific ideas and comments from the articles both in your own words and in direct quotation form |
| Ability to express your ideas clearly in academic English, making use of appropriate discourse markers. |
| Ability to express your ideas accurately in academic English |
| Ability to write a well organised and coherent text in English using paragraphs and subheadings |
| Ability to observe other aspects of academic literacy conventions such as in text referencing and references list. |

MARKING FOR PROCESS, SELF-REFLECTION AND AUTONOMY: DESIGNING ITEM SPECIFICATIONS FOR BUSINESS WRITING

Martin Andrew
School of English & Applied Linguistics
Unitec New Zealand

Abstract

This paper describes curricular, pedagogical and assessment-related factors that affect the design and implementation of a grid of ten item specifications for an advanced writing course. The study is located within a second year Business Writing programme of a Bachelor of Arts in English as an Additional Language (EAL). The marking criteria described were created to fulfil a number of purposes simultaneously. These item specifications serve as item descriptors, a focussed curriculum aid or pro forma and an evaluative assessment and feedback tool. As such, they may promote tutor ease without reducing feedback quantity. The item specifications incorporate such skills as self-editing and reflection, collaborative editing, and ability to work independently on improvement of recurrent language errors or features of discourse belonging to a particular genre. The design and implementation stages of this study hypothesise that learners of Business Writing within an EAL Programme benefit from acquiring a range of self-analytic, self-reflective and self-corrective skills to enable them autonomously to draft and reformulate well structured, accurate and professional-looking business texts. Drawing on a range of literature, this paper describes the process of designing and implementing item specifications that prescribe and assess these skills. Next, it introduces main findings from the evaluative implementation stage, and offers rationale for ten criteria chosen for the item specifications.

Introduction

This paper describes the design of a curriculum, teaching and assessment aid for writing tutors of advanced learners that incorporates process writing, self-reflection and the need for increased autonomy. It focuses on a project to create a draft set of ten item specifications for a Business Writing paper, *Business Writing in International Contexts (BWIC)*. As course developer and tutor, I was aware of a range of considerations in drafting these item specifications that aid the learners, in terms of prescribing the generic texts and describing students' work, and the tutor in terms of reducing time spent in explaining tasks and in offering holistic feedback. As action researcher, I investigate issues impacting on the design stage from the literature, discuss the process of designing the item specifications and demonstrate the enhanced awareness of the students and the teaching benefits of such documents to curriculum designers and writing tutors. I also consider their increased insight into their own written interlanguage via the emphases on noticing and applying (at the micro level) and intertexts via drafting and editing (at the macro level).

Teachers of writing for specific purposes in an English as an Additional Language (EAL) context obviously need to fulfil a number of functions. They have to describe the characteristics of model generic texts and prescribe the linguistic and discursive symptoms of good writing for learners. Further, they need to accommodate student expectations to offer corrective and holistic feedback as part of the text-evolution and learning processes. These teaching functions operate within an institutional culture that defines target competencies at particular years in the educational

framework. In the case of degree courses, course content must comply with New Zealand Qualifications Authority-approved course descriptors. Any item specifications need to conform to both institution-level and national-level controls. *BWIC* operates at Level 6 of the NZQA framework. This corresponds to the second year of a Bachelor course.

Background

Between 2003 and 2005, the School of English and Applied Linguistics (SEAL) at Unitec New Zealand implemented a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in EAL. It attracts migrants and international students aiming to enhance their communicative and linguistic capital for a range of academic and vocational, instrumental and integrative reasons. *BWIC* was intended to be popular among those taking the B.A. and a Bachelor of Business (BBus.) conjointly as these learners are likely to be working in international business cultures in their futures. The paper's input includes materials building awareness of the cultural dimensions of written communications for business; for instance, the discourse structure of a business letter written in China exhibits structural and tonal differences to a New Zealand business letter. The action research project described in this paper takes place in the context of the development and initial delivery of *BWIC*, a paper taught over 14 weeks by two tutors with a total of 56 contact hours and the expectation of 56 hours of self access and collaborative learning beyond the classroom.

I developed the course outcomes inscribed in the institution's course outline used to gain national (NZQA) approval. These learning outcomes emphasise critical evaluation of texts, use of appropriate genre, demonstration of self-correction, proof-reading and editing skills, critical evaluation of peer work and accurate production of texts using target language. Portfolio and examination modes of assessment are specified with equal 50-50 weighting. The portfolio assessment structure developed appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Portfolio Assessment Schedule

Portfolios (50% of final mark)

Content: For each item of writing included in the portfolio, students are required to submit:

1. first draft of the task
2. rewrite of the task following peer review and evaluation
3. final copy incorporating self reflection and tutors' suggestions.

Week 8: Portfolio Part 1 (25%)

- (i) written evaluation of a business report
- (ii) covering memorandum
- (iii) real-life business letter.

Week 13: Portfolio Part 2 (25%)

- (i) political, legal or cultural business letter
- (ii) Powerpoint slides from mini-research
- (iii) three Blackboard discussion board contributions:
cross-cultural commentaries, reviews, critiques or evaluations.

Based around these factors, I developed an action research project aimed at creating and implementing (and later evaluating and recreating) a draft grid of ten marking criteria and grade descriptors. The research question is: "What items need to be specified in a working document designed to describe and assess the quality of business texts and the learning process in *BWIC*?" I

adopt Brown & Hudson's (2002) use of 'item specifications', bearing in mind the wider range of functions in the present context.

The aim was to create item specifications that function both as a *pro forma*, effectively a descriptive and prescriptive curriculum, and as marking criteria, allowing the tutor to offer descriptive and diagnostic feedback to the learners according to the ten targeted item specifications. Having *ten* specifications of course adds mathematical ease. The draft item specifications not only allow learners to understand the stylistic, generic, discursive and linguistic features of business writing, but also reduce marking time for tutors while still offering holistic feedback. Further, the marking criteria incorporate the process of writing. Marks are allocated for text improvements due to both individual and collaborative editing. A further marking criterion labelled *targeted language* allows each individual to target one specific weakness in their written construction or expression and to apply their learning in the process of producing the second and third drafts of their texts. The discussion section describes the rationale for selecting these ten items in more detail. Short descriptions of the selected item specifications appear in Figure 2 and the full grid appears as Appendix A.

In two portfolio instalments, students hand in six texts. They present their three drafts, the second evidencing self-editing and the third reflecting applied collaborative input. For each item, students write a reflective memorandum describing her or his perceived progress in the ten specified items during the production and reproduction of each prescribed task. The two tutors either mark collaboratively, or standardise their marking based on three co-marked tasks and grade individually, meeting again for a final check of contentious tasks. This calibration process standardises marking consistency and offsets subjectivity. For each of the six tasks, each item is individually graded using the item specifications. By indicating a particular grade for each item, the tutor simultaneously describes the learner's work and offers holistic feedback. Tutors can, of course, also write individual comments to students and operationalise follow-up face-to-face conferences.

Figure 2: Short Descriptions of Item Specifications for *BWIC*

| Item | Short Description of Specification |
|------------------------------|---|
| Content | <i>Rigour, research depth and selection of content</i> |
| Layout | <i>Professionalism of layout and application of format</i> |
| Text Type | <i>Evidence of understanding and applying linguistic features appropriate for the particular text type</i> |
| Discourse | <i>Evidence of understanding and applying appropriate structural and discursive features</i> |
| Lexis | <i>Accurate use of appropriate business vocabulary</i> |
| Grammar | <i>Effective use of well-selected grammatical items</i> |
| Syntax | <i>Accurate use of a range of appropriate sentence structures</i> |
| Targeted language | <i>Evidence of successful understanding and application of a specified aspect of language (a weakness as identified in collaboration with tutor and peers) using self access materials</i> |
| Collaborative editing | <i>Evidence of collaborative editing and response to a peer's proof-reading</i> |
| Self-critical enquiry | <i>Reflective evidence of individual editing, proof-reading and targeted language learning</i> |

The Study: Designing Item Specifications for Business Writing in International Contexts

Methodology

The design stage is the first part of this action research project. Action or classroom research, “the application of fact-finding to practical problem-solving in a social situation” (Burns, 2000, p. 443), provides the over-arching methodology. The activities involved in action research “have in common the identification of strategies of planned action which are implemented, and then systematically submitted to observation, reflection and change” (Kemmis & Grundy, 1981, cited in Burns, 2000, p. 443). This cyclical process is reflected in the design and implementation stages of this project, and applied during evaluation and improvement stages. Importantly for a project involving assessment, action research allows tutor-researchers to test intuitive experience-based motivations against empirical variables. Figure 3 itemises the stages of the study, the data collection methods and the methodologies employed.

Figure 3: Data collection and methodology over the four stages

| | Stage | Data Collection Methods | Methodology |
|---|----------------|--|--|
| 1 | Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Analyse marking criteria from five comparable writing papers •Investigate vital issues in designing appropriate item specifications •Needs analysis via focus group discussion with the tutors of the target learners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Action research using open coding and emergent themes •Literature review and application of insights •Location of emergent themes from transcript |
| 2 | Implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Elicit Initial memoranda from learners following piloting •Hold collaborative interview with co-tutor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Open coding and emergent themes •Transcription and discourse analysis |
| 3 | Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Solicit evaluative questionnaires from participants •Hold second collaborative interview with co-tutor •Triangulate with insights from designer-tutor’s reflective journal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Open coding and emergent themes •Transcription and discourse analysis •Open coding/ discourse analysis |
| 4 | Improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Rewrite, reformat and re-pilot revised item specifications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Applied action research |

Sources of the Design Stage

Models of *pro formas* provided by the Higher Education Academy's Student Enhanced Learning through Effective Feedback (SENLEF) research project in the United Kingdom (2005, online) are grids incorporating self-reflective and peer collaborative elements. These provide insights into layout, structure and pedagogical application. North (1996/7) has also developed writing descriptors for language testing, and Hyslop (1995) devised holistic analytic criteria for college business writing.

The design of the item specifications originated from three sources. Firstly, ongoing literature review established a range of issues needing consideration when designing item specifications. Secondly, open coded analysis of existing similar documents for current Level 5 writing courses demonstrated a need for Level 6 to focus on the assessment of applied skills, most notably self-corrective and peer collaborative editing skills, more targeted application of generic, syntactic and discursive patterns and more emphasis on lexicogrammatical forms (Andrew, 2004, pp. 124-6). Third, a needs analysis performed prior to the designing of the criteria developed a portrait of the likely Level 6 *BWIC* learner based on results of previous semester's courses, interviews with tutors of ongoing students, and data about newly enrolling students including Bachelor of Business majors and single semester Study Abroad students. In short, the predicted class included learners with variable written competence. All students had achieved IELTS 5 (or equivalent) in Writing (a slim majority had achieved 6) and all shared common instrumental motivation. This is a vital fact in maximising learner success in a writing programme (Myles, 2002, p. 11). This empirical data, in addition to the range of issues raised in the literature review, informed the processes of designing and implementing the item specifications.

Commentary and feedback on the selection and wording of the ten key criteria were elicited from seven EAL tutors comprising the SEAL B.A. development team and minor changes were made. Next, draft descriptions of performance within each criterion were written, using the 'A', 'B', 'C' scale to incorporate insights advanced by Brown and Hudson (2002, Chapter 3) in producing 'specification-driven' items. The process follows Cushing-Weigle (2002) who argues that scale descriptors should be written intuitively "by defining in advance the ability being measured". The next stage sets "levels of attainment, from none to complete mastery" (p. 125).

In addition to Brown and Hudson (2002), Liu and Hansen (2002) and Cushing-Weigle (2002), two other studies provide insights into developing item specifications grids: Gunn (1995) and Bailey (1998). First, Gunn's (1995) study of devising, implementing and evaluating a set of assessment procedures for adult immigrant learners of English within the Australian Migrant Education Programme (AMEP) concludes that items specifications need above all to be clear. Gunn emphasises that criterion-based assessments can track/record learners' language development systematically (p. 263). They can also have a focussing effect on the curriculum, yielding interpretable measurements of 'teachable' performance standards, countering marker subjectivity and reducing confusion (p. 263). Second, Bailey (1998) describes the devising of weighted analytic scoring criteria for an Upper Intermediate writing course. The team composed a one-page grid with the aim of using the grid to ensure marker standardisation and to "promote positive washback" and allowed the students to see areas of progress throughout the term (p. 191). The *BWIC* grid is intended to contain and reflect these advantages, as well as being a curricular *pro forma* for learners.

Further Literature Review for the Design Stage

Below, in identifying three issues impacting on assessing business writing, I discuss a range of literature informing the study, and identify controversies which need consideration when designing and implementing marking criteria. Identifying assessment issues, I summarise the controversial dichotomies informing scale construction, consider the place of focus on form and error correction and argue for the incorporation of criteria for the assessment of reflective learning.

Assessment Issues: Reconciling Three Dualities

Literature on assessing writing (Brown & Hudson, 2002; Cho, 2003; Cumming, 1990, 1998; Cushing-Weigle, 2002; Fulcher, 1997; Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Hyland, 2002; Kroll, 1998; Pollitt & Murray, 1993/6) offers insights into types of norm and criterion-referenced scales used in marking, largely focussing attention on three dichotomies: the intuitive versus empirical duality informing scale construction, the relative appropriateness of analytic scales and user-constructed scales and, of course, the stress between assessing *product* and *process*.

As for the first of these, the *draft* marking criteria for *BWIC* were intuitively constructed but founded on empirically-based needs analyses. Further, they are subject to further empirical scrutiny by the target users in the evaluation stage for future ongoing revision. As for the second, Cushing-Weigle (2002) comments on the appropriateness of analytic scales for L2 writers as “different aspects of writing ability develop at different rates” (p.121). The *BWIC* scales are, hence, analytical and criterion-based. Cushing-Weigle (p.122), further, differentiates between ‘constructor oriented scales’ (task-specific, as in any SENLEF or NZQA scale), ‘assessor-constructed scales’ (created for ease of marking) and ‘user-oriented scales’ that help the users to interpret their scores. In developing the *BWIC* grid, it was necessary to integrate analytic user-constructed and assessor-constructed scales in order to create a document that could function both as *pro forma* and assessment and feedback tool. As for the third duality, *product* versus *process*, *BWIC*’s measurement of learning across the item specifications requires definite focus on processes (drafting, editing, proof-reading, evaluating, reformulating, responding, reflecting) to foreground writing problems as well as language problems (Gabrieletos, 2002) and to for students to demonstrate and assess evidence in improvement. These are assessed via the criteria *targeted language*, *collaborative editing* and *self-critical enquiry*.

Assessment Issues: Incorporating Focus on Form

In producing scale descriptors for *BWIC* and considering the institutional context and the end users of the grid, issues around the viability and necessity of peer and tutor interventions in micro- and macro-level feedback and error correction were considered.

First, we considered the debates around the relative weighting of criteria focussing on grammatical/ lexicomorphological accuracy in the *product* and applying error correction strategies in the *process* (James, 1998; Ferris, 1999, 2002, 2003; Grey, 2004, *et al.*). Myles (2002) sums up the problem articulated by many researchers (Truscott, 1996; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Lee, 1997; Hyland, 1998; Loewen, 1998, *et al.*) involved in the debate around the usefulness of corrective form-focussed feedback on writing: “if students have not developed learning strategies to monitor their writing errors, and if they do not receive enough

conceptual feedback at the discourse level, then the positive effects of the instruction may backfire” (p. 11). Our brief was to assess text types and to focus on discourse-level issues. However, needs analyses suggested that the target learners required lexicomorphological input *as well as* a focus on the error at word, sentence and discourse levels. To bridge the gap, we decided on three tutor interventions: tutors would lead class sessions focussing on text reformulation and editing weekly in order to focus attention on the editing process as well as particular cases of focus on form and to train the learners as peer collaborators. Tutors would also hold one-on-one conferences with each learner in class time based on one item (three drafts) in the learner’s portfolio to offer specific feedback that can be applied to remaining texts in the portfolio. Third, there are optional conferences when the portfolios are returned. The level of success of these interventions is the subject of ongoing research.

For the reasons outlined above, we refocused our consideration on the value of form-focussed peer correcting (Swain, 2000; Riddiford, 2004) and more holistically-focussed peer editing (Falchiov, 2001; Liu & Hansen, 2002). Both are incorporated in our item specifications subsumed under *collaborative editing*.

Focus on form, however, is an unavoidable consideration (Myers, 1997). The studies of Cohen (1989), Swain (2000), Qi and Lapkin (2001), Lapkin and Swain (2002) and others into collaborative dialogue and reformulation inform assessment of the drafting and editing processes, and strategies for integrating peer editing into curricula have been detailed by Liu and Hansen (2002). Importantly, the cross-curricular imperative of business writing foregrounds focus on form: “Sloppy or poorly-worded correspondence is usually detrimental to business relations, even if the ideas are clear” (South, 1998, online). The *BWIC* criteria acknowledge the need for accuracy with its conventional descriptors for *grammar*, *lexis* and *discourse*.

Assessment Issues: Reflective Learning

Thirdly, the need to focus learners on the process of text construction over a series of drafts demanded the application of reflective practice methodology (Birch, 1997; Birch & Kemp, 1998; Hillocks, 1995; Scott, 2005). Students write reflective memoranda describing their process learning during the production of each of the 6 texts, over three drafts, to help tutors assess individuals’ self-reflective skills in the criterion *self-critical analysis*.

Processive and subject-specific writing such as that required in *BWIC* incorporates a form of reflection (Hillocks, 1994). ‘Reflection’, applied to student learning, refers to “the ability to be self aware, to analyse experiences, to evaluate their meaning and to plan further action based on analysis and reflection” (de la Harpe & Radloff, 2002, p. 1). Birch and Kemp (2000) maintain that academic literacy is developed when knowledge is applied beyond the classroom (as in peer- and self-editing and -reflecting) allowing learners to “operationalise ... components of communicative competence even when they are not yet fully developed” (p. 10). Promoting the skill of self-correction in EFL learners appears possible in translation contexts (Kouraogogo, 2002). As the following discussion makes clear, applied reflective thought is considered in the *criteria self-critical enquiry* and *collaborative editing*.

Discussion

In the light of the literature discussed above, I would like to offer rationales for the selection of these 10 item specifications. Next, I will discuss initial findings from the implementation

stage regarding the usefulness of the item specifications and the clarity of their design. The third part of this discussion discusses the benefits of designing (and applying) item specifications from the perspectives of learners and tutors.

Rationale for the Item Descriptors

Firstly, I wanted to ensure that students were reading, processing and applying a sufficient range of primary sources (such as authentic and model texts) and secondary materials (a wide selection of business writing textbooks and websites) with emphasis on global contexts. Learners encounter these in the classroom, in recommended texts and on *BWIC's* intranet Blackboard site. This comprehensible input translates into the first item specification, **content**, which is obviously an overarching criteria impacting on many others. Because of the business focus, it is important to measure the learner's ability to employ professionally word-processed formats, obey conventions of lineation and spacing, use white space effectively and produce a professional document. These skills focussing on the typographical professionalism of the printed text are measured as **layout**. **Text type** is *BWIC's* item specification for the learner's ability to apply the linguistic and conventional features of a particular genre effectively. The assessed genres are reports, memoranda, business letters, Powerpoint slides and critiques.

A genre-based item specification allows students to bring their knowledge of the purpose, structure, and grammatical characteristics of genres to the assessment (Paltridge, 2001). This, achieved pedagogically via text reformulation and deconstruction of model texts, enhances discourse level awareness of textual organisation (Alonso & McCabe, 2003), which in turn impacts on the composition process (Raines, 1991, 1998). It effectively participates in a process that Cumming (1995) calls 'cognitive modelling'. The use of genre accommodates two issues raised by Fulcher (1998): the facts that rhetorical structure and genre are culturally-conditioned and/or institutionalised, and that the texts are recognisable and classifiable from their communicative purpose. Further, the use of genre adds to learners' cultural capital in terms of its being a means of reaching a target discourse community, and is in itself motivating (Paltridge, 2001, p. 104). And it allows students to demonstrate their potential for future development (Paltridge, 2001, p. 114), a point that becomes especially important in the context of assessing the processes involved in drafting and redrafting text.

The next three criteria, **discourse**, **syntax** and **lexis** clearly correspond to accuracy and appropriacy at the levels of text and paragraph, sentence and word. *Discourse*, in this context and at this level, measures the learner's ability to construct a business text and signpost its thought processes in a logical, objective and reader-centred manner. It necessarily overlaps with text type and students need to be clear that text type focuses on generic features while discourse looks at logical and structural elements. Learners also need to be aware that discourse conventions belonging to a genre within their culture may not correspond with those of New Zealand contexts. At level 6, syntactic variety and accuracy is a major issue for learners and this is consolidated in other papers which learners may be taking as co-requisites. Clear, simple, accurate sentences minimising relative clauses are expected of *BWIC* students. Lexically, *BWIC* learners are taught to avoid jargon, archaisms, indirectness, euphemisms, verbosity and overuse of abstractions and nominalisations. We ask them to focus specifically on lexical form, connotation and

tone and to ensure succinct verbs are selected. This process of revisiting target lexis aids language acquisition and encourages meaning negotiation (Flower, 1994).

The item **grammar** is deliberately wide-ranging, although issues of word form (e.g. a noun used where a verb is needed) are more appropriately covered by *lexis*. Issues of tense and word ending are construed as grammatical. This criterion embodies accuracy, a vital component of professional writing in a course designed to prepare learners for future professional and workplace contexts. Students with a high expectation for corrective feedback capitalise on the item **targeted language**. This flexible criterion is designed for students to use self-access materials to target a diagnosed or particular linguistic need. A student consistently making incorrect lexical choices in dependent prepositions, for instance, locates self-help materials and applies them when self-editing. This can also be used for recurrent grammatical errors, inappropriate use of discourse markers or lack of syntactic variety. It can also be used to focus attention on learning specific to business genres, such as the accurate use of bullet points. This is useful for ensuring that more grammatically and lexically advanced students are given a challenge while those needing form-focussed input target their own learning needs autonomously. There is also need to transfer responsibility for rectifying error to learners as peers and self-analytical individuals. For this reason, and because integrating new grammatical learning follows the pattern of noticing, comparing and remediation to promote language acquisition (Ellis, 1997; James, 1998; Cross, 2002), *targeted language* is a viable item for assessment. Assessing it depends on its manifestations in the three drafts, and the students' reflections on their learning in the accompanying reflective memorandum.

This memorandum, itself unassessed, provides learner self-reports on **collaborative editing** and **self-critical enquiry**, the final of the 10 item specifications. The first of these is fundamental to the outcomes of BWIC's institutional course descriptors. An increasingly substantial amount of literature indicates the necessity of skills developed during peer editing for future professional contexts and for lifelong autonomous learning. Berg's (1999) experimental research, for instance, supports the inclusion of item specifications for collaborative editing. She suggests that appropriate and targeted peer editing training not only effects meaning-related revision but also, at a more global level, better quality of writing. Liu and Hansen (2002) advance this approach in a book-length study accommodating issues of learner styles and group/ pair dynamics. There is also support for our item specification for *self-critical enquiry*. Cram (1995), for example, asserts: "training in self-assessment helps learners to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and to accept greater responsibility for assessment decisions" (p. 300).

These skills require considerable in-class practice in order to focus learners on the non-grammatical (as well as the grammatical) aspects of their peers' intertexts. It also requires tutor responses. Hyland's (1998) ethnographic study into the lasting value added by teacher feedback in the text revision process informs the need for collaborative editing to include tutor suggestions. This implies that teachers can help learners generate both their own sources of feedback and strategies for self-revision. Empowering learners to comment on others' use of generic conventions, discourse structure, syntactic and lexical choices and achievement of tone represents a substantial learning investment. It offers a major contribution to the autonomous evaluation and construction of business texts. This is also true for self-editing, which, together to reflect on the learning achieved through the processes of drafting and collaboration, makes up *self-critical enquiry*.

Teacher and Learner Response to the Draft Item Specifications

During the implementation stage, the item specifications were used to introduce and assess a formative task. On receiving their assessed task back together with annotated item specifications, 16 learners (mixed nationalities and ages; even division of genders, and of international students and permanent residents) wrote a non-assessed practice memorandum. The memorandum task aimed to elicit learners' understanding of the specifications and gauge opinions of the fairness of the item specifications as an assessment tool and their ability to offer diagnostic and holistic feedback. In addition, the co-tutor was interviewed in order to discuss implementation issues and learner (and tutor) problems with using the grid. I supply a brief advance summary of the findings here.

The most recurrent comment (ten responses) indicates the usefulness of the diagnostic role of the grid in terms of providing curriculum-specific feedback and pinpointing aspects of text production requiring self-study. This directly supports Bailey (1998). One student generalises: *"Without the grid's clear feedback, it would get difficult to develop my business writing"*, while another, clearly concerned mainly with accuracy, offers: *"I can find out what are my weaknesses, things that I need to improve, what I have done good, how to improve more, how to correct my errors and mistakes"*. The diagnostic use of the grade specifications is noted: *"It tells me what is the level of my writings"*. Seven learners indicate that the grid provides a useful foundation for the basis of developing confidence in producing business texts of various genre, as with the learner who comments that she can now write *"letters like the model letters"*. Other typical comments indicate the ease with which the grid directs performance according to specifications: *"It is very good for us to be able to see what we are expected to do for different grades"*.

Two other emergent themes are relevant: the grid's clarity (Gunn, 1995); and its potential to promote positive washback (Bailey, 1998) and autonomy. The clarity of the grid as a diagnostic tool is the subject of seven comments. A representative sentiment is that *"you can easily see what you are good at and what you need to improve"* by studying the grid. The grid's role in focussing the students on self-editing and self-reflection emerges in five comments: *"One thing I want to emphasise is I am not over rely on tutors now ... I am noticing all my weaknesses, especially on self-critical enquiry"*. Several students appreciate learning via process: *"I need to pay attention to the stages of writing step-by-step and not concentrate on just finish the writing"*, and one notes the value of reflection: *"Reflection helps me to see where I have gone wrong and what I need to work on next time and also in my future job"*. Similarly, the use of targeted language is well reviewed: *"I can recognise my comma splices and worked on it"*.

Less well reviewed is collaborative editing, largely due to the fact that the class contained some learners, and hence collaborators, whose level of language awareness was below the class norm: *"If no responses from group members, how can I learn from each other?"*; *"my teacher is the best collaborator for me"*. Falchikov (2001) indicates in her study of peer tutoring that the educational benefits of peer tutoring depend on the degree to which tutees are 'real' peers. The tutor's insight is valuable here:

Collaborative editing is essential for students on this course (and at this level) to start learning and putting into practice peer editing and proofreading skills in relation to future study and work needs. The majority of students are from a teacher-centred, non-

communicative learning environment and need as much exposure as possible to development of autonomous learning skills, especially if they plan to continue their studies and/or work in NZ.

The tutor evaluates the item specifications positively overall, and specifically for their use of *layout* and *text-type*, their evaluation of *content*, *grammar*, *lexis* and *syntax*, and for their detail and ability to promote positive washback: “*A detailed marking criterion enables teachers to check a wider range of descriptors than would otherwise be referred to in individual error correction, especially for portfolios and exams*”. She indicates some confusion among learners about *discourse*, particularly its border with *text-type*, makes suggestions for clarifying the wording of performance descriptions, notices general improvements in learner’s self-critical and reflective skills and comments positively on the learning potential of *targeted language*. The major obstacle, even at an advanced level, is student’s difficulty in seeing past *grammar*, both their own and that of others, and into other components of business text production. In terms of implementation for the tutors, their value in promoting standardisation and time-saving are noted, although tutors need to get adjusted to them.

Benefits of Item Specification Grids for Teaching and Learning

The item specification grid itemised in Figure 4 offers potential benefits to both teaching and learning. In particular, it acts as a curriculum aid in defining ten key facets of the business writing product and/or process. It incorporates a clear focus on aspects of the process of writing while maintaining awareness that in business texts and in a computer-moderated text production environment *layout* within culturally-specific genres is significant. This is enhanced by its emphasis on *peer editing*, *self-critical analysis* and reflection, highlighting the importance of these skills for autonomy and future study and professional work. The grid is helpful in defining the focus for learners engaged in *collaborative editing* and *self-critical analysis*, although the development of these skills needs a range of tutor interventions. Its provision of the item *targeted language* recognises that learners have different grammatical, structural and formal needs and gives each learner a chance to notice, compare and integrate their targeted learning into their final draft and reintegrate it into their subsequent portfolio item. As such it serves as a catalyst in the process of learning.

Its benefits to instruction, assessment and giving holistic feedback are also evident, although this is the subject of ongoing further evaluative study and the wording of the descriptors is far from perfect. However, such item specifications can function as a fair and extensive set of marking criteria and grade descriptors, provided markers engage in a calibration process. Done well, they can aid in the process of co-marker standardisation and reduce post-event moderation issues. They also have the capacity to provide diagnostic, descriptive and curriculum-specific feedback to learners. They may serve as the basis for face-to-face learner conferencing and the diagnosis of future targeted language. They can also reduce marking and processing time by providing sufficient holistic feedback.

In terms of being user-constructed *pro formas*, the specifications focus learners on appropriate aspects of learning for entry into a business-focussed discourse community. For instance, they direct learners to recognise the lexical, syntactic and discursive features of selected business text types and apply them to their own texts; to critically and

holistically evaluate ones own and others' work and to compare their own and others' texts to authentic texts of the same genre and recognise opportunities for making them more effective. These skills are valid foci for measurement of achievement as well as being important prescribed learning outcomes.

Conclusions

Devising analytic, criterion-based item specifications that are assessor-constructed yet user-oriented for advanced specific-purpose writing courses represents an investment for the course designer/tutor. The process requires design team corroboration, a window during the first weeks of instruction for piloting, and tutor standardisation meetings.

Any item specification document serves to prescribe and itemise categories in which learners are expected to make progress in line with institutional and national course documentation. In addition to serving as a curricular aid, it is also invaluable as an assessment tool. Although its major considerable advantage lies in valuing tutor time, it may also provide sufficient holistic feedback for students to acquire target language. A question for further study, of course, is whether such feedback is to any extent a substitute for or a reasonable complement to individualised written and/or oral feedback. I would also like to measure the amount and type of washback that the use of such item specifications can achieve.

The emphasis on process written into the item specifications appears to lead to an appropriate shift in responsibility for corrective and editorial feedback from the tutor to the peer and the individual. This effectively builds autonomy, fosters learner independence and builds skills for use in future discourse communities of practice. My study so far indicates that substantial tutor intervention and conferencing is needed to activate collaborative editing skills and to a lesser extent reflective self-critical skills. This intervention takes the form of in-class reformulation and text evaluation tasks in addition to a short face-to-face conference focussing on one item in a writing portfolio. This is effective in the week prior to the deadline. Conferencing diagnoses patterns in grammatical and syntactic error and also offers insights into text patterning and evidence of applied learning of business format, typographical layout, generic text type and logical structure at the discourse level.

What emerges from the evaluation stage and is also supported by considerable research is that learners of business writing within a programme such as the B.A. (EAL) benefit from acquiring a range of self-analytic, self-reflective and self-corrective skills to enable them autonomously to draft and reformulate well structured, accurate and professional-looking business texts. Whether the item specifications participate in a process by which specific aspects of language acquisition occurs is a further subject for future empirical study. Clearly, a great deal of empirically-based research can be done to corroborate these claims. The evaluation and recreation stages of the project aim to rarefy the specifications so that they to incorporate a better idea of the texts that the target students are composing.

The ten item specifications selected and described here, particularly *targeted language*, *self-critical enquiry*, the discourse level descriptors (*discourse*, *text-type*, *layout*) and the conventional item specifications (*content*, *grammar*, *lexis*, *syntax*) suit the context of *BWIC* and aid its students and tutors although clearer wording may help differentiation. In the eyes of many learners only, collaborative editing is problematic and needs tutor intervention at the

pedagogical level and conferencing at the drafting stage. The item specifications for *BWIC* incorporate and reflect recent research, but also suggest a range of studies and improvements for the future.

References

- Alonso, I. & McCabe, A. (2003). Improving Text Flow in ESL Learner Compositions. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 9 (2). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/> on June 10 2005.
- Andrew, M. (2004). Assessing Processive Business Writing: Criteria for Self-Analysis and Reflection. In Wallace, D. (Ed.). *Writing for a Change. Proceedings 6th Biennial Tertiary Writing Colloquium Victoria University Wellington*, 2-3 December 2004 (pp. 117-42). Wellington: Tertiary Writing Network.
- Bachman, L.F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bailey, K.M. (1998). *Learning about Language Assessment*. Pacific Grove: Heinle and Heinle.
- Berg, E.C. (1999). The effects of trained peer response on ESL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(3), 215-37.
- Birch, G. (1998). The Reflective Practice Method. *QATESOL Newsletter*, 2, 6-13.
- Birch, G. & Kemp, E. (1999). The reflective practice method in action: Task-based autonomy in a university ELICOS centre. *EA Journal*, 17 (2), 8-20.
- Brown, J.D. & Hudson, T. (2002). *Criterion-referenced Language Testing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burns, R. B. (2000). *Introduction to Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications,
- Cho, Y. (2003). Assessing writing: Are we bound by only one method? *Assessing Writing* 8 (3), 165-192.
- Cohen, A. D. (1989). Reformulation: A technique for providing advanced feedback in writing. *Guidelines*, 11 (2), 1-9.
- Cram, B. (1995). Self-assessment: from theory to practice. Developing a workshop guide for teachers. In G. Brindley, (Ed.), *Language Assessment in Action*. (pp. 271-305). Macquarie University: NCELTR.
- Cross, J. (2002). 'Noticing' in SLA: Is it a valid concept? *TESL-EJ*, 6 (3), 1-9.
- Cumming, A. (1990). Expertise in Evaluating Second Language Compositions. *Language Testing* 7(1), 31 - 51.

- Cumming, A. (1995). Fostering writing expertise in ESL composition instruction: Modeling and evaluation. In D. Belcher & G. Braine (Eds.), *Academic Writing in a second language* (pp. 375-397). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Company.
- Cumming, A. (1998). The Testing of Writing in a Second Language. In C.M. Clapham, and D. Corson (Eds.) *Language Testing and Assessment. Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, Vol. 7. (pp. 51-63). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Cushing-Weigle, S. (2002). *Assessing Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- de la Harpe, B., & Radloff, A. (2002). Do first year students reflect on their learning? Why they should and how they can. (Online). Retrieved September 1, 2004. Paper presented at the HERDSA, Melbourne. <http://www2.auckland.ac.nz/cpd/HERDSA/HTML/TchLearn/delaHarpe.HTM>
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *SLA Research and Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP.
- Falchikov, N. (2001). *Learning Together: Peer Tutoring in Higher Education*. London: Routledge
- Ferris, D. R. (1999). The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: a response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Writing* 8(1), 1-11.
- Ferris, D. R. (2002). *Treatment of error in second language student writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Ferris, D.R. (2003). *Response to Student Writing: Implications for second language students*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Flower, L. (1994). *The construction of negotiated meaning: a social cognitive theory of writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Fulcher, G. (2002). Assessing Writing in: G. Fulcher (Ed.) *Writing in the English Language Curriculum*. Hertfordshire: Prentice-Hall Europe ELT.
- Fulcher, G. (2003). *Testing Second Language Speaking*. London: Longman/Pearson Education.
- Gabrieletos, C. (2002). EFL Writing: Product and Process. Karen's Linguistics, May. Retrieved from <http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/eflwriting.html> on November 20 2004.
- Grey, R. (2004). Grammar Correction in ESL/EFL Writing Classes May Not Be Effective. Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Gray-WritingCorrection.html> on November 20 2004.

- Gunn, M. (1995). Criterion-based assessment: a classroom teacher's perspective. In Brindley, G. (ed.), *Language Assessment in Action* (pp. 239-70). Macquarie University: NCELTR.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (1991). *Assessing Second Language Writing in Academic Contexts*. Ablex: Norwood, NJ.
- Hedgcock, J. and Lefkowitz, N. (1994). Feedback on feedback: Assessing learner receptivity to teacher response in L2 composing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 3(2), 141-163.
- Higher Education Academy (2005). SENLEF case studies by feedback category. Retrieved from <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/1344.htm> on June 7 2005.
- Hyland, F. (1998). The impact of teacher written feedback on individual writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7 (2), 255-86.
- Hyland, K. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Writing*. London: Longman.
- Hyslop, N. (1996). "Using Grading Guides to Shape and Evaluate Business Writing", Eric Digest. Retrieved from http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed399562.html on 30 August 2004.
- Kouraogogo, P. (2002). Helping advanced EFL learners improve their written English through self-correction tasks. In M. Bax (Ed.). *Reflections on Language and Language Learning. In honour of Arthur van Essen* (pp. 359-373). Philadelphia, PA, USA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kroll, B. (1998) Assessing Writing Abilities. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 219-240.
- Lee, I. (1997). ESL learners' performance in error correction in writing: Some implications for teaching. *System* 25 (4), 465-477.
- Loewen, S. (1998). Grammar Correction in ESL students writing: How effective is it? Retrieved from <http://www.temple.edu/gradmag/fall98/loewen> on November 10 2004.
- Liu, J. & Hensen J. G. (2002). *Peer Response in Second Language Writing Classrooms*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Myles, J. (2002). Second Language Writing and Research: The Writing Process and Error Analysis in Student Texts. *TESL-EJ*, 6 (2), 1-20.
- Myers, S. (1997) Teaching Writing as a Process and Teaching Sentence-Level Syntax: Reformulation as ESL Composition Feedback. *TESL-EJ*: 2 (4). Retrieved from <http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/tesl-ej/ej08/a2.html> on August 8 2004.
- North, B. (1996/7). Language Proficiency Descriptors. Retrieved from http://www.romsem.unibas.ch/sprachenkonzept/Annexe_3.html on June 4 2005.

- Paltridge, B. (2001). *Genre and the Language Learning Classroom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Pollitt, A. and Murray, N.L. (1993/1996). What raters really pay attention to. Paper presented at the 15th Language Testing Research Colloquium, Cambridge and Arnhem, 2-4 August 1993. In M. Milanovic and N. Saville (Eds.), *Performance testing, cognition and assessment* (pp. 74-91). Cambridge: University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.
- Qi, D. S., & Lapkin, S. (2001). Exploring the role of noticing in a three-stage second language writing task. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 277-303.
- Raimes, A. (1991). Out of the woods: Traditions in the teaching of writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, 407-430.
- Raimes, A. (1998). Teaching writing. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 142-167.
- Riddiford, N. (2004). Collaborative Error Correction – Does it Add Value?. In Wallace, D. (Ed.). *Writing for a Change. Proceedings 6th Biennial Tertiary Writing Colloquium Victoria University Wellington*, 2-3 December 2004 (pp. 151-5). Wellington: TWN.
- Scott, T. (2005). Creating the Subject of Portfolios: Reflective Writing and the conveyance of Institutional Prerogatives. *Written Communication*, 22 (1), 3-39.
- South, C. (1998). The Language Teacher The Writing Teacher's Friend: An Editing Checklist for Students. Retrieved from: <http://www.jaltpublications.org/tlt/files/98/mar/south.html> on August 8 2004.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques & Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Swain, M. (2000). The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue.' In J.P. Lantouf (Ed.), *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (2001). Focus on form through collaborative dialogue: Exploring task effects. In M. Bygate, P. Skehan & M. Swain (Eds.), *Researching pedagogic tasks: Second language learning, teaching and assessment*. London: Pearson Education.

Appendix A: Business Writing in International Contexts: Draft Item Specifications

| Short Description of Criterion | Criteria | A | B | C | D | E |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| Content | <i>Rigour, research depth and selection of content</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content is precise, accurate, well-selected, well-researched, original, appropriately referenced Length is as specified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content is mostly precise, accurate, well-selected, well-researched, original, and for the most part appropriately referenced Length is near that specified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content is sufficiently precise, accurate, satisfactorily-selected and -researched, original, and appropriately referenced, although there may be some gaps Length is fairly near that specified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content lacks precision, accuracy, appears unsatisfactorily-selected and -researched, possibly not entirely original, and inappropriately or partially referenced, with some gaps Length exceeds or shortfalls that specified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content is imprecise, inaccurate, poorly-selected and under-researched, appears unoriginal, inappropriately referenced or unreferenced Length is unsuitable |
| Layout | <i>Professionalism of Layout and Application of format</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is accurately word-processed, effectively laid out with excellent use of typographical features and spacing Effective, appropriate format selected and applied | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word-processing of item is mostly accurate and largely effective, with good use of typographical features and mostly effective spacing Selected format is well applied, although there may be room for minor improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accuracy of word-processing is satisfactory and fairly effective, with adequate use of typographical features and satisfactory spacing Selected format is fairly well applied, although there may be room for a number of minor or even major improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is occasionally imprecise in its word-processing with evidence of hurried or sloppy formatting layout May be ineffective with incomplete use of a suitable range of typographical features, Spacing detracts from effectiveness of item Partially effective, or partly inappropriate format selected and applied | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is imprecisely or sloppily word-processed, ineffectively laid out with inadequate use of typographical features and poor spacing Ineffective, or inappropriate format selected and applied |
| Text Type | <i>Evidence of understanding and applying linguistic features appropriate for the particular text type</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structural, stylistic and linguistic features of the item's text type are fully evident and effectively applied Completely original version of model texts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structural, stylistic and linguistic features of the item's text type are mostly evident and effectively applied Largely original version of model texts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structural, stylistic and linguistic features of the item's text type are satisfactorily evident and applied May show too much dependence on model texts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structural, stylistic and linguistic features of the item's text type are partially evident and applied with some degree of effectiveness, The attempt to duplicate the text type is derivative or unrealised | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structural, stylistic and linguistic features of the item's text type are not evident and have not been effectively applied May be totally derivative or demonstrably plagiarised |
| Discourse | <i>Evidence of understanding and applying appropriate structural and discursive features</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is marked by a high level of evident understanding of appropriate discourse features Cohesion and coherence are clear, and discourse markers well-chosen and used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is marked by a good level of evident understanding of appropriate discourse features Cohesion and coherence are largely clear, and discourse markers mostly well-chosen and used, although application may be improved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is marked by a satisfactory level of evident understanding of appropriate discourse features Cohesion and coherence are partially clear, although discourse markers need to be better chosen and used, and application may certainly be improved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is marked by an unsatisfactory level of evident understanding of discourse features Cohesion and coherence require remedial work, and discourse markers need to be more carefully chosen and more appropriately used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item is marked by a poor level of evident understanding of discourse features Cohesion and coherence are faulty, and discourse markers inappropriately chosen and used |

| Short Description of Criterion | Criteria | A | B | C | D | E |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| Lexis | <i>Accurate use of appropriate business vocabulary</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocabulary characteristic of the text type and subject is precise, well-chosen and accurate Word forms are accurate Excellent range of lexis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocabulary characteristic of the text type and subject is, on the whole, precise, mostly well-chosen and accurate, although minor errors may occur Word forms are mostly accurate Good range of lexis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocabulary characteristic of the text type and subject is satisfactorily precise, chosen with some care and presented with some attention to accuracy Minor lexical errors, such as in word form and collocation may occur and some remedial work may be needed Attempt to use a satisfactory range of lexis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocabulary used is partially uncharacteristic of the text type and subject and/or may be partly imprecise, appear too general rather than business-like and/or inaccurate Word forms contain an unsatisfactory number of inaccuracies Limited range of lexis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocabulary used is uncharacteristic of the text type and subject and/or may be imprecise, overly general and/or inaccurate Word forms contain frequent inaccuracies Inadequate range of lexis |
| Syntax | <i>Accurate use of a range of appropriate sentence structures</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An excellent range of complex, compound and simple sentences is used effectively and accurately | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An good range of complex, compound and simple sentences is used with a good degree of effectiveness and accuracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A fair range of complex, compound and simple sentences is used with a satisfactory degree of effectiveness and accuracy Minor remedial self-study is helpful | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A limited range of complex, compound and simple sentences are used with a less than satisfactory degree of effectiveness and accuracy Remedial work in sentence structure and form is recommended | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A poor range of complex, compound and simple sentences is used with a less than satisfactory degree of effectiveness and accuracy Remedial work in sentence structure and form is required |
| Grammar | <i>Effective use of well-selected grammatical items</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate grammatical structures are clearly evident and accurately applied An excellent range of appropriate grammatical structures is competently used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate grammatical structures are evident for the most part and applied with a high degree of accuracy An good range of appropriate grammatical structures is competently used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate grammatical structures are evident to a satisfactory extent and applied with a satisfactory degree of accuracy An fair range of appropriate grammatical structures is used, with satisfactory competence Minor remedial self-study is helpful | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate grammatical structures are not satisfactorily evident and/or are applied with an satisfactory degree of accuracy and work may be careless An inadequate range of grammatical structures is used Accuracy may be faulty Grammatical competence may be questionable Remedial self-study is recommended | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no evidence of appropriate grammatical structures Some grammatical structures are inaccurately applied An extremely limited range of appropriate grammatical structures is used Remedial work in grammatical form is required |

| Short Description of Criterion | Criteria | A | B | C | D | E |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|---|
| Targeted language | <i>Evidence of successful understanding and application of a specified aspect of language using self access materials</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specified aspect of language appears fully understood and is applied accurately and appropriately in the writing Clear evidence of own learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specified aspect of language appears improved and is applied with some accuracy and appropriacy in the writing Evidence of own learning Minor lapses in language target may be evident | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specified aspect of language appears mostly understood and is applied with a satisfactory degree of accuracy although appropriacy may be occasionally doubtful Some evidence of own learning, but also evidence of the need for further self-study on specified language item Lapses in language target may be noticeable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspect of language may not be sufficiently specific or Appears understood only partially and applied with an unsatisfactory degree of accuracy Appropriacy is doubtful Limited evidence of self access and own learning Evidence of considerable need for remedial self-study on specified language item | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspect of learning is not specified or Specified aspect of language appears misunderstood and is misapplied Lacks accuracy and appropriacy Disputable evidence of self access and own learning Remedial work urgently required |
| Collaborative editing | <i>Evidence of collaborative peer editing and proof-reading</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item contains convincing evidence of collaborative peer editing and proof-reading First draft, rewrite and final copy are included, and original | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item contains evidence of collaborative peer editing and proof-reading First draft, rewrite and final copy are included, but some aspects may be incompletely realised | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item contains satisfactory evidence of collaborative peer editing and proof-reading First draft, rewrite and final copy are mostly complete, and are satisfactorily original, although evidence of collaborators' help might be noticeable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item does not contain fully convincing evidence of any one or more of the following: collaborative peer editing, proof-reading Any of: first draft, rewrite or final copy may be incomplete Work may appear unoriginal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item does not contain convincing evidence of completely collaborative peer editing and/ or proof-reading First draft, rewrite and final copy are not all included, Work unoriginal or generic |
| Self-critical enquiry | <i>Evidence of individual editing, proof-reading and targeted learning</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item demonstrates full attempt to apply editing and proof-reading skills Clear evidence of individual work and learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item demonstrates a good attempt to apply editing and proof-reading skills Evidence of good individual work and learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item demonstrates a satisfactory attempt to apply editing and proof-reading skills Evidence of satisfactory individual work and learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item evidences little attempt to apply editing and proof-reading skills Evidence of satisfactory individual work and learning is lacking Work may appear unoriginal and may not reflect the individual's work sufficiently | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final item evidences no attempt to apply editing and proof-reading skills No evidence of individual work and learning is Work is unoriginal and does not reflect the individual's work |

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND THE TEACHING OF PROCESS WRITING: THE SCAFFOLDING OF LEARNING IN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Roger Barnard and Lucy Campbell
Department of General & Applied Linguistics
University of Waikato

Abstract

This paper considers how independent and interdependent learning can be fostered through a process approach to the teaching of writing. It does so by presenting the theoretical rationale which underlies a university academic skills programme. Drawing on reports of this programme which have been published elsewhere (e.g., Brine & Campbell, 2002), it is a case study illustrating how scaffolding can be effected by teachers and students. The paper begins by briefly reviewing three central concepts of sociocultural theory: the zone of proximal development, scaffolding, and appropriation. Attention is then turned to a consideration of writing as a collaborative process rather than as a product of solitary endeavour. Details are provided about a university course which applies sociocultural concepts to the adoption of a process approach to EAP writing. Attention is then given to the ways by which six principles of scaffolding (Van Lier, 1996) are applied throughout the course. Firstly, various forms of tutor scaffolding are outlined, and then a short sample of transcript data illustrates how students on this course can work collaboratively to co-construct texts and scaffold each other's learning. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the broader pedagogical implications of sociocultural theory to the teaching of writing.

Key constructs in Sociocultural Theory

Most theories of, and research studies investigating, second language acquisition and learning are based on cognitive processes, usually in experimental conditions, and do not take the broader social context into account. By contrast, a sociocultural perspective, based on the pioneering work of L.S. Vygotsky (1896-1934), places the social context at the heart of the learning and communication process. Vygotsky posited that human learning cannot be understood independently from the social and cultural forces that influence individuals, and that sociocultural interactions are critical to learning. Individuals use physical, cultural and psychological tools to learn and to regulate their activity, and language - in Vygotsky's view, is the most important of these tools. Conceptual and cultural learning occurs through dialogue in what he called a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD):

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Thus, learning is not merely conveyed, but mutually created by the participants in a structured dialogue in which the more capable partner promotes the learning of the less able by building,

and progressively dismantling, a scaffold within which the learner is enabled to progress from present to a higher level of ability. The ultimate aim is autonomy; as Vygotsky put it (1978, p. 87), what the learner can do today only with assistance, she will do independently tomorrow. He himself did not use the term, scaffolding – it originated in an article by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) and has since been very widely applied to the assistance needed in a ZPD. With specific regard to language learning, Leo Van Lier (1996) has formulated six principles of scaffolding:

- *Contextual support* - a safe but challenging environment: errors are expected and accepted as part of the learning process
- *Continuity* - repeated occurrences over time of a complex of actions, keeping a balance between routine and variation
- *Intersubjectivity* - mutual engagement and support: two minds thinking as one
- *Flow* – communication between participants is not forced, but flow in a natural way
- *Contingency* – the scaffolded assistance depends on learners' reactions: elements can be added, changed, deleted, repeated, etc
- *Handover* – the ZPD closes when learner is ready to undertake similar tasks without help (Van Lier, 1996, p. 196).

With effective scaffolding, understanding is co-constructed during the verbal dialogue of the ZPD. *Learning*, however, only occurs when this understanding is appropriated (Bakhtin, 1981) by the individual - when the meaning and use of the concept shifts from the external (social) plane to the internal (personal) plane. The individual processes that meaning by referring to his/her own underlying frame of reference. The conduit for this process of internalisation is usually referred to as private speech, which may occasionally be audible as the individual vocalises his or her mental processing. Once the concept is appropriated, it becomes the individual's personal understanding: it makes sense to him or her. Because it has been accommodated to the particular mental schemata, that understanding - and its connotative value to the individual - is invariably somewhat different from the co-constructed meaning reached on the surface. As the dialogue proceeds, differences of interpretation are made manifest and, perhaps, refined and reconciled dialectically in a continual process of mutual learning.

It is important to note that learning in a ZPD may be effectively scaffolded by either teachers or fellow learners, and strategies for both are implemented in the writing course discussed below

The constructs of the ZPD, scaffolding and appropriation can be applied to the teaching of writing as a process, to which attention will now be turned.

The teaching of writing as product and process

Traditionally, the teaching of writing has tended to focus on the production of texts by individual students, often under time constraints and usually in silence. However, over the past two decades it has increasingly come to be recognised that writing is a process of creating and extending meaning, rather than merely conveying pre-conceived information (Appleby, 2000; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Chenoweth and Hayes, 2001, 2003; Flower and Hayes, 1981; Hayes and Flower, 1987; Shaughnessy, 1977). These insights have been applied to second language instruction (Badger & White, 2000; Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd

and Helt, 2002; Mesana, 2004; Pennington and So, 1993; Raimes, 1985, 1991, 2002; Sengupta, 2000; Silva, 1990, 1993; Zamel, 1987)). A process approach to teaching writing emphasises the development in learners of the recursive strategies and techniques that writers use when composing.

Most of the writers in this area, especially earlier ones such as Hayes and Flower, considered the process of writing to be an essentially cognitive one, but more recently there has been a tendency to consider a more sociocultural orientation. Recognising that learning and teaching are essentially social activities, sociocultural theorists (Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Lantolf, 2000; Van Lier, 2000) have drawn attention away from individual cognition and towards the sharing and distribution of mental activity among learners; as Pea (1993, p. 47) states “the mind rarely works alone” and writing, as a learning activity, is one that lends itself to the co-construction of texts by students working together.

Thus, collaborative problem-solving, brainstorming, shared planning, multiple drafts, peer feedback, revision, have all been suggested as relevant activities within a cycle of process writing (for example, by Keh, 1990; Seow, 2002; Tsui, 1996; Zamel, 1983). These authors have tended to focus on conventional classrooms, where teachers and learners interact in face-to-face settings. Increasingly, though, electronic technology is being applied to the teaching of writing, not least to promote strategic interaction and collaboration in the various stages in the process of writing. Reviewing a wide range of recent research investigating the relationship of technology to second language writing, Warschauer (Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland & Warschauer, 2003, p.164) has pointed out that, “the diffusion of computers and the Internet is likely to be as important for the development of writing as was the earlier advent of the printing press”.

A university EAP writing course

A sociocultural perspective has for several years informed an undergraduate EAP (English for Academic Purposes) university programme at the University of Waikato. Various aspects of the programme have been elsewhere reported (for example, Brine, Franken and Campbell, 2002; Brine and Campbell, 2002; Brine, Johnson, Franken and Campbell, 2002a; 2002b; Campbell, 2005). No claims are made in the present paper for the excellence of the writing course; rather, it is presented here as a case study of how theoretical constructs can be applied in practice.

The programme comprises four courses: Academic Oral Presentation (Level 1) and Academic Oral Discourse (Level 2), and Academic Writing and Research (Level 1) and Academic Written Discourse (Level 2). Students who take these courses are from international (mostly Asian) backgrounds, and all are expected to have the equivalent of IELTS 6.0. The majority of students take one or more of the writing courses in the programme to facilitate their studies across the university. . Over the years, class sizes in the Academic Writing and Research course have sometimes exceeded 300 students, with tutorial groups usually comprising 25 or more. This is a far from satisfactory situation, but imposed budgetary constraints prevent the use of more tutors with smaller groups.

In the Level 1 EAP writing course, there are various learning ‘spaces’: two two-hour lectures a week; structured online interaction among and between students and tutors; one hour face-to-face tutorials; scheduled personal consultations hours; and informal networking among groups of students, either face to face or online. The lecture classes are taken up with instructional input

and associated tasks intended to consolidate the students' initial uptake of the conceptual content of the lecture. Between the lecture and the tutorial session each week, students are expected to use an in-house web conference. This platform provides information in the form of lecture notes, handouts, suggested library readings and instructions for such matters as the scheduling of postings and responses. More importantly, it is an effective conduit for interaction among students, and between teachers and students – in both cases on an individual or group basis.

Typically, students are put into groups of five to collaboratively complete various written assignments. They are expected to co-construct texts of varying length in a dialogic process through both face-to-face and online interaction. Such co-construction involves a variety of activities, for example: brainstorming ideas about the content and organisation of the topic; providing peer feedback on their work in progress; assisting each other in revising sequences of drafts, preparing versions for inter-group feedback; and eventually handing over a final, co-constructed text to the tutor. (It should be noted that, eventually, students are also expected to produce three individual writing assignments.) In early offerings of the course, students selected their own groups, and negotiated task accomplishment with relatively little specific assistance in this respect. This led to some disorganisation, dissatisfaction and complaints by some students of unequal contributions among group members. The decision about grouping students now follows suggestions by Oakley, Felder, Brent & Elhaji (2004, pp. 2-4), and in the present version of the course factors such as national backgrounds, degree majors, outside class interests, etc. are used in an attempt to collect students with similar interests and study fields to allow for more like-minded students to work together. They are also encouraged to divide the various tasks among themselves and are helped with this division of labour by the use of a Team Policy Statement (Oakley, et al., 2004, p. 5; p. 17). This model breaks down roles taken within groups and allows for students to initially choose a role that they feel they can accomplish. As the collaborative work progresses from one written task to the next, students have to assume different roles, so that each student in a group has a chance to practise the characteristics of the role. Students now sign a group work contract to show allotted tasks in the writing process, and this has worked well with more transparency being shown in the division of work.

Before the students actually start composing, they are given a pre-worked report to comment on. This has been designed and written by the tutor with features built in that correspond to typical mistakes made by students when writing the first composition assignment on this course. The idea behind this is that while critically reading the text and articulating comments among themselves, students are made aware of likely errors and how to correct them. This then forms a foundation for their own first composition assignment where they have to co-construct a similar report. The title changes, but the idea is that they learn from the mistakes they have identified and avoid making them. Each of the assignments prepares the way for their individual assignments, the first of which is a comparison/contrast assignment similar to the title of a previous group assignment. In this way, the skills of researching background reading and information, and the production of individual text-types for individual writing are developed through the work done in groups.

The entire cycle can be regarded as a ZPD: learners are taken from their present level of writing ability to achieve a higher potential level within a structured framework. Each phase of the process is also a ZPD, in which all the participants engage in dialogue to achieve set outcomes. Learning is scaffolded throughout the dialogue – by both the tutors and peers – the latter on the assumption that there are different levels of actual and potential development

within any group, and that in one respect or another some students are more ‘expert’ than their fellow learners (Van Lier, 1996, p. 195). The cultural tools of speech and writing (on paper and online) mediate the process. Appropriation occurs as a result of the merging of the co-construction of texts in social interaction and introspection (private speech in the drafting process). More precisely how this can be achieved will now be explained with reference to Van Lier’s six principles of scaffolding.

Scaffolding by the tutor in a university EAP writing class

The principle of contextual support

Although teaching and learning is essentially a social activity, writing is often regarded as a solitary chore involving high stress and low gain (Tsui, 1996, p. 101). Thus, when inducting students into writing as a process, the tutor needs to create a supportive but challenging environment, set the overall goal and direction, and clearly explain the rationale for such writing, demonstrating, by appropriate micro-tasks, some of the procedures used for collaborative work. This is done in the lecture classes at the start of each writing cycle, and the first tutorial sessions are aimed at stimulating student interest in the tasks in hand, encouraging and guiding collaboration, and preparing for the subsequent out-of-class and online interaction. Students who are unfamiliar with the web conferencing are given hands-on training. One of the first points that is emphasised is the need for audience-awareness; at all times students are made aware that what they write is intended to be read – not merely judged – by their group members, other students in the class, and the tutors. They are encouraged to think that the first (and last) readers are themselves, and therefore to be reflective about their own writing.

The principle of continuity

The tutor sets up a routine and schedule for the posting of assignments. For example, students are told to submit online postings by a set time and day, and they are also shown how to submit postings with comments, questions or points for further discussion. While these are addressed to, and answered by, the tutor all postings and responses can be read by other students in the class. The first tutorial of the series goes through the Team Policy Statements and students are helped to consider which roles to take for each assignment. As the students become familiar and comfortable within a routine, additional elements are added or amended; for example, after students have got used to providing feedback on work done by others, they are encouraged to construct a similar type of genre before another text type is introduced. The extent and type of feedback is varied according to the students’ developing skills and the increased range and difficulty of the target text genre.

The principle of intersubjectivity

The task may be to write a collaborative report on a topic relevant to the students’ academic work elsewhere in the university, and broad outlines are discussed in the lecture class. In the subsequent tutorial sessions, the conceptual content presented in the previous lecture is reinforced and extended, and the group members engage in exploratory talk (Mercer, 1995), building on each others’ ideas to work towards a common goal. Before they leave the tutorial, they are encouraged to agree on what is to be done in the next phase of the forthcoming group assignment. Individuals then draft and post their sections for within-group revisions (face to

face and/or online). The structure of the course thus obliges students to collaborate intersubjectively, and the tutor's responsibility is to create a harmonious atmosphere that facilitates the students, as far as possible, to be thinking along the same lines.

The principle of flow

It has to be said that this principle is, initially at least, flouted in this course. The requirement to submit postings and feedback to a tight schedule, and the fixed timetable of lectures and tutorials and the nature of academic assignments, militates against a natural flow of communication. However, opportunities are provided - and taken - for students to meet informally to discuss issues arising from their work in their own time. Moreover, the large number of online postings, in which students and tutor discuss content – at text, sentence and word levels - and negotiate procedural issues is clear evidence of natural flow in a free give-and-take written ‘conversation’. (This is illustrated in Section 5 below.)

The principle of contingency

The tutor scaffolds the students' learning by monitoring online postings and other written drafts in progress. The tutor responds and provides assistance, raising or lowering the scaffold, according to the needs of the students as indicated in their postings. Contingent scaffolding is also provided in the face-to-face tutorial sessions: to provide extra assistance and practice in the skills taught during lectures, to answer questions, suggest ideas for strategies, maintain focus and motivation, and deal with any problems that arise. In addition, each tutor has consultation hours two hours a week, during which individual students, or small groups, can discuss particular problems they face. In these ways, elements of the writing process can be added, deleted or adapted for individuals, groups, or the whole class according to their progression through the ZPD.

The principle of handover

The co-constructed drafts are edited and proofread by group members - again a division of labour is suggested in that different students focus on different issues. Once this has been done to their general satisfaction, they make final adjustments to the report and a final version is submitted online. The tutor provides online criteria-referenced feedback for group assignments with the use of Microsoft word features. Each assignment has a marking sheet, based on both lower-level concerns (punctuation, syntax, etc.) and higher-level (structural, organizational) aspects that the students have learnt. Students - individuals or groups - may make appointments to discuss their work. In most cases, the students have attained a higher level of writing proficiency and this ZPD is closed; a new one opens and another cycle of process writing can begin.

Peer scaffolding in the co-construction of a text

As Vygotsky (1878, p. 86) noted, and Van Lier (1996, pp. 190-194) has explained more fully, scaffolding can be effected by both teachers and peers. The following extract is taken from Brine, Campbell, Johnson and Franken (2002, Appendix A). The transcript illustrates how a group of students creatively and interdependently begin, on line, to co-construct a text. The

students had been assigned a joint writing task with the title, 'Explain the changes in population of New Zealand over the past ten years'. As Brine et al. (2002) explain, the entire discussion at this stage originally comprised almost 150 online exchanges. Before this extract begins each of the students had proposed his or her version of an introduction (an outcome of private speech) and they had decided by message 25 that the draft posted by student XS was the best. The transcript below of their subsequent negotiations for a co-constructed refinement of the introduction is followed by a commentary discussing how Van Lier's six principles of scaffolding can occur among students without the physical presence of a tutor.

27. FROM: YO
TO: XS – is it the introduction or the data you got from some book, please? – However, I wonder whether natural increase and immigration are the two main factors in the change of population in your draft. And the reasons for these two factors are in the preview, right?
28. FROM: XS
TO: YO – have u got my message? - #25 is the one u should look at, can u give me your opinion?
29. FROM: NP
TO: Everyone – i have look at the one XS did that is really good too, but do you have to put in the table figures
30. FROM: XS
TO: YO – the natural increase and migration (pay attention, here means not only immigration) caused the changes in the population. – all my resource is came from Demographic Trends, 2001, as i mentioned in the intro. – don't know if u give attention to the thesis statement and preview. have split those into two separated parts. – also add a feature in thesis statement, that's welfare and living condition, which is related to the natural increase. – my new preview is intended to talk about the changes of the different kinds of immigration, emigration and native people
31. FROM: YO
TO: XS – I've got what you meant now – so the thesis statement of #25 is the natural increase and immigration caused the changes, and in your preview, you listed the issues which presenting the reasons for the changes. Right??
32. FROM: XS
TO: NP – have to put the table in the intro, to explain what's going on these years
33. FROM: YN
TO: Everyone – think the sentence “for a migration country...” should change to “for NZ” instead. and the last sentence is just a repeating of the sentence before that...don't need that
34. FROM: XS
TO: YO – the title is “explain the changes” of nz... – it tells us that we should state what changes have happened in the article. – so, in my preview, which means the body paragraphs, state the 1. immigration, 2. emigration, 3. native people from those dimensions to state what's happened these years. u should know, talking in the background should not be repeat in the body, in other words, should not repeat those in the body
35. FROM: YO
TO: Everyone – I agree with XS's idea, since his introduction has come to the point with intense structure, but the thesis statement and preview are not quite clear
36. FROM: YN
TO: XS – why is it no figure shows in year 1991? Is it all right to do that?
37. FROM: YO

TO: XS – could you paste your #25 directly into the square, since I failed to open it in the computer i'm using now

38. FROM: XS

TO: Everyone – got YO's suggestion about my work, you mean there are not quite clear, how about get rid of the last sentence. – and the thesis statement also involves two factors i have talk about in background

Contextual support was initially provided by the title for the essay and by face-to-face discussion among students and tutor in the preceding lecture and tutorial session. Once on line, the students also provided another layer of contextual support by their selection, before this extract opens, of one version of the introduction to the essay as the basis for their ongoing co-construction of text. The challenge that lay ahead was to co-construct a more refined draft.

Continuity – the students in this extract are following a schedule for out-of-class collaboration to enable them to link with past and future face-to-face sessions. It can be seen (for example #27, 29, 31, 36) that they are developing ideas by commenting on, questioning, and seeking further clarification of their current online postings. In this way, over several such interactions, the complete text will eventually be co-constructed.

Intersubjectivity - the students here can be seen to be engaging in harmonious exploratory talk. For example, in #28, XS seeks YO's opinion. Later (#31), YO confirms his appropriation of the points XS has just made by reformulating a summary statement and seeking confirmation of his understanding. Later (#35), the same student indicates agreement but feels that there is a lack of clarity in XY's thesis statement and preview – exemplified (#36) by another student in the group - and responded to by XT in the final message in this extract. In this way, there is mutual engagement and support: each student is building on suggestions by others, working towards a common outcome – the creation not only of text but of understanding.

Flow – the style of writing in the extract indicates that the interaction – although asynchronous – is characteristic of easy conversation; for example, the informality of 'texting' usage such as 'u', the lower case 'i', casual punctuation and reduced sentences such as 'Right' (#31) and 'don't need that' (#33). The amount of task-related written communication thus engendered is considerable – in the case of student XS, who writes most in this short extract, this amounts to about 250 words, and of course considerably more over the 150 posted messages in the episode. Such writing is monitored, but not assessed, by the tutor who thus gains valuable formative insights into the development of the students' skills in the process of writing.

Contingency – in the flow of interaction, the help that each student seeks and provides is contingent upon what has been posted in previous messages: elements are changed, added, or deleted. For example, it may be assumed that, perhaps because his text was selected as the basis, XS took the role of the more capable peer in this extract. He responded very fully (#30) to YO's initial request for clarification and later (#32) more briefly, but appropriately, to NP's simple question (#29). The participants' differing ways of comprehending, thinking and interpretation - their levels of appropriation - are brought to the surface of discourse, and through contingent interaction are reconstructed, refined, or reconciled as part of the process of mutual learning.

Handover – at the end of the hundred or so messages following this extract, the students reached agreement on what they had done, and also what next needed to be done - and by whom - before the next scheduled interaction. The students have thus achieved a measure of control over the process of writing through interdependent activity, and this in itself represents a waystage handover – the closure of a ZPD - before the final submission to the tutor. It may be assumed, although not proved, that the autonomy of individual students might be enhanced as a result of this interdependence.

Summary: sociocultural theory and the teaching of process writing

In a Zone of Proximal Development, understanding is shared and *created* (Mercer, 1995) – and not merely transmitted - in the interaction within and between the co-participants of an activity. This process is mediated both by the available cultural tools, such as pen and paper and electronic media, and by the cultural practices of the group – for example, the extent to which they are accustomed to work with each other and with an appropriate division of labour.

The learning of an individual in a ZPD depends as much on the nature and quality of the dialogic intersubjectivity as on the potential limit of personal capability within the demands of the task. Thus, collaborative learning needs willingness on the part of all participants to learn with and from each other. The primary role of the tutor, as an expert or more capable partner in the ZPD, is to directly or indirectly scaffold this collaborative learning. This is done by providing appropriate resources, both material and conceptual, and by creating and sustaining motivation in a psycho-socially safe, but challenging, environment in which students can subsequently scaffold each other's efforts in the creation of multivocal texts. Typically, students in the Waikato programme are unaccustomed to a collaborative style of working, but it can be a positive experience, as indicated by these comments of students reported by Brine et al (2004):

Student A: Write comment for other people's work is an interesting strange activity to me. The comment report in this course is different to any comments I did before.

Student B: I have never made comments about other's work before, but you give us a good chance to make comments to other group.? I really like it?. To make comments is very interesting (Brine, Franken & Johnson 2004, p.95).

It should be noted that students' reactions to collaborative learning and the co-construction of texts, both initial and longer-term, vary considerably; some readily adapt while others are more defensive.

Written texts are usually read 'univocally' by an individual in an attempt to reconstruct the author's original intended meaning. This understanding can subsequently be conveyed to another. However, the process of *writing* a text 'dialogically' can be more productive: learners use the emerging text as a 'thinking device' to *appropriate* understanding – that is, they integrate the meaning derived from the dialogue - mediated by the text as it is being co-constructed - into their own frame of reference. Private speech is the channel conducting this understanding from the social to the inner plane – and, equally importantly – in the other direction. It is the mechanism by which the individual converts his inner thoughts into words and longer stretches of speech in preparation for utterance on the social plane. Because individuals appropriate - and then reconceptualise - meaning in different ways, new ways of thinking invariably emerge in the dialogue. In an attempt to co-construct a well organized, coherent text, students are constantly using speech or writing to explore the different possibilities and avenues.

Conclusion

It may be widely accepted in principle that writing should be taught as a process, rather than as a product. In practice, however, the traditional approach is more often widely adopted. To some extent, this may be due to a lack of knowledge among teachers about the value of a process approach, and also a lack of belief in its practicability; by its nature, process writing is time-consuming, especially when it is done collaboratively. To these points may be added the not unreasonable assumption that many students – and especially perhaps those from Asian backgrounds – are unfamiliar with, and unwilling to try, non-traditional approaches, and may wish to get their own piece of writing done as quickly as possible. Such resistance is likely to be compounded when teachers face large classes.

The situation presented in this paper indicates that a measure of successful process writing can be achieved in a relatively short extensive EAP course (five hours of instruction over twelve weeks) with very large classes. It can reasonably be argued that the larger the class, the more need there is to provide opportunities for students to collaborate in groups; instead of a hundred individual activities to monitor, there might be twenty or even ten working units; in this way, in-class and online scaffolding by the teacher can occur more effectively than if help were distributed among individuals. There is also a considerable reduction in the eventual number of finished written assignments to read and provide feedback for – although it has to be admitted that there is a considerable amount of online tutoring required during the course. More important than these practical concerns, however, is that working in groups obliges students to work interdependently as a waystage for independence. They come to rely their collective, and co-constructed, knowledge and understanding – as much as, if not more than, instruction by the teacher.

In the EAP class under consideration, use was made of web conferencing facilities and strategies to mediate the learning process. It allowed the creation of structured learning spaces outside the physical limitations of lecture hall and tutorial room, and to enhance the intersubjective process of co-constructing both understanding and texts. Increasingly, students have chosen their own times to meet outside the lecture- and tutorial schedule, and they use Microsoft Messenger (MSM) well as, and sometimes more than, the established web conference. (One disadvantage of this from a research point of view is that there is less available evidence of co-construction actually in process. However, the use of role menus and group work contracts allows for the identification of individual contributions.) Electronic technology is a valuable teaching and learning tool – and one that need not be expensive; there are free web conference facilities available online, for example, <http://www.worldcrossing.com/>. These may not be as sophisticated as the platform used in this EAP programme, but most of them are more than adequate to support collaborative writing projects.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that all educational technology needs to be firmly underpinned by relevant pedagogic theory; in our case, we have found a sociocultural perspective to be extremely relevant, but of course other theoretical models can also be helpful to explain key aspects of learning and teaching. One implication of this is that teachers need to be provided with an appropriate theoretical foundation – as well as technical expertise – both before embarking on, and implementing, an innovative approach to teaching writing (or anything else, for that matter). Like their students, they are in a zone of proximal development and they too need scaffolding if they are to fully appropriate the meaning and value of this teaching and learning experience. In short, autonomy cannot be thrust upon either students or teachers: they need to be supported towards independence.

References

- Applebee, A.N. (1984). *Contexts for learning to write*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Applebee, A.N. (2000). Alternative models of writing development. In R. Indrisano & J.R. Squire (Eds.), *Perspectives on writing: Research, theory and practice* (pp. 90-110). Newark, NJ: International Reading Association.
- Badger, R., & White, G. (2000). A process genre approach to teaching writing. *ELT Journal*, 54 (2), 153-160.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1987). *The psychology of written composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Biber, B., Conrad, S., Reppen, R., Byrd P., & Helt, M. (2002). Speaking and writing in the university: A multidimensional comparison. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36 (1), 9-48.
- Brine, J., & Campbell, L. (2002, November). Web conferencing and academic second language writing. 9th Annual ALANZ Symposium. The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Brine, J. W., Campbell, L., Johnson, M., & Franken, M. (2002). Supporting academic writing through online conferences: dialogical strategies. In A. Kirkness (Ed.), *Proceedings of the fifth biennial Tertiary Writing Network Colloquium*, December 5-6, 2002.
- Brine, J., Franken, M., & Campbell, L. (2002, July). Covering all bases: The use of activity theory to analyse a computer mediated academic writing programme. CLESOL 2002 Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Brine, J., Franken, M., & Johnson, M. (2004). Using activity theory to evaluate a course management system for academic writing. In M.Clark Cummings (Ed.), *2003 Annual Review* (pp. 87-97). Aizu-Wakamatsu City, Japan: University of Aizu.
- Brine, J. W., Johnson, E. M., Franken, M., & Campbell, L. (2002). Collaborative second language writing: an activity analysis of web conferencing. In Kinshuk, et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Computers in Education*, 668-669. Los Alamitos, CA: ICCE Computer Society (07695-1509-6).
- Campbell, L. (2005). How reflective exchanges of second language students can have an impact on their learning outcomes and on future curriculum planning in a tertiary environment. In S. May, M. Franken, & R. Barnard, (Eds.), *LED2003: Refereed Conference Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Language, Education and Diversity*. Hamilton, New Zealand: Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato.
- Chenoweth, A., & Hayes, J. (2001). Fluency in writing: Generating text in L1 and L2. *Written Communication*, 18, 80-98.

- Chenoweth, A., & Hayes, J. (2003). The inner voice in writing. *Written Communication*, 20 (1), 99-118.
- Cole, M., & Engestrom, Y (1993). A cultural approach to distributed cognition. In G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations* (pp. 1-46). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Connor, U. (1996). *Contrastive rhetoric: Cross-cultural aspects of second-language writing*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32, 365-387.
- Hayes, J., & Flower, L. (1987). On the structure of the writing process. *Topics in Language Disorder*, 7 (4), 19-30.
- Keh, C. L. (1990). Feedback in the writing process: A model and methods for implementation. *ELT Journal*, 44 (4), 294-304.
- Lantolf, J.P. (Ed.) (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning: Recent advances*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Matsuda, P.K., Canagarajah, A.S., Harklau, L., Hyland, K., & Warschauer, M. (2003). Changing currents in second language writing research: A colloquium. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12, 151-179.
- Mercer, N. (1995). *The guided construction of knowledge*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Mesana, C. (2004). An integrated approach to foreign language writing instruction. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 27 (1), 44-57.
- Oakley, B., Felder, R. M., Brent, R., & Elhajj, I. (1004). Turning student groups into effective teams. *Journal of Student Centred Learning*, 2(1), 9-34.
- Pea, R.D. (1993). Practices of distributed intelligence and designs for education. In G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations* (pp. 47-87). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pennington, M.C., & So, S. (1993). Comparing writing process and product across two languages: A study of 6 Singaporean university student writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 2 (1), 41-63.
- Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled writers do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19 (2), 229-258.
- Raimes, A. (1991). Out of the woods: Emerging traditions in the teaching of writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25 (3), 407-430.

- Raimes, A. (2002). Ten steps in planning a writing course and training teachers of writing. In J. C. Richards & W.A. Renyanda (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 306-314). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press
- Sengupta, S. (2000). An investigation into the effects of revision strategy instruction on L2 secondary school learners. *System*, 28 (1), 97-113.
- Seow, A. (2002). The writing process and process writing. In J. C. Richards & W.A. Renyanda (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 315-320). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press
- Shaughnessy, M. (1977). *Errors and expectations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Silva, T. (1990). Second language composition instruction: Developments, issues and directions in ESL. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing* (pp.11-23). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Silva, T. (1993). Toward an understanding of the distinct nature if L2 writing: The ESL research and its implication. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(4), 657-677.
- Tsui, AB.M. (1996). Learning how to teach ESL writing. In D. Freeman & J.C. Richards (Eds.), *Teacher learning in language teaching* (pp. 97-119). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Lier, L. (1996). *Interaction in the curriculum: Awareness, autonomy & authenticity*. London: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Van Lier, L (2000). From input to affordance: Social-interactive learning from an ecological perspective. In J.P. Lantolf (Ed.) (2000) *Sociocultural theory and second language learning: Recent advances* (pp. 245-259). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1981). The genesis of higher mental functions. In J. V. Wertsch *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J.S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring inproblem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17, 89-100.
- Zamel, V. (1983). The composing processes of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17 (2), 165-187.
- Zamel, V. (1987). Recent research on writing pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21 (1), 697-715.

COMPLEXITY WITHOUT INTEGRATION

Heather Meyer
School of Languages
Auckland University of Technology

Abstract

*In a very helpful article entitled 'Simplicity without Elegance', Hinkel (2003) notes that even non-native speakers who have spent a considerable length of time in English-speaking environments, including academic ones, have relatively small lexical and syntactical ranges compared to native speakers in the same environments. She mentions some of the characteristics of their writing being a disproportionate number of be-copula and simple main verbs (such as want, think, like), predicative adjectives and what she terms 'vague' nouns (people, thing, world). Cameron (2003) too, on the basis of an extensive study of the writing of English as Additional Language students, comments that 'unimportant inaccuracies in the spoken English of EAL pupils become more noticeable in writing' (p.35). To add to these observations, this article reports on those particular results of an investigation which highlighted some of the key linguistic and cognitive differences between excellentⁱ **native** writers and excellent **non-native** writers at the senior secondary level. Those teaching non-native speakers who are competing with native-speakers in mainstream classes, even if they are drawn aside for ESOL lessons, may be especially interested in considering whether the findings of this research may be useful in identifying small but significant characteristics of their students' writing which could be preventing them from scoring as highly as their native-speaking counterparts. A detailed background to the study is given as well as a minimally revised version of the analytical framework used for the research.*

Introduction

The number of non-native speakers of English attending English-medium classes and sitting English-medium examinations is unprecedented in these times, the world over. Since learning, in the academic sense, is heavily dependent upon language and the higher a student advances in the education system, the more likely it is that he or she must gain credit by means of answering linguistically demanding essay-type questions, a better understanding of the connection between language and cognitive development is very useful for teachers.

Vygotsky (1934) describes pre-mature conceptual thought as thinking in chains with relations between single links or elements but no nucleus which would enable the thinking to rise above the elements of which it is constituted. By contrast, mature thinking involves the emergence of concepts when 'abstracted traits are synthesized anew and the resulting synthesis becomes the main instrument of thought' (Vygotsky, 1934, p.78). This is paralleled by the linguistic ability to identify, extract and deliberately manipulate language units or devices to contain and convey metacognitive thought as part of an argument. Vygotsky contends that the development of language actually allows the development of mature thought and is the means by which children working within the

zone of proximal development with an adult, may be drawn into a higher level of cognitive operation.

This integration of linguistic and cognitive development has some implications for non-native speakers who need to think in their native language and translate into English. Regardless of their ability to perform this complex linguistic task, the evidence of differences even in the writing of *skilled* native and non-native speakers, suggests that they do not appear to possess the same *integration* of cognitive and linguistic functions. It could be that this is due to the fact that cognitive development has taken place in a different language for the non-native speakers and their learning of English has come through what Cameron (2003, p.35) terms ‘mainstream participation where meaning can be understood without noticing small details at word level’. In academic writing, those small details may take on a greater significance.

Background

To investigate both the connection between language and cognitive skills in native speakers, as manifest in their sustained, factual-type writing, and, how the limitation of writing in a non-native language can affect the apparent cognitive quality of a student's writing, research was undertaken which applied a linguistic-cognitive analytical framework to essays written by highly skilled and lesser skilled, native and non-native, writers at senior secondary level.

Early development of the framework

Initially, a framework was developed merely from interest while tutoring female students who were similar ages, that is, between 16 and 17, and from similar backgrounds. One consistently produced essays of excellent quality and the other two did not. One of the two who was not achieving well, was a non-native speaker being educated in an English-medium environment. It seemed an ideal, albeit informal, experiment which would render helpful information. Each student was, individually, asked to write an essay of a particular length, on the same topic, given the same amount of time and no specific input or instructions. One essay written by a native speaker, was high quality and the other, a borderline failure. The other essay, written by the non-native speaker, was also borderline failure. By close examination of the essays, a profile for each was extracted and compared to the others. The profiles simply consisted of the linguistic and cognitive features which seemed to characterise each essay. That means that they appeared more than once or twice in the essay. A preliminary table or framework was constructed comprising the features which made up the profile for each. This framework was then tested in the formal study of forty essays which rendered the results presented in this article.

Linguistic qualities of each essay which appear to be the distinguishing ones between skilled and less skilled and native and non-native are in the right-hand column of the framework. They were identified using both traditional grammar and Systemic Functional Linguistic grammar. Traditional grammar was used in identifying sentence structure, for instance, in classifying opening and concluding statements as simple, complex, compound or complex-compound. The types of syntactical errors made, for example, illogical referents and clause relations, as a result of personal and relative

pronoun mishandling, were also identified using traditional grammar. Systemic Functional Linguistic grammar concepts, specifically the features of advanced literacy as described and exemplified in an article by Christie (2002), were then engaged in further grammatical analysis of the essays. Christie (2002) discusses the progression of children's grammatical skills by doing a linguistic analysis of writing done by children from age 6 to 16. Each piece, at a new age level, shows how the grammatical complexity of the writer grows with his or her intellectual development until mature literacy is achieved. The features of mature or advanced literacy identified by Christie (2002) were very apparent in the skilled writers' work in both the pilot and formal studies.

Two of the features of advanced literacy, used as part of the analysis of the linguistic **complexity** of the writing (see right-hand column of framework), are grammatical metaphor or the transformation of words that are more common in process or verb form, into nouns, and, embedded clauses or the use of verbal material, such as participles and infinitives, within nominal groups (noun phrases or clauses). Analysis of the use of sentence theme (the opening of each sentence) to guide the reader through the essay, another of Christie's features of advanced literacy, was used to assess the structural **specification** skill apparent in the essay. A third feature discussed by Christie, interpersonal metaphor, was identified as a means writers may choose to insert their **personal presence** in their writing. It involves using a clause within the sentence, to express opinion, such as *I believe that* It is considered metaphorical because the clause expressing the opinion, may appear to be the main clause but in fact, the subject about which the opinion is held, is actually the main clause of the sentence. This is demonstrated by using a tag question to identify the main subject of the sentence, for instance, *I believe that smacking children causes them to feel angry* would more suitably have the tag, *doesn't it?*, not, *don't I?* This particular feature was refined by separating the sentences which used the first person, which was associated with less skilled writing, from the sentences which used an impersonal subject such as *It is believed that* ..., associated with more skilled writers.

The **cognitive** qualities of the essays were also considered, (see left-hand column of framework), for example, what organisational principles had been used to structure the essay, how concrete or abstract the ideas seemed and whether the argument was consistent throughout or contradictory. From this volume of information, certain features were selected which seemed to characterise the high grade essay and other features, which the borderline essays had in common, were also noted. Differences between the borderline failure essays, one written by a native and the other a non-native speaker, were also investigated. The most distinctive features were arranged into the framework which was formally tested in the research project undertaken. The framework appears to demonstrate a connection between linguistic and cognitive qualities. The basis of this connection is **Design Theory** as explicated by Dembski (2001). Dembski's work is not within the field of Linguistics but the principles of Design Theory are used generally in scientific enquiry and the purpose of this investigation was to attempt to find more definitive or 'scientific' features upon which to base the *analysis* of writing, rather than the lesser defined ones often offered in *assessment* frameworks. According to Design Theory, intelligent design (which is obviously required in a successful essay) has three major requirements: **contingency**, **complexity** and **specification**. These can be explained as the qualities of relatedness, intricacy and purposeful arrangement, respectively.

Operationalisation of Linguistic and Cognitive Contingency, Complexity and Specification and minor revisions to the framework

This revised framework is very slightly different from the one used in the formal study due to the insights gained from that research. The revisions are mentioned here, together with, where necessary, some explanation of how the indicators were operationalised. The operationalised versions of **Cognitive** Contingency, Complexity and Specification are self-evident in the descriptions of the cognitive indicators in each of the cells so-named on the left-hand side of the framework¹¹ given below.

The following are the alterations on the **Cognitive** side: the term *formulating key statements which represent a position* under **Contingency** replaced the less concrete term in the older version, *choosing a position*. Under **Complexity**, a list of abstract and concrete concepts is required rather than only abstract. This enables the weighting of concrete to abstract thought to be more clearly seen. The **Specification** statement was altered from: *uses the concepts developed in a logically structured and connected way to construct an argument, the conclusion of which, agrees with the proposition to uses organising principles to develop the argument in a consistently logically structured way such that the proposition, supporting points and conclusion agree with one another without ambiguity or contradiction*. The changes in wording more accurately reflect the actual analytic procedure undertaken while formally working through the essays which, naturally, was only possible, with hindsight. In each case, the description is more detailed and concrete so that the framework is more accessible for other users.

The **Linguistic** operationalisation is a little more tangential and is explained here together with the minor alterations made after the formal study. For the first quality, **Contingency**, the cognitive assessment has to underpin the linguistic, that is, the sentence which is examined for syntactical complexity, must, content-wise, be contingent upon the topic given and perform the cognitive tasks of defining, refining, generalising and/or abstracting, *before* it can be recognised as an introductory or concluding statement and *in order to perform* those cognitive tasks, a degree of linguistic complexity is required, such as the ability to produce an *error-free* complex or compound-complex sentence. The integrated functioning of language and cognition should be clear here. The revised framework has, on the **Linguistic** side, the addition of noting the grammatical errors in key opening and concluding statements because, during the study, this became a key distinguishing factor between highly skilled and lesser skilled writers and, between highly skilled native and non-native speaking writers.

The linguistic manifestation of the quality of **Complexity** is perhaps more obvious as can be seen in the description given in the second cell on the right-hand side of the framework. Plainly, abstract concepts cannot be constructed if the writer is unable to produce little more than simple, single-word nominal groups in either subject or predicate position. Linguistic sophistication is vital for conveying cognitive complexity. During the course of the formal study, a decision was made and reported, to look at subject and predicate groups as a whole (as shown on the revised framework) rather than individual nominal groups because the complexity of the skilled writers' work, with embedding of clauses, made the complex nominal groups difficult to extract and separate in order to count accurately. Examining a larger chunk of text made the feature more manageable.

The quality of **Specification** can be seen in its linguistic operationalisation on the right-hand side of the framework. The writer would not be able to purposely arrange (specify) the concepts devised, if he/she were unable to construct sentences free of referential and syntactical error nor would he or she be able to use sentence themes to guide the reader, linguistically, through his/her cognitive pathways. Once again, the necessity of integration of thought and language is apparent. The identification of a *main organising principle* was added to the linguistic analysis of specification in the revised framework because in the formal study it was noted that this was a distinguishing feature of excellent native-speaking writers. The latter used more sentences with textual themes than the other writers who all relied heavily on topical themes. This feature is discussed in detail under *Marked Sentence Themes*.

Finally, the category of **Personal Presence**, the fourth part of the framework, is not part of Design Theory but emerged from the pilot study to provide a fascinating insight into the different ways in which writers insert themselves into their writing. The ability to integrate this function subtly, such that there is little superficial evidence of it, is a marker of skilled writing and, obviously, cognitive-linguistic integration. Originally, an attempt was made to separately identify ways of marking personal presence cognitively and linguistically but the research suggested that the former (a cognitive assessment) was untenable and it became simply a count of the number of linguistic means a writer used to perform this function, with the larger the variety of means used, being an indication of a larger repertoire and suggesting deeper integration of thought and linguistic expression. As a result, there is no distinction of cognitive and linguistic indicators in the revised framework for this feature.

Once the research was complete, the abovementioned alterations were made to the framework so as to make it as transparent and accessible as possible. Its application to a student's essay reveals a cognitive and linguistic profile for the student which is an *analysis* of their essay writing skills as demonstrated in the essay, rather than a *grading* device. The framework and a short methodological background are given on the following page.

Data collection

The researcher obtained, on request, forty discursive essays on the same topic, written by senior secondary students from a large, boys' secondary college in Auckland. They were collected and graded according to New Zealand NCEA Level 2 standards by a liaison teacher at the school and moderated by his assistant. As had been specified, twenty were written by native speakers of English and twenty by non-native. Half in each group (10) were graded as *excellent* and the other half, *non-achieving*ⁱⁱⁱ. Essays were coded by the liaison teacher according to their language background and grade so that they remained anonymous to the researcher. Using the pre-specified criteria presented in the analytical framework above, the researcher examined every essay, several times, to ensure consistency in application and extracted a cognitive and a linguistic profile for each of the four groups. As was anticipated, the *excellent* native and non-native essays resembled each other closely in cognitive profile and *non-achieving* native and non-native essays also resembled each other closely in the cognitive analysis.

Revised Analytical Framework

| COGNITIVE INDICATORS | LINGUISTIC INDICATORS |
|--|--|
| 1 <u>Contingency</u> : student opens and closes the essay by formulating key statements which represent a position <i>in relation to the given topic</i> which defines* concepts and/or refines** the topic, and/or shows signs of abstraction*** and/or generalisation**** of the topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammatical / linguistic complexity of main introductory statement: analysis of sentence type and grammatical errors • Grammatical / linguistic complexity of main concluding statement (as above) |
| 2 <u>Complexity</u> : student has developed the argument by building and naming complex abstract concepts. List: concrete concepts abstract concepts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity and abstraction of nominal groups: Number of subjects or predicates of main verbs which show non-congruence as in grammatical metaphor⁴, phrases with embedded clauses, dependent sub-ordinated clauses or embedded independent sub-ordinated clauses |
| 3 <u>Specification</u> : student uses organising principles to develop the argument in a consistently logically structured way such that the proposition, supporting points and conclusion agree with one another without ambiguity or contradiction. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of reference and syntactical relations: Instances of cohesive <i>imprecision</i> e.g. pronouns with missing, inaccurate or illogical referents ; Illogical clause relations • Control of theme⁵: Number and type of marked themes: topical, textual, interpersonal ; Identification of main organising principle |
| 4 <u>Personal presence</u> : Number & Type of Interpersonal markers : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interpersonal metaphor⁶ • direct statement <i>I think</i> ... • adverbs & adjectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotive nouns and verbs • modal verbs • rhetorical devices |

*Define: to explain what a specific word or concept means to the writer

**Refine: to indicate by explication, an understanding of the complexity of an idea

***Abstract: to relate a concrete instance to a larger, non-concrete concept

****Generalise: to relate an instance to a broader situation

⁴ Grammatical metaphor refers to the replacement of a process verbs such as *decide* with nouns, *The decision* This is also termed nominalisation.

⁵ The sentence theme refers to the opening words or point of departure of the sentence.

⁶ This is the use of a clause with the express purpose of conveying a point of view, such as, *It could be said that* ... , but excluded use of first person pronoun in the study undertaken.

Interestingly, however, the same was true for the *linguistic* profiles; regardless of the language background of the writer, the *excellent* writers resembled each other *linguistically*, as did the *non-achieving* writers from both native and non-native speaking backgrounds. This result was taken as evidence of the connection between language and cognition and aligns with the findings of Cameron's study (2003) which covered a far broader scope of analysis, looking at punctuation, spelling, vocabulary and genre knowledge, as well as several of the features examined in this study, such as complex nominal groups (in the subordination and sentence grammar analysis), modal verbs, and content and paragraph organisation. The focus of the current article, however, is only those fine, yet significant, *linguistic* differences that appeared to distinguish native-speaking *excellent* writers from non-native speaking *excellent* writers. The remainder of the article discusses these in some detail.

Apparent linguistic differences between native and non-native *excellent* writers

Linguistic complexity and grammatical accuracy of key sentences

The sentence type chosen for the main introductory and main concluding statement in each essay and the presence of grammatical inaccuracy in these was investigated under the first quality of Contingency (see framework, p.10). While non-native writers were mostly quite capable of producing *complex* sentences, native speakers were more likely than non-native to use *compound-complex* sentences, specifically in the concluding statement position. Such sentences permitted the native writers to *combine* or integrate complex ideas with suitable grammatical relations to suggest the relationship between the ideas. The lack of this in non-native speakers' writing is the first instance and variety of *complexity* without *integration*.

An example of the type of sentence used to conclude a native speaker's excellent essay is:

From this argument, it is evident that discipline should be undertaken in a way that has an impact, yet, it should not be too demanding on the parents.^{iv}

Representative of a non-native excellent writer's concluding statement is the following sentence:

Disciplining children is a serious issue which should not be taken lightly by parents.

The key introductory and concluding sentences also revealed that despite the overall grammatical accuracy of non-native, *excellent* writers, they were still more likely to make grammatical errors than native speakers. None of the native speakers produced grammatically flawed sentences in these key positions while twenty percent of the main introductory and concluding sentences of non-native writers were flawed in a grammatical sense. Although this may not be serious enough to affect the reader's comprehension, it does disturb the reading flow.

Syntactical errors

As part of the analysis of Specification (see framework, p.10), two types of errors were noted in an examination of *whole essay* texts, namely, errors of reference and errors in clause relations. Neither native nor non-native writers produced a significant number of errors of reference but non-native writers were twice as likely to make errors in clause relations such as

being unable to sustain the correct verb form in longer sentences and using non-finite verbs as main verbs in a clause. Some examples are:

*Smacking can thus be said to be a useful form of punishment for teaching a child respect, obedience and **let** them learn from their mistakes.*

*Some effective methods of punishment **being** time-out, deprived of television or grounding.*

Again, the minor grammatical shortfall, especially in the first example, possibly suggests less than fully integrated cognitive and linguistic functions.

Use of complex nominal groups

This was a more definite trend than the two above. The study showed that excellent native-speaking writers were likely to use twice as many complex nominal groups as excellent non-native speakers in their writing. A complex nominal group was defined as either the subject or predicate of a main verb which contained any of the following features of advanced literacy in the left-hand column of the table below, in at least two instances:

Table 1: Features of Advanced Literacy and Examples

| Features of Advanced Literacy ^v | Examples |
|--|---|
| Grammatical metaphor or nominalisation (transformation of a process verb into a noun) | <i>It continued to be a problem becomes The continuation of the problem ...</i> |
| Phrases with embedded clauses (non-finite verb forms which could be expanded into whole clauses) | <i>This causes parents to attempt to control their children.</i> |
| Dependent sub-ordinated clauses | <i>There are many methods which can discipline a child without physically hurting him or her.</i> |
| Embedded independent/dependent sub-ordinated clauses | <i>The advantage of smacking is that despite the child's hating it, it is over very quickly which means that there is no possibility of the child's avoiding it.</i> |

As the examples on the right-hand side of the table show, the use of these types of nominal groups allows writers to produce denser writing, combining more ideas within fewer words which, in turn, integrates complexity within the writing. The result is writing which moves at a faster pace so that language can keep up with fleeting thought more effectively. Simplifying the nominal groups produces longer winded writing which can become laborious for the reader. This finding affirms the suggestions of Cameron (2003:42) who in the light of her EAL Writing Project, recommended that students be taught to write longer noun phrases (which would include what are termed non-finite or embedded clauses – those without finite verbs) and especially to use these as part of the subject of the sentence which would avoid the end-weighting of the predicate so common in less mature student writing.

Interpersonal markers

While there was no significant difference in the *number* of markers used by any of the groups investigated, the interest in this feature lies in the *type* of marker used, that is, the means employed by writers to insert their presence within their writing.

Firstly, native writers made greater use of modal verbs - *may, might, must, would, should* and *could* which afforded them more subtlety in presenting their ideas, thus integrating their personal position in a more complex way with their stance on the topic:

*Unfortunately, the effect of severe smacking on the sub-conscious **must** outweigh any short-term advantages.*

A semantically similar yet less impressive non-native concluding statement reads:

Smacking naughty children is not worth its consequences in their life to follow.

The second notable difference between native and non-native writers in terms of their expression of their personal presence in their work is the use of interpersonal metaphor by native speakers and the very limited use of it among non-native speakers.

Interpersonal metaphor is defined as the use of a clause to express an opinion. An example would be:

*Thus, **it may be seen**, smacking produces violence among children.*

Excellent native and non-native writers alike shunned the use of clauses containing the first person pronoun, such as in the construction, *I think that*, for the purpose of expressing an opinion but native writers' essays made significant use of the indefinite pronoun in clauses such as: *It is evident that ...; It is undeniable that ...; It can be seen that...; One could say that*

These sentence openings lead well into the final and most fascinating difference between native and non-native excellent writers. It has to do with the ability to integrate linguistic functions simultaneously within sentence themes (the opening or point of departure of a sentence), allowing for highly sophisticated writing which is indicative of the integration of cognitive and linguistic functions in language.

Marked Sentence Themes

A marked sentence theme is simply the choice by the writer to open the sentence with something other than the natural subject of the sentence. The range of possible marked themes includes:

Topical – an aspect of the topic is emphasised

Textual – the organisational place of the point in the text is emphasised

Interpersonal – the writer's opinion on the point is emphasised

All writers, including the non-achieving, were able to use topically marked sentences and all writers, *except* native, excellent writers used more topically marked themes than any other kind.

Excellent native writers used more *textually* marked themes than any other variety which indicated that they were making a point of keeping the reader informed as to *the place of the point being made*, in the argument as a whole. Other writers focused on *the point itself*.

More importantly, excellent native writers were able to integrate two or even all three functions within a sentence theme:

That is to say that *when no consequence results ...*

The first *that* refers anaphorically to what has immediately preceded this sentence while the second *that* refers cataphorically to what is about to follow and thereby the theme is **textually** marked but, at the same time, it is clear to the reader that the writer is going to reinforce the previously made point, thereby giving the theme an **interpersonal** element which stresses the writer's agreement with the point.

Disastrous results of this *have been seen ...*

The *this* which is the natural subject of the sentence has here been included in a nominal group which contains **textual** marking – the *this* itself, which refers to the predicate of the previous sentence, **interpersonal** marking, in the adjective, *Disastrous* and **topical** marking, in that the *Disastrous results* become the focus for the next topic for discussion.

Such sophisticated linguistic and cognitive integration was, perhaps surprisingly, relatively common among excellent native-speaking writers but virtually absent among excellent non-native writers. It is unlikely that the native speakers were constructing such sentence themes consciously but more probable that they simply arose because their language was the means by which the thinking emerged in the first place. For non-native speakers, there is the complicating factor of their native language which most likely is the mechanism of their thinking. At what point the thinking is 'translated' into the other language (in this case, English), must remain an unknown and yet that necessary translation appears to be the very factor that mitigates against complete integration of thought and language which becomes evident in the linguistic differences identified in this research.

Conclusion

Hinkel (2003) suggests that non-native speaking students bound for tertiary studies should not be given simplified reading matter and that instructors should in fact target more complex grammatical structures for teaching. She recommends that students be given lexical alternatives in the categories of nouns and verbs and be required to practise their use. The process of nominalisation as described in this article could also be taught within this context. Additionally, the skill of moving a predicative adjective into attributive position, thus leaving the predicate free for other inclusions, is recommended by Hinkel (2003) and Cameron (2003). Further to this, since there is no reason to stop there in terms of syntactical manipulation, students could be taught to transpose clauses into phrases and phrases into shorter phrases or single words and how to perform these operations in reverse, thus giving

them the ability to construct more complex nominal groups in their writing. Such exercises both offer non-native students skills which give them options in the formation and positioning of language units, as well as increase their confidence in using the language. It may not be possible to eliminate all vestiges of the non-native speaker's linguistic background but by exposing learners to the full range of linguistic complexity and where possible, explaining its operations, non-natives may begin to approach the kind of linguistic-cognitive integration that native speakers enjoy.

Notes

-
- ⁱ *Excellent* refers to the New Zealand NCEA standards for subject English at Level 2/ school-leaving.
 - ⁱⁱ This is a revised version of the original framework used for the study. It is very similar but the research revealed that the refinements detailed in this article would be helpful.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ *Non-achieving* refers to the New Zealand NCEA standards for subject English at Level 2/ school-leaving.
 - ^{iv} All examples are reconstructions from similar sentences in the essays written by the participants in the study. The topic given was: *Smacking is a useful way to discipline children*.
 - ^v This term is taken from Christie, F. (2002) 'The Development of Abstraction in Adolescence in Subject English.' See reference list.

References

- Cameron, L. (2003). 'Writing in English as an additional language at Key Stage 4 and post-16': Ofsted Document no. HM1 1094, accessed @ www.ofsted.gov.uk
- Christie, F. (2002). 'The Development of Abstraction in Adolescence in Subject English.' In M. Schleppegrell & M. Cecelia-Columbi (Eds.), *Developing Advanced Literacy in First and Second Languages*, (pp.45-66). Erlbaum: Mahwah.
- Dembski, W. (2001). 'Signs of Intelligence, *A Primer on the Discernment of Intelligent Design*'. In W. Dembski & J. Kushner (Eds.), *Signs of Intelligence* (pp.171-192). Brazos Press: Grand Rapids.
- Hinkel, E. (2003). 'Simplicity without Elegance: Features of Sentences in L1 and L2 Academic Texts', *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(2), 275-301.
- Vygotsky, L. (1934). *Thought and Language*. Translated by E. Hanffmann & G. Vakar (1962) MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

BOOK REVIEWS

Singh, Ishtala (2005). *The History of English: A student's guide*. London: Hodder Arnold. ISBN: 100-340-80695-8.

Reviewed by Marilyn Lewis, Honorary Research Fellow, The University of Auckland.

To the general reader, a history of English not written by David Crystal might seem an anomaly. As the author admits in the first paragraph, we are not short of popular books on this topic and therefore a case needs to be made for a fresh one. Notwithstanding the definite article in her title, her thesis is that “there can be no such thing as the one history” (p. 1). Rather there are histories and these Singh, a lecturer at King’s College, London sets about to describe. Her book is aimed at serious students of historical linguistics.

Chapters one and two provide a background to the chronological order of the rest of the book. The first summarises developments in the English language including, for example, semantic changes through restriction, broadening and so on. Examples of these and other changes are spread through all the periods of the book. For some reason the topic of language families and the pre-history of English, which are the title of the second chapter, also make an appearance in Chapter One, where Singh refers to classifications of languages developed by early nineteenth century linguists. When she returns to the topic in Chapter Two, we find the infrequently used evaluative voice of the author, who asks “how rational, how scientific, are the methods used for grouping and reconstructing language families?” (p. 61).

Chapters three to six follow the chronological divisions of Old, Middle, Early Modern and Modern English. Although chapter introductions recall the spoken language of a university lecture (“Imagine that you are ...”, p. 39), for the most part the style is more formal, with the content presented factually in a combination of text complemented by the traditional ‘trees’ and tables. Tables show language similarities and features such as the disappearance of h in consonant clusters [hl, hn, and hr]. Each chapter finishes with “Study Questions”, which would translate easily into test or examination questions (“In the light of our earlier observation that ... consider ...”, p. 173).

It is worth noting that regular writers to the *NZ Listener* on examples of “incorrect” usage are part of a long tradition, starting a couple of centuries ago. Singh refers to a debate as recently as last year in Britain spurred by the use of the words ‘less examinations’ by a former Chief Inspector of Schools. Apparently Lynn Truss, author of *Eats, shoots and leaves*, was brought on to speak on the BBC for comment. (Incidentally, Truss’s book is not referenced in the bibliography.)

In 226 pages Singh summarises the literature with detail from many sources. Surprisingly, though, the similarly titled McCrum, Cran and Macneil work (1992) is not mentioned at all, despite their several references to Singapore English, one of Singh’s interests. In fact references to other forms of English in the twentieth century are limited almost entirely to the case of Singapore English, which has ten pages. An exception is a case study dealing with the topic of English in Barbados from the 1600s on. (An earlier book by Singh is about Pidgins and Creoles.)

Because the work is intended as a textbook it would not be fair to compare it with the more general histories and encyclopedias on the same topic. However, since this review is for members of *TESOLANZ*, I conclude with some reasons why the book might interest them even if they are not students of historical linguistics. One incentive could be the numbers of graduate students in New Zealand from countries in Asia where the study of language is valued as a separate pursuit from communicative language acquisition. Secondly it offers some answers to the questions frequently asked by language learners “Why does English say it this way?”. It also provides some insights (albeit brief) into the structures of languages spoken by these students: Chinese, Vietnamese and Chinese, for example. One final reason for reading the book could be to trace the parallel developments of the English language and our profession. Howatt and Widdowson’s 2004 book on the latter topic starts during the Middle English period in 1400. More specifically, though, this book will be prescribed for linguistics students and deserves to be reviewed in a journal read by teachers of those courses.

References

- Crystal, David (1995). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCrum, R. Cran, W. and Macneil, R. (1992). *The Story of English*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Howatt, A.P.R. and Widdowson, H.G. (2004, 2nd edition). *A History of English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Coffin, Caroline, Hewings, Ann and O'Halloran, Kieran (Eds.) (2004).
*Applying English Grammar.***

Open University: Edward Arnold. ISBN: 0-3408851-49.

Reviewed by Helen Basturkmen, The University of Auckland

Applying English Grammar is a collection of articles compiled as a reader for the undergraduate course, *English Grammar in Context*, taken by students on the Diploma in English Language Studies, Advanced Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and the undergraduate degree programme at the Open University, UK. The course aims to offer a framework for the analysis of the use of the English Language. The reader comprises chapters on the concepts and methods of systemic functional and corpus based approaches to language description and chapters reporting studies based on these approaches. The work is approximately 300 pages in length and contains fifteen chapters. Approximately half the chapter are adaptations or reproductions of previously published articles and book chapters and the remainder are newly commissioned.

The book is organised into three parts. I will briefly describe the function of each part and outline the content of one chapter from each part by way of illustration. Part I, 'Introducing Corpus Linguistics and Systemic Functional Grammar', introduces the theories and methods on which systemic functional and corpus based approaches are based. In Chapter 3, 'Corpus-Based Comparison of Registers', Douglas Biber and Susan Conrad present part of the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan, 1999), a corpus-based investigation of differences between spoken and written grammar. Spoken English conversation is compared to three different registers of written English (academic prose, fiction and journalism). The main section of the chapter presents a selection of data from the Longman Grammar in the form of frequencies of grammatical features, such as use of present or past tenses and nouns or pronouns, across the four registers.

Part 2, 'Getting Down to Specific with Corpus and Functional Approaches', as its name indicates, presents specific analyses of English Grammar from a functional or corpus perspective. The analyses contrast pairs of texts or small corpora from fiction, academic writing and medical history. The aim is to show how grammatical features vary within different registers and to reveal 'the fine details of texts written for different audiences and for different purposes' (p. 98). Chapter 6, 'Impersonalising Stance: A Study of Anticipatory 'it' in Student and Published Academic Writing', is adapted from an article published in *English for Specific Purposes Journal* in 2002. In this article Ann and Martin Hewings report their investigation of the use of it-clauses in two corpora of texts – one a corpus of published journal articles and the other a corpus of dissertations written by non-native speaker students. Among a number of findings reported one concerns the high frequency in the students' writing of it-clauses in strident phrases functioning as emphatics (for example, *It can be shown that* and *It can be concluded that*). The researchers suggest that the student writers presumably (and somewhat mistakenly) believe that the use of these emphatics would impress the value of their research upon the audience.

Part 3, 'Critical Text Analysis with Corpus and Functional Approaches', shows how corpus based and functional approaches can be used to analyse the transmission of values and ideologies through text. The editors argue that this section of the book is unique in that it contains Critical Discourse studies that use combined functional and corpus-based approaches. In Chapter 13, 'Subjectivity and Evaluation in Media Discourse', Peter White examines the topic of assessments

or evaluations in media news reports. He presents a framework or categorisation of different types of assessment with options such as: explicitly presenting an evaluation as emotion or opinion; explicitly presenting an evaluation as ‘matters which are currently at issue or ...treated as ‘givens’ which can simply be assumed’ (p. 237); and the use of implicit evaluations in which triggers are used by the writer to lead the audience to make the evaluation.

The value of this reader for students following the UK Open University programme for which it was developed is clear. It is harder however to establish the value of the work for others. The editors make few claims for the book other than saying that the work seeks to illustrate two methodological approaches to grammatical analysis and show ways that these approaches can make us more aware of language use. The book succeeds in meeting these aims. The editors suggest that advanced undergraduates, postgraduates and academic staff interested in these approaches may find the work of interest. As an academic staff member interested in the use of English I found that my prior reading in this area had already familiarised me with a good deal of the book’s content. For students the book might be useful especially if they are following a course similar to the one for which the collection was made.

Two chapters that provide a good introduction to the field and would be of general interest to students following different language studies courses are Chapters 1 and 4. Chapter 1, ‘Working with Corpora: Issues and Insights’ by Elena Tognini-Bonelli provides an overview of the field and includes discussion of the relationship between grammar and lexis, methodological questions, such as how corpora are defined, and description of the types of databases available for those working in the area. Another chapter of interest to a general audience is Chapter 4 ‘Grammatical Structure in English’. In this chapter, Jim Martin defines key concepts, such as class, function and system, and presents arguments for the value of a systemic functional approach to grammatical analysis. Also of general interest is the glossary of terms. This was compiled by Sarah North and forms part of the front matter of the book. The thirteen-page glossary lists terms related to the analysis of language use and provides brief, clear definitions of key concepts. This is an excellent reference source for both students and academics.

Many students might find that only some of the remaining chapters are of interest or relevance to their studies. The relevance might also depend on the assignments they undertake for their courses. For example, students on the ‘discourse analysis for language teachers’ paper I convene at the University of Auckland would find Chapter Two, ‘Grammar and Spoken English’ by Ronald Carter relevant to the topic of planned and unplanned discourse, one topic addressed in the paper. Some students on the paper select an assignment on critical discourse analysis. They would find any of the articles in Part Three of the book of interest. For those students who do their assignment on critical discourse assignment on media discourse, the chapter by Peter White on evaluation and point of view in media discourse would be of immense interest.

In short, some of the work is likely to be of interest to most language studies students. However, it is unlikely that most chapters would be of interest as in only a few cases will the topics match closely the content of language studies courses in different settings.

Reference

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S. and Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman.

Thompson, N. (2003). *Communication and Language*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 0-333-99346-2.

Reviewed by Jonathan Newton, School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Victoria University of Wellington.

According to the blurb, this book explores ‘the complexities of the vast theory base underpinning communication and language, demonstrating how theoretical ideas can be applied in practice’. The material is presented in two sections: theory and practice.

The theory section begins with a comprehensive survey of communication theory dealing briefly but clearly with contributions from semiotics, speech act theory, existentialism, and post-modernism. The following chapter on language is brief and sketchy covering issues such as what is language, myths about language, language and the individual, society, culture and bilingualism, all in about 25 pages. The material assumes a reader with no background whatsoever in these areas.

Subsequent chapters in this first section explore writing, conversation, context and meaning. Throughout, Thompson paints with broad strokes. We explore the history of writing, the primacy of writing, forms of writing, and, in the speech chapter, ways of listening and speaking, including discussions of phatic, non-verbal and paralinguistic communication. Although this is basic material, Thompson tackles important contemporary themes including the relationship between power and language, and the interplay between culture, identity and language. In doing so he introduces the reader to key theorists including Bakhtin, Foucault, Bernstein, Scollon and Scollon, and Fairclough.

Section 2 is a guide to effective communication through speaking and writing. Thompson begins by discussing self-awareness in interpersonal communication, highlighting the various ways in which discrimination and power asymmetries are expressed unconsciously and providing strategies for more effective and empathetic communication. He then moves to the area of written communication and here identifies ways of becoming a more effective writer. Advice is offered to overcome typical pitfalls such as: failure to plan, lack of structure, airs and graces, poor presentation and being vague. This is useful material for both student writers and writers in business contexts.

Interspersed throughout the text are ‘practice focus’ boxes, mostly compromised of fictional vignettes. These are clearly aimed at bringing the ideas to life, but in the main they are slight and inert. A typical example tells us of Sara a practitioner who finds the intense eye contact of a student, Tim, makes her feel uneasy and ‘very tense in his company’ (p. 99). But that’s it. That’s all we get. No discussion prompts, no analysis. This is supposed to exemplify the significance of non-verbal communication, but to me adds nothing to the text and offers no useful material for using this book in an instructional context. These vignettes are a minor part of the text however, and ignoring them in no way compromises the main body of text. That said, I think the author misses an opportunity to bring the text to life and give the reader activities to guide their reflections and to apply the material to their communication and language use.

Overall this is a useful and well-organized text that would be of interest to anyone working with learners in foundation level tertiary courses, undergraduate writing or introductory language and communication courses. It would be particularly useful in courses designed to introduce students outside of the humanities to basic concepts of communication and language.

Corbel, C., and Gruba, P. (2004). *Teaching Computer Literacy*. Sydney: Macquarie University. ISBN: 1-86408-755-2. RRP: \$26.99.

Reviewed by Karen Haines, School of Languages, Unitec New Zealand.

This A5-size handbook is one of a series called *Teaching with New Technology*, which are guides put out by the AMEP Research Centre for teachers using computer-based technologies in the language classroom. Each book in the series gives practical techniques and lessons that teachers can use, as well as making explicit some of the theory that lies behind the adoption of technology in classrooms. Suggestions are also made about issues that are appropriate for action research.

Teaching computer literacy does each of the above admirably. Each chapter gives a theoretical perspective and practical suggestions for teachers, followed by several lesson plans. A section on issues to explore has both discussion questions and possibilities for action research. There are only four chapters in the book, but it includes a wealth of experience and down-to-earth ideas.

The authors believe that computer literacy can and should be developed in tandem with language learning, and that, as language teachers, it is our responsibility to ensure that our students are not handicapped, particularly in the context of immigration and settlement, by not having the computer literacy skills necessary for the 21st century. They acknowledge that this is a big ask for teachers who are often already hard pushed to get through language curriculum, but they remain unequivocal in the belief that language teachers are best placed to give the kind of support that learners need if they are to develop their computer skills. Teachers are the ones who 'provide a learning environment that encourages active reflection about what is being learned for what purpose.' (Corbel and Gruba, 2004) The book discusses the needs of learners in relation to computers and includes teaching suggestions. This advice focuses on, first, helping students overcome fears; second, dealing with the distraction of the computer and, third, working with individuals of varying abilities. Specific skills and levels are discussed in detail along with accessibility, navigation and various computer applications. The final chapter deals with how to integrate computers into the syllabus, using both CALL applications (software for learning language) and productivity software such as Microsoft Word or Excel.

Of particular value in this book are the sections at the end of each chapter called Issues to Explore. If you are currently involved in teaching computer literacy, then here you will find plenty of ideas for discussion and also to stimulate action research.

It is easy to assume that our students are familiar with technology and can use it in their every day life as well as to assist their language learning. This booklet gives teachers insights into how they can support language students in improving their computer literacy. Corbel's 1997 book, *Computer literacies: Working efficiently with electronic texts*, is useful for further reading in this area.

Reference

Corbel, C. (1997). *Computer literacies: Working efficiently with electronic texts*. Sydney: NCELTR.

Edwards, C. and Willis, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Teachers Exploring Tasks in English Language Teaching*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. ISBN: 1-4039-4557-8. Pp. 298.

Reviewed by Lynn Grant, Auckland University of Technology

Corony Edwards and Jane Willis have edited a collection of articles on task-based learning (TBL) written by practitioners from Britain, the USA, Canada, Greece, Korea and Syria who did post-graduate study at a university in Birmingham. As Willis says in her introduction, the book is written by language teachers for language teachers with a view to encouraging us to use more tasks in our teaching lessons. Rather than attempting to cover every type of task or research process, the book instead shows how language teachers have interpreted the idea of TBL within their own classrooms.

Because the word ‘task’ can have several different meanings, it is explained in the introduction that a broad classification of tasks could include 6 categories:

- listing tasks
- ordering and sorting tasks
- comparing tasks
- problem-solving tasks
- sharing personal experiences
- creative tasks

The book begins with a chapter summarising current theories regarding task-based learning and teaching, and ends with a chapter looking at how teachers feel about doing classroom research and the research methods used in the exploration of tasks.

The rest of the book is divided into four parts. Part A contains brief descriptions of teachers who use tasks in their lessons. Parts B and C go more deeply into TBL, with extracts from recordings of tasks in action showing how learners interact with each other and the use of language in the tasks. Lastly, Part D looks at the effects of different task types or different stages in a task-based lesson, showing what happens when teachers change the way they set up their tasks.

A helpful table in the introductory chapter lists the authors of the 19 chapters, what theme they cover, what was investigated and why. For example, Chapter 4 by Raymond Sheehan, under the theme of grammar, is described in this way: “Raymond found that conventional reference works like grammar books were often unsatisfactory when it came to answering students’ linguistic queries, so he wanted to try out using concordances as an alternative”. People with the book can use this table to focus on an area of language teaching that interests them. Another example is found in Chapter 13, entitled “Multiword Chunks in Oral Tasks”, where Maggie Baigent investigates how ‘chunks’ used by native speakers differ from those used by non-native speakers. She found gaps in the learners’ repertoire of multi-word chunks so where native speakers used more precise, topic-specific lexis (had a passion for, stereotype image), the learners relied heavily on general expressions (strange sensation/feeling/situation/things). Following the tasks, however, Baigent made some interesting observations, including:

- learners tend to use planning time to focus on lexical rather than grammatical accuracy
- a ‘second attempt’ in the form of a reporting stage or repetition of a task produces greater precision of multi-word chunks
- once chunks are identified as such, learners readily perceive them as an aid to expressing ideas more accurately and fluently

The book is not written so that it must be read from start to finish but instead teachers can delve into the parts that are most interesting and relevant to them. The appendices at the back include more information about methods and techniques for classroom research as well as recommended books and resources. Because of this, the book can be said to offer something to everyone and has much to interest language teachers who want to know more about the advantages of task-based learning and teaching.

Wallace, M.J. (2004). *Study skills in English*. (2nd ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 0-521-53385-6. RRP NZ\$34.95

Reviewed by Elizabeth Morrison, Massey University English Language Centre, Wellington.

English language learners preparing to do tertiary study need to not only develop language skills but also critical skills. Lea and Street (2000, p. 34), point out that a 'study skills' approach dealing mainly with surface language and 'atomised' skills has limitations. They differentiate between a study skills approach, an acculturation to academic culture and an academic 'literacies' approach where meaning is contested. *Study Skills in English* (2nd Edition) goes beyond surface study skills and introduces learners to critical listening and reading and the process of writing and investigation.

First published in 1980, *Study Skills in English* was a standard academic study skills text for English language learners but it was overdue for a new look and a new take on study skills. Revised and revamped in 2004, it has re-established its place as one of the best resource books for English language learners starting or preparing to start study in English language medium tertiary institutions. Although the subtitle of the book indicates that it is a reading skills course, all aspects of study skills are covered making it appropriate as a course book or as a supplementary text for Foundation and EAP programmes, or for IELTS candidates looking for a serious grounding in academic skills.

Most of the improvements in the second edition incorporate developments that have occurred in learning theory, discourse analysis and information technology since 1980. A task-based approach and consciousness-raising are features of each chapter and students are also encouraged to reflect critically on their own learning. The new layout is contemporary and uncluttered and the larger format is a welcome improvement. Texts topics are general enough to interest most readers (e.g. *Men are from Mars*) but academic in format and language. The appendix has answers, teacher's notes, tape transcripts and further reading and resources. *Study Skills in English* is probably best used with teacher support and direction, rather than for self-study. Most upper intermediate and advanced English learners whom the book targets still need to acquire the reading and skills the book sets out to teach so they may not be able to use much of it effectively on their own. The tutor notes and tapescripts are included in the same book which also comes with a CD or cassette (not available for review). The chapters can be studied in any order.

Throughout the book, learners are encouraged to develop metacognitive knowledge, such as the functions of discourse markers in the note-taking skills chapter. The need for basic research skills in undergraduate courses is recognised and a chapter is devoted to techniques for identifying and using resources, including using Internet search engines and online catalogues. The writing skills chapter takes students through structured tasks for interpreting, organising, writing and editing. The topics and frames approach to writing essays provides a comprehensive overview of different types of text organisation and is accompanied by useful diagrams.

Study Skills in English is part of the popular and long-standing Cambridge series. It could be used in conjunction with the other volumes which specialise in particular academic language skills, or as a stand-alone course book.

Reference

- Lea, M.R. & Street, B.V. 'Student writing and staff feedback in higher education: an academic literacies approach,' in Lea, M.R. and Stierer, B.(Eds.), (2000). *Student writing in higher education*. Buckingham: Society of Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Lewis, Marilyn (2004). *English Conversation Groups: A resource for community groups*. Adult Migrant English Service: NSW AMES. ISBN: 0-7310-1944-X. Price: \$18.95

Reviewed by Marie Frost, Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland.

This book is exactly what it is meant to be - a concise guide to setting up and running conversation groups by community volunteers to cater for a diverse range of participants from non-English speaking backgrounds or with limited English fluency who wish to improve their conversational ability and to feel more at home when using their new language. It is ideally suited to both voluntary organisations and funded language providers who are contemplating setting up, or who have recently organised, English conversation groups for new immigrants. Lewis records some of the more salient experiences of both organisers and participants and she includes many pertinent observations made by members of these community groups. The resource is intended to enthuse, encourage and guide those intending to embark on such a journey as it offers a clear pathway on how to get started and covers the many pitfalls that may be encountered. It is undoubtedly a valuable resource.

This book is in addition, a valuable asset in that it supports the Ministry of Education's (2003, p. 3) vision that "... all New Zealand residents from non-English-speaking backgrounds [should] have opportunities to gain English language skills so they can participate in all aspects of life in New Zealand ...".

This is a soft covered A4-sized 47-page booklet, attractively presented and very user-friendly. It is divided into three sections, Getting Started, Making the Group Work, and Issues. Each section is further divided. Section A covers four major topics: *Decisions, Action, The First Day, and Grouping the Participants*. The second section: Making the Group Work deals with *Setting Goals, Making Good Conversation, Problems in Conversation, Resources and Activities and the Group Leader*. The final Section explores a range of Issues under the separate headings of *The Volunteers, and The Participants*. Moreover the Contents pages offer the user a comprehensive and most useful description of precisely what is covered on every page.

The text itself is attractively formatted with plenty of white space, clearly numbered pages and cleverly used grey text boxes. The latter are user-friendly attention grabbers used both to introduce subsequent content and to highlight observations or comments from both volunteers and participants. Bold headings, bulleted key points and easily digestible paragraphing adds to the attraction of the presentation making it very accessible to its targeted audience.

Superficially this resource may appear to be rather light but in fact it has a wealth of content judiciously chosen so as not to discourage intending volunteers. Included are conversation starters, checklists for choosing topics, how to answer questions about language, checklists for setting goals, contacting participants, handling conflict and dealing with unsuitable participants or volunteers and much else gathered from practical experience.

Whilst targeted at the lay volunteer, practising professionals may also find this book of value.

Reference

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2003). *The Adult ESOL Strategy*. Wellington.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

1. Contributions to *The TESOLANZ Journal* are welcomed from language educators and applied linguists within and outside Aotearoa/New Zealand, especially those working in Australia and countries in the South Pacific.
2. Contributions should in general be no longer than 5000 words.
3. Referencing conventions should follow that specified in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. This publication is available in most university libraries. In the text, references should be cited using the author's last name and date of publication. If quotations are cited, the reference should include page numbers (e.g. Brindley, 1989, pp.45-46). The reference list at the end of the article should be arranged in alphabetical order. The reference list should only include items specifically cited in the text.
4. As far as possible, comments and references should be incorporated into the text but, where necessary, endnotes may be placed after the main body of the article, before the list of references, under the heading Notes.
5. All graphics should be suitable for publication and need no change.
6. It is understood that manuscripts submitted have not been previously published and are not under consideration for publication elsewhere.
7. Enquiries and draft submissions should be sent by email to the Editor, Dr John Bitchener at Auckland University of Technology, on john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz . The preferred format is WORD.
8. All submissions should be accompanied by a full mailing address, a telephone number and, if available, an email address and/or fax number.
9. Submissions will be considered by the Editor and members of the Editorial Board.
10. Those interested in submitting a book review should contact the Review Editor, Dr Martin Andrew at School of English and Applied Linguistics, UNITEC Institute of Technology, on mandrew@unitec.ac.nz .
11. The closing date for the submission of manuscripts for 2005 is **Friday 1 September**.