

○ **R. TANG (ED.), *ACADEMIC WRITING IN A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACING ESL/EFL ACADEMIC WRITERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXTS***

(ROUTLEDGE. 2010. PP. XXVIII. 682)

*Review by Constance Ellwood Honorary Fellow, School of Languages and Linguistics,
University of Melbourne*

This book consists of an eclectic selection of issues in academic writing relevant to ESL/EFL background scholars and their teachers. The book's contributors, from many countries, offer perspectives on writers from a range of Asian and European backgrounds, at a range of professional levels, and from a range of writing contexts. The book is grounded in a number of well-researched and current issues such as the status of English as the international lingua franca of academic publication and the associated disadvantages (rejections and criticisms of their English, for example) experienced by many ESL/EFL scholars as they seek to publish, as well as the links between identity and academic writing.

Preceding the book's three main sections, the introduction (Chapter 1), by editor Ramona Tang, gives a broad overview of the issues and challenges which face academic writers from ESL/EFL backgrounds, acknowledging that insofar as academic discourse is a form of social practice, these challenges also face writers from English-speaking backgrounds. Tang also proposes the need to appreciate the cultural and linguistic contributions of ESL/EFL scholars rather than accepting a simplistic 'deficit model' thinking.

The eleven chapters in the volume, as Tang states, align with two basic approaches: those which seek to demystify academic discourse practices and those which seek to challenge and transform them.

The first section of the book, 'Learning to write for academic purposes', contains four chapters. The first of these, Chapter 2, by Margaret Cargill and Patrick O'Connor, reports on an integrated training package (CIPSE: Collaborative Interdisciplinary Publication Skills Education) used to support Chinese science researchers towards publication. This model integrates language training with disciplinary content and is one of a broad set of approaches which seek to address the pressures on non-English speaking background academics to publish in English. The qualitative data analysed in this chapter reveal, among other things, the participants' increasing awareness of the importance of cohesion and flow, and the strategies necessary to maximise the chance of publication. Chapter 3, by Giuliana Diani, describes a course in which Italian

undergraduates used discourse and corpus analysis to learn how to write research papers, increasing their awareness of and skills in the use of such relevant aspects of research papers as moves, reporting verbs, and personal pronouns. Diani also usefully lists several software packages available on the web for corpus analysis and provides some sample teaching material. Chapter 4, by Guangwei Hu and Hongwei Ren, discusses the use of peer feedback in improving student writing, including potential problems and recognised benefits, by focusing on Chinese students' beliefs about the activity. The authors conclude that the way the activity is set up impacts on its benefits and on student acceptance or rejection of it. They also comment on the need to make students aware of the benefits of peer feedback in order to wean students from a dependence on teacher responses to their work. The final chapter in this section, Chapter 5, by Brian Paltridge and Lindy Woodrow, discusses the experiences of students undertaking a university course in thesis/dissertation writing. The chapter focuses on the students' reflections on their experiences and provides useful insight for any thesis supervisors who might need greater insight into all-important non-content issues confronting their higher degree students.

The second section of the book, 'Features of ESL/EFL learner discourses', contains three chapters which each focus on a specific area of academic writing: thesis conclusions (Chapter 6, Jo Lewkowicz), shell nouns (Chapter 7, Hilary Nesi and Emma Moreton) and writing lists and tables (Chapter 8, Maria Leedham). The first of these chapters illustrates, through a report on Polish students' approaches to their thesis conclusions, the ways in which local norms and assumptions may impact on the type of English employed, bringing nuances to a hegemonic conception of academic written English. Chapter 7 offers some practical accounts of shell nouns (inanimate abstract nouns) and their role in academic texts. Drawing on the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus, the chapter compares uses of shell nouns by native and non-native speakers of English. This is a useful chapter for anyone who wants an improved understanding of the important role of shell nouns in academic discourse. Chapter 8 draws attention to disciplinary-specific uses of bulleted lists and the overuse of them by the L1 Chinese writers in the study under discussion. Needham stresses the importance of teaching 'graphic literacy' to enable students to gain control over the discourses of their field.

The third section of the book, 'Identity work and professional opportunities in academic writing', also contains three chapters. The first, Chapter 9, by Hanako Okada and Christine Pearson Casanave, discusses the difficulty of finding the right terminology or 'label' for speakers. The chapter thus rekindles an ongoing philosophical/ethical issue in applied linguistics about categories and essentialisation (e.g., Spack, 1997). Chapter 10, by Suganthi John, addresses the construction of writer identity and presents a nuanced account of the use of reporting verbs as implicit evaluations of citations. Again, this chapter offers practical information for anyone writing or teaching academic discourse. The final chapter of this section, Chapter 11, by Ramona Tang, takes up her own suggestion, given in the introduction, that ESL/EFL writers have more – or at least as much – to offer as they may

lack. This chapter thus reflects on the variety of ways in which ESL/EFL scholars can benefit from their positioning on the margins of ‘the Centre’. This is a particularly useful chapter for anyone teaching English academic writing for publication to highly marginalised scholars who can be reminded of what it is they offer the “Inner Circle” (Kachru, 1986).

The book concludes with an afterword by Theresa Lillis, a scholar noted for her significant contributions to issues facing EFL academics (e.g., Lillis & Curry, 2006, 2010). While Lillis contributes the expected commentary on the content of the book, she also problematizes many of the taken-for-granted terms and understandings within it. She draws attention, for example, to the ‘messy’ nature of language and foregrounds those chapters which problematize assumptions about terminology, about what counts as significant, about the role of language and about the positioning of ESL/EFL scholars. As she comments, contingency is an all-important term and the question of ‘whose English are we talking about?’ (p.244) should not be forgotten. Additionally, Lillis focuses on the idea of English as a networked resource accessed through a variety of means, including, for example, literacy brokers (Lillis & Curry, 2006), and not solely through individual mastery.

Overall the book provides a valuable contribution to those areas of applied linguistics concerned with issues of academic writing, with issues faced by users of English as an additional language, and with some ways in which academic English discourse norms can be made more transparent. While the book will be of particular interest to anyone involved in supporting the academic work of ESL/EFL writers, it also offers, in several chapters, valuable and practical information for writers of any background, English L1 included, who want greater insight into specific academic English discursive norms. Finally, the afterword adds a refreshingly provocative overview of some major issues of concern for those interested in some of the broader philosophical issues and assumptions which underpin what Lillis (p.238) calls English medium writing for academic purposes (EWAP).

REFERENCES

- Kachru, B. (1986). *The Alchemy of English: the spread, functions and models of non-native Englishes*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2006). Professional academic writing by multilingual scholars: Interactions with literacy brokers in the production of English-medium texts. *Written Communication*, 23, 3-35.
- Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (Eds.). (2010). *Academic writing in global context: The politics and practices of publishing in English*. New York: Routledge.
- Spack, R. (1997). The rhetorical construction of multilingual students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(4), 765-774.