B. PALTRIDGE AND S. STARFIELD, *THESIS AND DISSERTATION WRITING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE: A HANDBOOK FOR SUPERVISORS*
(LONDON: ROUTLEDGE, 2007. PP. VI, 189)

With rising numbers of international postgraduate students in English-speaking universities, supervising those for whom English is a second language (ESL) continues to invite focused discussion in the higher education literature (e.g. Ryan and Zuber-Skerritt 1999; Cadman 2000; Harman 2003; Whiteley 2004; Nilsson and Anderson 2004; McClure 2005; Strauss et al. 2003). *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language* is a timely and welcome reprieve for those supervisors grappling with the complex challenges of supervising students from linguistically diverse cultural backgrounds in what is essentially a demanding task to do well in any case. Paltridge and Starfield are keen to unsettle the notion that ESL students need be an 'additional burden' as they strive to impart greater understanding throughout of why ESL students might experience the challenges they do, and how supervisors can help them and themselves to reduce the impact of these challenges.

The early chapters draw on an extensive literature to probe key issues, such as the problem of making 'global assumptions' about the ESL cohort of writers; the differing views of 'cultural appropriateness'; a range of psycho-affective, behavioural and social issues that can inhibit effective communication; the impact of the social and cultural contexts on thesis and dissertation writing; the significance of the relationship between writers and readers (including examiners); the shaping influence of disciplinary expectations (so important for dissertation and thesis writers transferring disciplines); approaches to knowledge at different levels of study (e.g. Masters and PhD); and the potential for isolation to which ESL students can be particularly prone. Thorough exploration of these issues leads to the conclusion that 'intensive negotiation' is indeed vital for successful cross-cultural communication. The authors also introduce a key concept to which they frequently return in the remainder of the book: 'metadiscourse', which 'primarily plays the role of organizing the text for the reader and is used by the writer to interact with the reader about the content of the text' (49), a concept that in practice bedevils many ESL student writers. Many tasks are offered along the way, including the 'role perception scale', which is a simple and useful instrument to help both student and supervisor begin

an open discussion about 'their potentially differing understandings of the supervisory relationship' (37). These early chapters are a rich resource of detailed discussions, insights and applications useful for supervisors wanting further clarification, deeper understanding, and practical strategies for consolidating productive relationships with their ESL students.

In subsequent chapters, the authors fine-tune understanding of the issues involved in thesis writing, and provide numerous examples, applications and strategies for supervisors to draw on with their ESL students in the writing of a Research Proposal, the Introduction, the Literature Review, Methodology and Results chapters, Discussions and Conclusions, and the Abstract and Acknowledgements sections. In these chapters, Paltridge and Starfield scaffold tasks to allow for incremental advances in students' understanding, thus ensuring supervisors engage with their students in progressive learning. The detailed discussions, examples and applications presented by the authors throughout these chapters will serve best supervisors of students engaged in research involving data-collection and incorporating some variation of the Introduction, Materials & Methods, Results and Discussion (IMRAD) model in the macro-design of their dissertations and theses. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that there is nothing further for those supervisors of ESL students researching and writing outside these boundaries, as, for example, those doing theoretical or modelling kinds of theses that do not include empirical research. There are handy hints for supervisors to help students refine a research question, a great checklist for developing a research proposal in any research area, particularly useful tasks related to metatext – how writers talk about their text, examples of 'gap statement' verbs, reporting verbs and tense shifts in different situations of writing, and sound suggestions for writing a Literature Review. Since many ESL students (particularly PhDs) find conducting an in-depth critique of the literature difficult, discussion of this subject and the accompanying task (110) would certainly benefit from expansion beyond the limits of the IMRAD model. In deciding which tasks will be appropriate for the specific needs of their students, supervisors will also need to consider the time-pressures to which ESL students are subject as some of the recommended tasks throughout these chapters are more time-economical than others.

The authors note that a key aim of the book is to help student and supervisor 'develop a shared and accessible language for talking about thesis writing to assist in raising awareness of the typical generic structure of the thesis' (85), which is indeed a commendable aim. But the relevant application based on the 'hourglass framework' (84) may be less useful for non-IMRAD theses and dissertations. This contrasts with the seminal Swales and Feak (1994) model recommended by the authors (83) as a flexible tool for supervisors to get students thinking about typical compositional moves in dissertation

or thesis Introductions – *how* texts are put together (not what they say), whether the sample texts students are previewing conform to or depart from this model, and how and why. Supervisors can use educational aids of this type with all ESL students, and, for that matter, with students for whom English *is* the first language to unlock the perplexing mysteries of dissertation and thesis writing. I also suspect that some supervisors may not be aware of how important it is to help ESL students (and others) master practices that they themselves automatically engage in their own writing, such as the 'stance practices' (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, self-mentions) uncovered in Ken Hyland's research (Hyland 2004: 110). The authors return to these practices in later chapters to show how they work in different contexts of thesis and dissertation writing. This is yet another example of the high value of the linguistic research on which the authors draw to model many of their tasks, research that takes supervisors well beyond considerations of the grammar of the thesis, important as this is.

The discussions around Methodology, Results, Discussion and Conclusions continue to provide numerous practical examples and useful tasks in terms of structural norms and conventions, language patterns and linguistic strategies that supervisors can adopt with ESL students writing an IMRAD type thesis. There is a particularly interesting discussion of issues around ESL students and qualitative research (126–132), with the authors advising supervisors to encourage students who do take this path to keep a research diary to log on a regular basis 'what they did and why they did it, as well as any reflections, on the research process' (132); as the authors remark, diary keeping can facilitate regular writing and may even constitute data for the thesis. Paltridge and Starfield also rightly point out that, when it comes to the Discussion, students are often not aware of the necessity to 'show the relationship between the results of their study and the results of similar studies and related arguments in the published literature' (145). Many ESL students find Discussion chapters demanding to write. There are useful tasks on which supervisors can draw to help students frame the Discussion, strategies to identify steps through which a Discussion moves, the ways in which writers make claims in Discussions so as to avoid over-claiming, and for probing the organisational structure of Conclusions, as well as requisite language considerations. At the end of the book, the authors provide a briefly annotated, comprehensive list of resources, both online and print, that supervisors can draw on for further information.

More could have been made throughout *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language* of the educational value of supervisors making explicit their *tacit* knowledge of disciplinary writing, of how much students can learn from supervisors modeling their own practices in various writing contexts. It would also have been useful to have had

some dedicated discussion of joint and team-based supervision; and of how supervisors supervising large numbers of students (with an ESL mix), or groups of supervisors might build effective communities of practice through peer engagement and learning, such as directed reading and writing groups. Still, there is no doubt that this very useful handbook will certainly assist many supervisors to smooth the development of ESL students from 'interculturalism to transculturalism' (Cadman 2000: 487).

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