

Academic Writing:

The challenges of doctoral writing in another language in the humanities

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INTRODUCTION

As Hayot argues in his book *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*: "Writing is not the memorialization of ideas. Writing distils, crafts and pressure-tests ideas –it *creates* ideas" (2014:1). The process of academic writing is seen to be more integral with argumentation in humanities scholarship than other fields. Building on Bazerman (1994), Flowerdew and Li view writing in the humanities different from other disciplines in the "separation of work/content on the one hand and language/form" on the other, "where the two go hand in hand, and where language constructs reality" (2007:461).

For some time, English has been the dominant language of scholarly writing for publication (see, e.g., Ammon 2011). As a doctoral degree prepares candidates for the academy, writing in another language is a challenge that doctoral researchers in the humanities encounter. This raises the questions: How does writing in another language affect the distillation, crafting and pressure-testing of ideas? Specifically, how does writing in English as an Additional Language (EAL) affect doctoral writing in the humanities?

One thing that most academics can likely agree upon is that academic writing is much more enjoyable in the having done it than the doing it. Yet academic publications are a critical measure in evaluating job applications, promotions and research grants. For doctoral researchers, the pressure to publish in English has a "flow-on effect", which means that they often write in English just

as they are beginning to test ideas and formulate their doctoral projects (Kwan 2010). In this article, we consider research on academic writing with a focus on EAL academic writers, particularly doctoral researchers. This article examines the issues surrounding academic writing and multilingualism with a focus on how best to support these doctoral researchers. We find a lack of research on EAL writers in non-ambient environments in Europe, which should be addressed.

NATIVE SPEAKER ADVANTAGE VS. "THE MYTH OF LINGUISTIC INJUSTICE"

Many researchers have argued that the pressure to publish in English unduly disadvantages EAL writers (Flowerdew 2008; Kwan 2010; Lillis & Curry 2010; Wellington 2010; Politzer-Ahles 2020). These disadvantages include more time spent on writing, the need for and expense of translators, the lack of translators with knowledge of appropriate disciplines and academic writing conventions, anxiety, and a bias in academic reviewing.

However, in a 2016 article, Ken Hyland argues against the "crude Native vs. non-Native polarization," problematizing "native speaker advantage" and deeming "linguistic justice" in academic publishing a "myth". By examining the top five journals in a selection of subjects (biology, electrical engineering, physics, linguistics, and sociology), as well as overall publication rate, Hyland notes a shift in publication from 61.2% publications by native English speakers and 38.8% publications by EAL writers in 2000 compared to a publication rate of 43.3% for native English speakers and 56.7% for EAL writers in 2011. Hyland concludes that publica-

tion success is as high for English-first language writers as EAL and that more important indicators for publication success are collaborators and publishing experience rather than first language.

Hyland's article provoked numerous responses. Some researchers felt that Hyland missed the effort required for an article to reach submission standard. Indeed, Hyland looks at submissions of article to publication not what happens before those articles are submitted to journals (Politzer-Ahles et. al. 2016), or in Hayot's words the distillation, crafting and pressure-testing of ideas and the added cognitive load which might burden EAL writers, including doctoral researchers. Ignoring this factor is a major limitation of Hyland's (2016) study.

ACADEMIC WRITING IN THE HUMANITIES

Hyland's comparison of publication rates by English as a first language writers and EAL writers includes only one humanities discipline: linguistics. Linguistics is arguably one of the more "technical" humanities disciplines, with article sections familiar to those found in other scientific publications. What about history or literature? Is the situation with academic writing in English different for EAL writers in the humanities as opposed to other fields?

Academic writing researchers have pointed out that rhetorical differences between disciplinary cultures and languages play a larger role in the humanities and social sciences (Flowerdew 2019). In a large corpus-based study of academic writing, Hyland (2008:550) found that "about 75% of all the features which mark author visibility in a text – such as self-mention, personal evaluation and explicit interaction with the

readers...occur in humanities and social science articles." These elements require more continuous cognitive effort than the reporting of an experimental outcome as writing is an integral part of the development of the argument (see, e.g., Flowerdew & Li 2007). Moreover, such features – "self-mention, personal evaluation and explicit interaction with the readers" – differ between academic writing traditions (Pérez-Llantada 2012) and are perceived as challenges by EAL writers (Ma 2020).

Many of these disciplinary cultural and linguistic differences in the humanities and social sciences fall under the concepts of identity and voice. Identity and voice are critical yet contested concepts in the study of academic writing (e.g., Hyland 2010; Ivanič 1998, 2004; Tardy 2016). While voice and identity are sometimes used interchangeably, we understand identity to mean the understanding academics and doctoral researchers have of themselves in the wider academic community. Or as Paré (2019:81) writes of doctoral writing, "writing is identity work, and dissertation writing presents the author with some fundamental questions: who am I in this text? With what authority and freedom do I speak? With and to whom am I speaking?" Tardy (2016) summarized the body of research on voice. In her article, she outlines the complexity of voice, which has two distinct but often intermingled understandings: individualized voice, which is aligned with personal style, and social voice, which aligns with particular contexts, such as the disciplines or other communities of practice. Voice and identity are significant to many academic writers inside and outside of the humanities. While many important studies focus on identity and voice for academic writers and readers, few studies consi-

der these concepts in relation to EAL writers (Tardy 2016). One exception is Matsuda and Tardy's (2007) study of how peer reviewers construct the voice of one EAL writer.

More work can be done on how voice and identity are parsed by multilingual academic writers. Tardy (2016:260) makes a plea for more research on identity and voice that focuses on multilingual writers. As she argues, "such work will be important in understanding more about how identities and voices are constructed in the transnational contexts that are increasingly common in today's globalized world." Particularly, there is gap in the research concerning the voice and identity construction of EAL doctoral researchers (Ma 2020). Such studies might help researchers understand the increased challenges EAL writers face when simultaneously testing ideas and developing voice and identity in their EAL academic writing.

L2 DOCTORAL WRITING: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Most research to date about L2 doctoral academic writing is conducted in English speaking countries, such as Australia, the UK and the USA. In these countries, English is an ambient (surrounding) language. However, many university environments where English is not the surrounding language, such as various European and Asian universities, could contribute a wealth of research. These non-ambient environments which also include many doctoral researchers writing in English deserve consideration, particularly in disciplines where voice and identity may play more of a role, such as many humanities

disciplines. The lack of ambience potentially increases the issues outlined above.

In one of the few studies of such an environment, we asked doctoral researchers to describe their experiences with academic writing in English. From this study, two key themes emerged: deficit and commonality (Langum & Sullivan 2017). Deficit refers to the perception that EAL writers are at a disadvantage in terms of both language and academic writing skills compared to their English as a first language colleagues. Commonality refers to "the perception that writing in academic English shared the same attributes and features as academic writing in their native languages, and that their perceived weaknesses in academic writing in English reflected the same or similar weaknesses in academic writing in their native languages" (Langum & Sullivan 2017:24). While this study did not pick up on aspects of academic identity and voice, the doctoral researchers' concerns link back to the contested idea of "native speaker privilege". These findings align with a recent study of EAL doctoral researchers in an Australian university (Ma 2020). Ma (2020) found that EAL doctoral researchers felt at a disadvantage in terms of language and the time required to produce academic writing, yet that they also shared similar problems to English as a first language writers.

In another study we conducted on Norwegian doctoral researchers in education, identity and voice came to the fore (Langum & Sullivan 2020). Mid-point doctoral researchers in teacher education contributed narratives about their experiences in academic writing, primarily in English and Norwegian. From this study, it was clear that the development of an academic voice and identity was of prime im-

portance for most of these researchers. Furthermore, being an EAL writer made some doctoral researchers anxious that English acted as a filter, which created extra distance between themselves, their writing and their readers.

SUPPORTING ACADEMIC WRITING IN DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

In order to support multilingual doctoral researchers, more research is needed on multilingual writers in non-ambient environments, and how they navigate establishing their own identity and voice as they begin to distill, craft and pressure-test their project ideas. These studies would be particularly instructive in disciplines where publishing in English is less traditional but gaining traction.

Academic writing is fundamental to academic life, as well as doctoral education. Given its importance, universities and degree programmes have implemented various forms of support. Two approaches are supervision and courses in academic writing, either targeted at a general audience or particular field. Yet some academic writing courses taken by EAL doctoral researchers tend not to take into account their particular needs (Odena & Burgess 2017).

WHAT ARE SPECIFIC NEEDS FOR EAL DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS?

Academic writing courses and supervisors sensitive to the needs of EAL writers should think about relevant issues and initiate a dialogue with EAL writers. One example that has already been mentioned is a focus on academic cultures and their

different rhetorical conventions (Ma 2020). Further, we outline three potential strategies for supporting EAL doctoral researchers in the humanities.

DISCUSSION AROUND THE CHOICE OF LANGUAGE

One issue pertaining to EAL writers, for example, is the choice of language for their dissertations, i.e., whether they write in a national language or English. It is not simply a question of what is easier. Rather, doctoral researchers weigh many issues in their choice of language. On the one hand, writing in English is accessible to a wider academic audience and may open more doors for future opportunities. On the other hand, writing in English can be more difficult and take more time to hone ideas for EAL writers. Furthermore, it may close off other audiences, such as the public and policy makers. This decision is familiar to more senior academic writers in the humanities and social sciences (Li and Flowerdew 2009). Furthermore, the difficulty of translating data from one language while keeping the voice and meaning of the participants constant is a pressing concern (van Nes et al. 2010; Ho, Holloway & Stenhouse 2019). Our recent study of Norwegian doctoral researchers demonstrated that they weighed both concerns – reaching a particular audience and maintaining the authenticity of their data – in choosing the language of their dissertations (Langum & Sullivan 2020). Indeed, doctoral researchers need support in their choice "as to which languages (e.g., English vs. Spanish) or varieties of language to use (e.g., standard vs. non-standard English[es]) and how to use them when writing science for particular au-

diences...as they develop their hybrid, plurilingual research writing practices/repertoires" (Corcoran 2019:561). Seminars and discussions with supervisors and other academic advisers can support EAL doctoral researchers in navigating choice of language(s).

FOCUSING ON IDEA CONSTRUCTION RATHER THAN GRAMMAR

One strand of research argues that academic writing is "not part of the Native speaker's inheritance: it is acquired rather through lengthy formal education and is far from a universal skill" (Ferguson et al. 2011:42). While EAL doctoral researchers face specific challenges that we have outlined above, certain issues are common to all novice academic writers. In this light, supervisors and academic writing instructors can also consider that doctoral researchers may not be using language correctly, because they are coming to understand the complex ideas with which they are working. In his study of Chinese graduate students at an American university, Gao found that "the major factor" disrupting academic writing in English was "content familiarity" rather than rhetorical or grammatical features (2012:15). Many writing problems relate to research progress rather than language capacity, yet are mislabelled as proficiency errors (Bitchener & Basturkmen 2006). In this sense, academic writing is difficult for everyone. Particularly in the humanities, a focus on idea construction and argumentation rather than stylistic issues and grammar can help doctoral researchers avoid the perception of linguistic lack or disadvantage before returning to the writing for stylistic editing.

TRANSLANGUAGING

Furthermore, supervisors may be able to reduce the challenge of writing a dissertation in EAL by opening the academic writing process to translanguaging (e.g. Kaufhold 2018). Translanguaging is the use of multiple languages simultaneously. When multilingual writers translanguaging, they use their various languages as an integrated writing system without focus on which language the ideas are being written. Translanguaging has a long history in education as an approach to support learning and literacy development in multilingual students. It was first proposed in a doctoral dissertation (Williams 1994), and today research has begun to consider advanced multilingual writing (Kaufhold 2018; Pfeiffer 2019; Skein, Knospe & Sullivan 2020). Pieces of translanguaged writing are multilingual, and hence allow the doctoral researcher to use all their languages to create ideas and write without need to check the writing is in only one language. As Skein et al. (2020) pointed out, a piece of writing needs to be understood by its intended audience and a translanguaged piece of writing written in a translanguaged space is a stepping stone to the production of a monolingual EAL dissertation. By allowing translanguaging, supervisors can free up cognitive capacity for idea construction that would otherwise go to monitoring the language of the writing.

CONCLUSION

While academic writing is not easy for anyone, it is undeniable that some writers face different challenges than others. In spite of these challenges outlined above,

there are positives to being multilingual writers (Kramsch 1997; Flowerdew 2019). For example, in our study of Norwegian doctoral researchers, one researcher elaborated how developing her EAL academic writing improved clarity in her first language (Langum & Sullivan 2020). While further research is needed to explore the experience of EAL doctoral researchers writing in the humanities, one simple approach is open and honest dialogue with successful academic writers in supervisions, seminars and courses. Academic writing guru Helen Sword (2017:78) writes "of all the myths surrounding academic writing, the fallacy of effortless productivity is among the most persistent." Certainly, supervisors and academic writing courses should not perpetuate that myth.

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SUMMARY

Academic Writing: The Challenges of Doctoral Writing in Another Language in the Humanities

(Akademiskt skrivande: Utmaningar för doktorander inom humaniora som skriver på ett främmande språk)

It has often been acknowledged that English is the dominant language of scholarly publication. While the disadvantage this poses to English as an Additional Language (EAL) academics is controversial, it is clear that some senior academics and doctoral researchers perceive that EAL writing affects idea creation. This article surveys the research on EAL academic writing and the particular challenges it poses for doctoral researchers in the humanities. We argue for more support and research in this area.

Keywords: academic writing, doctoral studies, EAL, humanities.

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