

University of Hong Kong
Faculty of Education

**Second/additional language
academic literacies: a cross-
field enterprise**

30th November 2007

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Unremarkable issue

Problem:

How do you do? ... I am a student currently on the freshman level. I am going to be attend Biology 5C next year ... Although my major is in Social Science, I am consider to have Biology as my second major. I am currently attending Professor Campbell lecture. He suggested to me that maybe I should seek around to for research projects ... He suggest that maybe I should contact you to see would it be possible for you to provide me with some information. As I have understand that you are currently conducting a research on the subject of plasma, and I would like to know more about it, that is, if I am not costing any convenience. Thank you very much, and have a good day.

(Scarcella, 2003:1)

Routine normative practice

Routinized response:

Academic English is a variety or a register of English used in professional books and characterized by the specific linguistic features associated with academic disciplines. The term 'register' refers to a constellation of linguistic features that are used in a particular situational context ... Academic English tasks include reading abstracts, getting down the key ideas from lectures, and writing critiques, summaries ... It includes a wide range of genres ... I define genre as a discourse type having 'identifiable formal properties, identifiable purposes, and a complete structure ...

(Scarcella, 2003:9)

Compare: Lea and Street (1998)

Routine normative practice (Scarcella, 2003: 9)

A Description of the Linguistic Components of Academic English and Their Associated Features Used in Everyday Situations and in Academic Situations

Linguistic Components of Ordinary English	Linguistic Components of Academic English
<u>1. The Phonological Component</u>	
<p>knowledge of everyday English sounds and the ways sounds are combined, stress and intonation, graphemes, and spelling</p> <p>Examples: <i>ship</i> versus <i>sheep</i> /ʃ/ - /ʃ/ <i>sheet</i> versus <i>cheat</i> /sh/ - /ch/</p>	<p>knowledge of the phonological features of academic English, including stress, intonation, and sound patterns.</p> <p>Examples: <i>demógraphy</i>, <i>demográphic</i>, <i>cádence</i>, <i>genéric</i>, <i>casualty</i>, and <i>celerity</i></p>
<u>2. The Lexical Component</u>	
<p>knowledge of the forms and meanings of words occurring in everyday situations; <i>knowledge</i> of the ways words are formed with prefixes, roots, suffixes, the parts of speech of words, and the grammatical constraints governing words</p> <p>Example: <i>find out</i></p>	<p>knowledge of the forms and meanings of words that are used across academic disciplines (as well as in everyday situations outside of academic settings); <i>knowledge</i> of the ways academic words are formed with prefixes, roots, and suffixes, the parts of speech of academic words, and the grammatical constraints governing academic words</p> <p>Example: <i>investigate</i></p>
<u>3. The Grammatical Component</u>	
<p>knowledge of morphemes entailing semantic, syntactic, relational, phonological, and distributional properties; <i>knowledge</i> of syntax; <i>knowledge</i> of simple rules of punctuation</p>	<p>knowledge that enables ELs to make sense out of and use the grammatical features (morphological and syntactic) associated with argumentative composition, procedural description, analysis, definition, procedural description, and analysis; <i>knowledge</i> of the grammatical co-occurrence restrictions governing words; <i>knowledge</i> of grammatical metaphor; <i>knowledge</i> of more complex rules of punctuation</p>
<u>4. The Sociolinguistic Component</u>	
<p>knowledge that enables ELs to understand the extent to which sentences are produced and understood appropriately; <i>knowledge</i> of frequently occurring functions and genres</p>	<p>knowledge of an increased number of language functions. The functions include the general ones of ordinary English such as apologizing, complaining, and making requests as well as ones that are common to all academic fields; <i>knowledge</i> of an increased number of genres, including expository and argumentative text</p>
<u>5. The Discourse Component</u>	
<p>knowledge of the basic discourse devices used, for instance, to introduce topics and keep the talk going and for beginning and ending informal types of writing, such as letters and lists</p>	<p>knowledge of the discourse features used in specific academic genres including such devices as transitions and other organizational signals that, in reading, aid in gaining perspectives on what is read, in seeing relationships, and in following logical lines of thought; in writing, these discourse features help ELs develop their theses and provide smooth transitions between ideas</p>

Normative description: *in extremis*

Americans sometimes find it difficult to accept the more formal Japanese manners. They prefer to be casual and more informal, as illustrated by the universal 'Have a nice day!' American waiters have a one-word imperative 'Enjoy!' The British, of course, are cool and reserved. The great topic of conversation between strangers in Britain is the weather – unemotional and impersonal . . . (Soars and Soars 1996: 41)

Communicative competence: a Hymesian turn in ELT

Hymes (1972: 281) suggests that four empirical questions:

- 1) Whether (and to what degree) something is formally **possible**;
- 2) Whether (and to what degree) something is **feasible** in virtue of the means of implementation available;
- 3) Whether (and to what degree) something is **appropriate** (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
- 4) Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually **performed**, and what its doing entails.
[emphasis in original]

Hymes, 1994:12

[Ethnography of communication] would approach language neither as an abstracted form nor as an abstract correlate of a community, but as situated in the flux and pattern of communicative events. It would study communicative form and function in integral relation to each other.

Canale & Swain 1980s-

Recontextualizing communicative competence:

- grammatical competence
- sociolinguistic competence
- discourse competence
- strategic competence

Epistemic transformation

Ethnographic aspirations → Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Empirical research orientation → curriculum & pedagogy

The need to specify what is to be taught and learned inevitably turns research questions, which allow the possibility of both instability in existing knowledge and emergence of new knowledge, into pedagogic guidelines and principles which have to assume a degree of stability, transparency and certainty in existing knowledge. This is, of course, not a zero-sum game; it is a matter of degree ... (Leung, 2005:125)

Abstracted empiricism

Yalden (1983: 86–7):

The components [of a communicative syllabus] could be listed as follows:

1. as detailed a consideration as possible of the **purposes** for which the learners wish to acquire the target language;
2. some idea of the **setting** in which they will want to use the target language . . .
3. the socially defined **role** the learner will assume in the target language, as well as their interlocutors . . .
4. the communicative **events** in which the learners will participate . . . [emphasis in original]

Abstracted empiricism → expert authority and prescription

CLT needs analysis/assessment



ethnolinguistic insider-expert accounts of how things are done with words



CLT syllabus/curriculum

Who are the ethnolinguistic insider-experts?

Student writing

I want to study a degree in Computer Science because I am interested in the role that computers play in society now and in the future. Now-a-days each and every organisation uses IT. Currently I am studying ICT, Mathematics, Physics and Urdu which I hope will help me to be successful in Computer Science degree. Apart from studying I also have some experience of fixing computer hardware wiring problems. What I find most interesting about the computer is that it is helping humans in many aspects of life. Where will computers go in the next 15 or 20 years? What will be the reaction of humans to the increasing use of them? My ambition is to be a computer engineer either in relation to hardware problems, software problems or both. Perhaps I will be able to be involved in solving hardware design difficulties or in devising better software solutions in the areas of databases or spreadsheets . . .

An admissions tutor's response

. . . I am . . . a bit wary of kind of massive, banal, generalisations . . . OK this person is saying 'where will computers go in the next 15–20 years? . . . What I find most interesting about the computer is that it is helping humans in many aspects of life' my reaction to both of those comments is . . . big deal . . . you know . . . say something a bit more precise about you and why you want to do this course and what is it about computers which interests you in a more specific sense . . .

What's not right for the tutor

The 'public good' discourse (e.g. '...helping humans...') extolling the virtues of (depersonalized) contribution to society was, in this case, not highly rated by the tutor.

The somewhat depersonalized 'public good' discourse self did not provide sufficient authorial personal presence (despite the presence of self as author expressions such as 'My ambition is' and ' . . . I will be able to be involved in solving hardware problems ...' which are propositionally oriented towards technical problems).

What might the tutor be looking for?

The tutor's negative evaluation of these statements also indicates that certain kinds of information are preferred.

In this case more self-declarative (self as author) statements indicating personal goals and plans would be welcome (e.g. I would like to make use of my knowledge in mathematics . . .). (Interview data)

Lillis (1999, 2001)

Nadia, wanted to make use of what she learned from a previous course in her essay on:

‘Working class children are underachieving in schools. How much of this may be attributed to perceived language deficiencies?’

Nadia's experience

Nadia wrote:

Throughout this essay I will be focusing on the types of underachievers. Firstly the working class bilinguals and the misleading intelligence tests, of which bilingual children are expected to do. Secondly the working class monolinguals which are underachieving. Thirdly I will seek information on how much of this may be attributed to perceived language deficiencies. (1999:134)

Her tutor's comment:

Your beginning section moves away from essay title. Need to organize your thoughts more carefully and adhere to the essay title more clearly. (Loc.cit.)

Content Matters

KS3 History textbook: Peace and War (1993) Shepherd, C. et al, John Murray Ltd. p.44.

In 1700 Liverpool had been a small sea port with a population of 5000. In 1709 Liverpool slave traders set out on their first voyage to buy and sell slaves. By 1771 there were 106 ships a year sailing from Liverpool, which between them carried 282,000 slaves. In the 1790s Liverpool's slave trade alone accounted for fifteen percent of Britain's entire overseas trade. By 1800 Liverpool was a successful booming city of 78,000 people.

Knowledge structure analysis

Sentence

In 1700 ...	description
In 1709 ...	description
By 1771 ...	description
In the 1790s Liverpool's ...	description
By 1800 ...	description

Discourse

In1700 ... In1709 ... By 1771 ... In the 1790s Liverpool's ... By 1800 ...

↑
Sequence

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/fluviruses.htm> accessed on 9-3-2006

The Three Types of Influenza Viruses

Influenza A, B, and C

Influenza types A or B viruses cause epidemics of disease almost every winter. In the United States, these winter influenza epidemics can cause illness in 10% to 20% of people and are associated with an average of 36,000 deaths and 114,000 hospitalizations per year. Getting a flu shot can prevent illness from types A and B influenza. Influenza type C infections cause a mild respiratory illness and are not thought to cause epidemics. The flu shot does not protect against type C influenza.

Influenza type A viruses are divided into subtypes based on two proteins on the surface of the virus. These proteins are called hemagglutinin (H) and neuraminidase (N). The current subtypes of influenza A viruses found in people are A(H1N1) and A(H3N2). Influenza B virus is not divided into subtypes. Influenza A(H1N1), A(H3N2), and influenza B strains are included in each year's influenza vaccine.

Teaching Writing Approaches (based on Ivanič 2004)

Approaches	Learning to write	Teaching and assessment
Skills	Learning rules governing sound-symbol correspondence and syntactic patterns	Explicit teaching of rule-governed aspects of written language; focus on accuracy of production/reproduction
Creativity	Learning by writing on topics of interest (to the writer)	Implicit teaching drawing on language experience; focus on interesting content/style
Process	Learning the processes and the work involved in planning, drafting and revising writing	Explicit teaching and modeling of writing processes; unclear assessment focus, probably some attention to evidence of drafting and revision
Genre	Learning the need for different text types for different social purposes, and the ways language is used to produce the appropriate text/s	Explicit teaching of genres; focus on appropriateness of text types and language expressions
Social practice	Learning to write by writing in real-life (or in simulation) for specific purposes	Explicit teaching where social contexts and purposes are known; implicit teaching where the classroom is constructed to replicate an outside social environment
Sociopolitical	Learning different types of writing and learning to take a position to change or transform existing 'unjust' power relations	Explicit teaching of social and political analyses in relation to writing; focus on writing as challenge to existing power relations

The essay – essayist culture

The 'essay' is in fact a very complex package of preferred ways of argumentation, culturally sanctioned principles for content selection, subject or discipline-informed ways of using language, text format and prose. Given the generally limited amount of direct contact between students and staff, much of this staff-engendered complexity is not immediately obvious to students.

Practice of mystery

Lillis (1999, p. 143) observes that '[t]he socio-discursive space which is inhabited by student-writers and tutors . . . is predominantly monologic: it is the tutor's voice which predominates . . .'

But in a good deal of discussion on uses of language for academic purposes 'there is denial of real participants, that is, actual tutors and student-writers with their particular understandings and interests . . .' (Lillis, 1999, p. 143).

And there is evidence that tutor expectations and requirements vary within and across different disciplines (Lea and Street, 1998).

Unravelling mystery

Potential sources of difficulties for students:

Content (ideational) expectation/Discourse
(Gee, 1996)

Tutor framing of quality in 'academic writing'
— e.g. accuracy, creativity, process, genre (Ivanič, 2004)

Power differentials between student and
tutor

Academic Literacies Approach

[In addition to 'language skills']

→ ... the relationships of power, meaning making, identity that are implicit in the use of literacy practices within specific institutional settings ... it does not view literacy practices as residing entirely in disciplinary and subject based communities but examines how literacy practices from other institutions (e.g. government, business, university bureaucracy etc) are implicated in what students need to learn and do ... (Lea & Street, 2006:369)

Situated ESL-Academic Literacies

