

L1 and L2 Approaches to Academic Writing at a Canadian University

Jennifer MacDonald

@Jen_Mac_Donald // jennifermacdonald@dal.ca // Slides: jennifermacdonald.ca



Academic Writing Instruction for Multilingual Students: A Patchwork

- L1 Approaches
 - Composition
 - Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
 - Writing in the Disciplines (WID)
 - L2 Approaches
 - ESL/EAL
 - English for (Specific) Academic Purposes
 - Discipline-specificity? Criticality?
 - Mainstreaming multilingual students
 - Sheltered sections/tutorials for multilingual students
- Credit-bearing courses
 - Non-credit bearing courses, workshops, drop-ins
 - Required courses
 - Optional or “suggested” courses
 - Requirements vary from program to program, department to department, sometimes student to student

Examination of: Institutional goals

Course goals

Teaching practice

Student experience

Examination of an L1 and an L2 Writing Course

- **Student Population:**

Particular group of 2+2 economics students take a WID course (Writing for the Sciences) and a general-skills EAP course (Academic Writing and Research Skills) concurrently in 2nd semester in Canada every year

- **Research question:**

What is the nature of the teaching and learning experience in the WID and EAP courses in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and learning community?

- **Semi-structured interviews:** 4 students, 4 instructors/teaching assistants

- **Document analysis:** course outlines and descriptions from the two courses

- **Thematic analysis:**

Analysis of discourses, attitudes and beliefs, and behaviours from student and teacher accounts and documents

Theme 1: Academic Socialization

- **Focus on ‘showing the ropes/learning the ropes’ of academic communities(s); focus on linguistic, discourse and behavioural norms and expectations**
- **Student desire and appreciation for this socialization process**

Curriculum Goals and Objectives

Emphasis on initiation culture of academic/scientific writing

Discipline specificity and genre

Grammar, punctuation, formatting

Research, referencing and citation

Academic integrity

Pedagogy

“Tough Love”

Norm-focused/prescriptive approach to language; accuracy

Preference for mainstreaming of multilingual writers

Theme 2: Development and Transformation

- **Focus on moving ‘beyond black and white’ of language norms and didactic instructional methods**
- **Students experiencing development or transformation**

Curriculum Goals and Objectives

Self-awareness and self-development

Ownership of language and learner autonomy

Pedagogy

“Safe Space”

Sliding scale for marks

Socio-literate approach to texts and language (Johns, 1997)

Communicative competency

Group work

Preference for sheltered sections/courses for multilingual writers

Johns, A.(1997). *Text, role, and context: Developing academic literacies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

What's interesting: Themes 1 & 2

Divergence from literature on the themes of academic socialization and pragmatism

- **Within L1/L2 writing literature:**

Different “cultures of writing” (Atkinson and Ramanathan, 1995)

L2 writing: pragmatic “strategic” approach, emphasis on “workperson-like prose” and communication (p. 559-560).

L1 writing: “developmental” approach, focus on rhetorical effectiveness, with an “emphasis at the content level on complexity of thought and critical ‘insight’” (p. 560)

- **Within EAP literature:** Critical vs. Pragmatic vs. Critical-Pragmatic EAP

- **My study:** Presence of themes didn't fall along course lines. Both themes were present in interview accounts for both courses, from students as well as teachers.

Atkinson, D., & Ramanathan, V. (1995). Cultures of Writing: An Ethnographic Comparison of L1 and L2 University Writing/Language Programs. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(3), 539–568. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588074>

What's interesting? Themes 1 & 2

However:

- **BIG gap between documents and interview data:**

- Course descriptions and course outlines contained only thematic elements related to academic socialization
- This contrasts with interview accounts of these courses

Why this gap?

- Neo-liberal higher education environment: language work is viewed in **instrumental terms that emphasize the immediate and pragmatic value of academic writing** study, such as improved marks in other courses, etc.
- **Understandable** that instructors document the aspects of the courses that are **most highly valued** administration, institutions, students

Theme 3: Unmet Expectations

• Teachers' expectations:

- **Frustration when students didn't go 'beyond black and white':** show learner autonomy, ownership over the language, "leave comfort zone", interact in English with other students and outside class, etc.
- This betrays teachers' **underlying assumptions of how language is acquired**, and how academic socialization takes place.
- **Mismatch:** these expectations weren't included on course outlines

Students' expectations:

- **Initially expected directive, norm-focused teacher behavior** (correction, marks, etc.)
 - Disappointed, confused when teachers used developmental, transformative pedagogies
- Also: in both courses, students wanted **more discipline specificity in economics.**
 - Scope of "discipline": science vs. economics

A Few Recommendations

- **Discipline Specificity**
 - How much? Does institution's/instructor's idea of 'discipline-specific' align with students'?
- **Maximize Course Outlines and Course Descriptions**
 - Alignment of course content with descriptions and course outlines to better represent what will happen in course. Make assumptions re: behavior and values and your view of language development explicit.
- **To instructors: resist urge to minimize language work to strictly pragmatic outcomes**
 - Contributes to a reductionist “technicisation of language” and the “emaciation of the development of academic language proficiency as an intellectual challenge more complex and valuable than its short-term instrumental purpose” (Turner, 2004, p. 95)

Turner, J. (2004). Language as academic purpose. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 3(2), 95–109.

Conclusion

- This is but a single case at one Canadian institution.
- My objective was to shed light on the discrepancies that can exist between institutional objectives (or lack thereof), course objectives, teaching practice and student experience.

• Thank you!

- jennifermacdonald@dal.ca
- Twitter: @Jen_Mac_Donald

References

- Atkinson, D., & Ramanathan, V. (1995). Cultures of Writing: An Ethnographic Comparison of L1 and L2 University Writing/Language Programs. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(3), 539–568. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588074>
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