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## ABSTRACT

These selected papers from the First Conference on Tertiary Literacy focus on communication across differences of culture and discipline in Australian universities. Many of the papers have resulted from cooperation between applied linguists and specialist lecturers and describe cooperative models of literacy education based on interdisciplinary partnerships. Keynote addresses include "Disciplinary and Cultural Perspectives on Student Literacy" (I.Reid) and "Communicating Within Cultures, Communicating Across Cultures, Communicating Between Cultures" (A.Liddicoat). A colloquium on intercultural variation in academic communication includes papers by Andy Kirkpatrick, Lesley Farrell, Gillian Ferguson, Anthony Liddicoat, and Zosia Golebiowski. Other papers include: (1) "Providing Scaffolding for Theses Preparation in Computer and Mathematical Sciences (P.Cerone and G.Caruso); (2) "Never Say 'I'? The Writer's Voice in Essays in the Humanities" (K.Chanock); (3) "Making Sense: Cross-Cultural Variation in the Organization of Academic Texts by Taiwanese and Australian Undergraduate Students" (J.Couchman); (4) "The Teaching of Academic Discourse" (M.Elliott); (5) "Promoting Language Skills through Collaboration between Content Lecturers and Language Specialists" (R.Hallett); (6) "Between Logic and Rhetoric: Advance and Complication in the Teaching of Reading Comprehension" (D.den Hartog); (7) "Developing Critical Literacy for Nursing and Health Science" (M.Harvie and others); (8) "EAP: Making Risk-taking in Academic Writing Less Risky for International Students" (B.Hird); (9) "Literacy, Culture and Difference: Feedback on Student Writing as Discursive Practice" (M.Keech); (10) "Writing Expository Essays in Chinese. Chinese or Western Influences?"

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(A.Kirkpatrick); (11) "The Development of Communication Skills in Undergraduate Health Professional Education" (R.Ladyshewsky and E.Gotjamanos); (12) "An Applied Linguist Reads Engineering" (R.L. Davies) and (13) "Language Characteristics of the Examination Essays by Dental Students" (R.L.Davies); (14) "Cross-Disciplinary and Discipline-Specific Discourse Features in Student Academic Writing" (S.Kaldor and others); (15) "You Only Have to Humiliate Yourself: Discursive Practices in a First-Year 'Practical Legal Skills' Course" (R.Maclean); (16) "Learning to Manage? Managing to Learn? Reading Frames in Business Education" (I.Reid and D.Mulligan); (17) "Another Country: Non-Aboriginal Tertiary Students' Perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples" (J.Ryan); (18) "The Report and the Essay: Are We Muddling Science and Engineering Undergraduates by Asking Them to Write in Two Different Genres?" (H.Silyn-Roberts); (19) "Cultural Differences Within 'Western' and 'Eastern' Education" (M.Spizzica); (20) "Advanced Learners' Literacy in Japanese Literature" (M.Takeuchi and E.Tanaka); (21) "Research Management: Discipline Specific Discourse and Supervisor/Researcher Interactions" (L.Wilkins and F.Symons); (22) "Native Speakers' Attitudes towards Sales Letters and Implications for Teaching Modern Standard Chinese" (Z.Yunxia); and (23) "Literacy Needs for Engineering Numeracy" (K.Yasukawa). (Contains approximately 375 references.) (BF)

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# Academic Communication across Disciplines and Cultures

ED 414 823

## Selected Proceedings of the First National Conference on Tertiary Literacy: Research and Practice

### Volume 2

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# Academic Communication across Disciplines and Cultures

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Selected Proceedings of the  
First National Conference on Tertiary Literacy:  
Research and Practice  
Volume 2

edited by  
Zofia Golebiowski and Helen Borland

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## Erratum

Paragraph 3, page ix of volume 2, starting “This volume opens with plenary presentation by Richard Baldauf...” should be deleted and replaced by the following paragraph:

This volume opens with plenary presentations by Ian Reid and Anthony Liddicoat, followed by papers comprising the Colloquium on Intercultural Variation of Academic Communication by Andy Kirkpatrick, Lesley Farrell, Gillian Ferguson, Zosia Golebiowski and Anthony Liddicoat. Reid’s paper calls for support for principles of cross-cultural education in tertiary institutional policies and for more attention to differences in disciplinary demands. Liddicoat discusses differences and similarities of academic prose in humanities and hard sciences. The deliberations of the Colloquium focus on the questions whether there are significant differences in the way knowledge is transmitted within different cultural and educational traditions and whether there are disciplines in which the disciplinary norms and practices override cultural differences.

# Introduction

The First National Conference on Tertiary Literacy: Research and Practice was held from 14 to 16 March 1996 at Victoria University of Technology. About 270 academics from Australia and overseas took part in the Conference's deliberations and shared their tertiary literacy experiences. The Conference examined the role of literacy as a foundation for knowledge acquisition and dissemination, and, thus, as a major factor influencing academic success of tertiary students. It addressed the question of responsibilities of higher education institutions for tertiary literacy and provided a national and, in many cases, international perspective on tertiary literacy and its reflection in the quality of university learning and teaching.

The Conference's call for papers asked for contributions within four main themes: *policy and practice of tertiary literacy, inter-cultural variation of academic communication, discipline specific discourses and research English*. The papers selected for these proceedings have been divided into two major groups: Policy and Practice of Tertiary Literacy in Volume 1, and Academic Communication across Disciplines and Cultures in Volume 2. However, the division of papers into these two volumes is to some extent arbitrary, as the practical models and applied knowledge provided by many papers spread across the themes.

This volume opens with plenary presentations by Richard Baldauf, Lesley Parker, Barbara Kamler and Terry Threadgold. Baldauf views literacy from an equity perspective, reviews existing tertiary literacy policies or efforts towards their formulation, and presents strong arguments for the introduction of literacy policies in all Higher Education institutions. Parker presents an example of what appears to be the most comprehensive institutional framework for the development of communicative competence introduced in an Australian university, while Kamler and Threadgold analyse the discourses and cultures of postgraduate pedagogy.

Many papers in Volume 2 have resulted from cooperation between applied linguists and specialist lecturers. They describe cooperative models of literacy education, based on interdisciplinary partnerships. There seems to be a general agreement that success of tertiary literacy programs can only be established through collaborative approaches, with language and literacy academics and academics from other disciplines meeting half-way and creating a pedagogical dialogue.

Papers in this volume provide multiple examples of programs and case studies, working with international students and local non-English speaking background (NESB) students. They stress the need for tertiary pedagogy to recognise the linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of students and call for the creative utilisation of bilingual skills and cultural resources which NESB students bring to the academy.

Due to a variety of publication and editorial problems, as well as the large number of papers submitted for consideration, these proceedings appear a little later than initially anticipated. I apologise to all Conference participants, as well as those who were not able to attend the Conference but ordered the proceedings, for having to wait for their appearance. As indicated to presenters when papers were requested for submission to the Conference proceedings, to limit the time lag and production costs, in most cases, the papers are published with minimum editing. The proceedings do not include all papers presented at the Tertiary Literacy Conference. Unfortunately, because of space constraints, we were forced to make some difficult decisions about which of the submitted papers to select.

*Zosia Golebiowski*  
*Conference Convenor*  
Melbourne, December, 1996.

# Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Tertiary Literacy Conference Reference Committee and various experts in Tertiary Literacy for their assistance in the process of the Conference organisation. I would particularly like to acknowledge Doug Absalom, Richard Baldauf, Brigid Ballard, Helen Borland, Kate Chanock, Wally Evans, Mark Garner, Susan Kaldor, Barbara Kamler, Andy Kirkpatrick, Jane Madden, Petre Santry and Terry Threadgold. Without their generous help and valuable advice the Conference would not have been the success it was.

I wish to thank the Conference sponsors: David Lawson on behalf of the VUT Faculty of Human Development, Liz Collins from Victoria University Equity and Social Justice Department, Ron Toomey from Victoria University Department of Education, Rosa McKenna, on behalf of National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, and Helen Borland from Victoria University Department of Communication and Language Studies. I would also like to acknowledge Grace Pulis and Kim Borg for their invaluable administrative assistance and Phil McCluskey for his patient typesetting revisions.

I am indebted to the Conference presenters for submitting their work for this collection. The success of any conference is primarily the result of the quality of the presentations and informal interactions of conference participants. My thanks are wholeheartedly extended to all who attended, and especially to those who presented papers on such a broad range of interesting topics. I trust these proceedings will make a valuable contribution to disseminating research and practice in Tertiary Literacy in Australia and internationally.

*Zosia Golebiowski*

# Disciplinary and Cultural Perspectives on Student Literacy

**Ian Reid**

*Division of Humanities, Curtin University of Technology*

What we refer to as “tertiary student literacy” involves two sets of complex issues that are sometimes considered in isolation from each another but need to be considered together because of their intricate interrelations. One of them concerns the various ways in which expectations about literate communication are inflected by different academic disciplinary norms. The other one concerns the extent to which cross-cultural factors may be affecting the literacy difficulties faced by some tertiary students.

An ambitious national research project on this topic is now under way, spanning four universities and funded for 1995-96 by the Australian Research Council. “Framing Student Literacy: Cross-Cultural Aspects of English Communication Skills in Australian University Settings” comprises a co-ordinated set of investigations, with each of the four participating universities (Curtin, Edith Cowan, Macquarie and UWA) concentrating on a different aspect of the topic. This ensures that the inquiry as a whole can cover a comparative range, taking in different disciplinary contexts, postgraduate as well as undergraduate programs, and students from both native-speaker and non-native-speaker backgrounds.

The paper will outline some of the particular aspects of literacy practices that are being investigated in this project.

## **IS ANYTHING AMISS ?**

How do we *know* that the topic of this conference refers to a substantial problem in our universities? The evidence may seem obvious. Doesn't everybody agree in complaining about the level of literacy among most students these days?

Apparently not. Among students themselves, by the time they graduate, the number who think that their skills in written communication have not been improved by their degree studies is only one in seven. Those figures come from the latest round of the national Course Experience Questionnaire survey, based on responses from nearly 70,000 graduates across all programs (Ainsley & Long 1995:6). Nevertheless you might argue that *some* improvement is the least that can be expected, and perceptions of improvement tell us nothing about whether the literacy standard achieved is adequate. Perhaps students tend to be too easily

satisfied, because their tertiary education has failed to acquaint them with proper norms of advanced literacy in the wider community. Perhaps the entry level for tertiary institutions is often so low that students are bound to remain below par when they leave.

Actually most of those who teach in universities do express general dissatisfaction with the written language skills of most of those they teach. This was the finding of a world-wide survey of 20,000 academics not long ago (reported in *Campus Review* in 1992). And Australian employers are even more dissatisfied than academics with the communicative competencies of graduates. A report by the Higher Education Council (1992), drawing on a survey by the Business Higher Education Round Table, shows that employers attach the highest importance of all to written and oral communication, yet academics rank this only fifth among desirable skills.

What employers ask universities to provide above all else is better attention to students' literacy skills. While I don't have any international statistics on this, there is no reason to think the complaints are heard only in this country. Certainly, Australian business leaders and professional organisations are clear and consistent about their priorities. To quote just a small sample of public statements culled from newspapers in the last couple of years, the CEO of one industrial organisation says that "business wants university graduates with literacy skills and liberal minds"; the national recruitment manager for the Institute of Chartered Accountants says "employers don't want number-crunchers ... they want people with all-round skills ... able to communicate well" (cf. ICAA 1994); the public affairs director for the Institution of Engineers lists "communication skills" among the general abilities expected from an engineering education; and the Association of Graduate Employers, having surveyed 150 of the largest public and private employers, has found that the most commonly perceived deficiency in the quality of graduates is in the area of written English (Illing 1994).

Then isn't it clear that "tertiary literacy" is a problem in Australian universities? Well, not exactly *a* problem. Rather, it's a knotty tangle of *several* large problems, and the different strands that have been caught up together need at least to be separately identified so that we know what variety of things we are talking about in a conference such as this.

When the different groups I've mentioned refer to "communication skills" or "literacy", what do they actually *mean*? That's not always easy to interpret. But I can tell you, for a start, what *I* mean. With regard to literacy in general, leaving aside for the moment particular features of literacy practices in tertiary institutions, here are my own four main principles, drawn from what I have stated elsewhere on this subject (Reid 1993).

## LITERACY EDUCATION: BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. Properly conceived, literacy is not just another important component of desirable knowledge, nor just one competency among others. It is the prime foundation for acquiring and using knowledge. It is the competency that underlies



and secures all major competencies. It is the very means by which we can live and work as interactive social beings, and participate fully in our culture. Through the written word more substantially than through other forms of communication, we not only apprehend and construct meanings, we also circulate and retrieve meanings. As this can involve several cognitive and communicative tasks, the term “literacy” does not have a simple, fixed, tangible referent. While we all recognise that it corresponds to a cluster of capacities and activities in the general area of reading and writing, we do not always remember that these need to be differently defined according to changing circumstances. Nevertheless it is true that, persisting through all technological transformations, literacy remains the central sign system of our culture.

2. In the phrase made familiar by Rosie Wickert (1989), there is “no single measure” for assessing whether a person is competently literate. Elaborate attempts have been made to construct competency rating scales that will indicate stages of language skill development (e.g. Griffin et al. 1990). Such scales encounter strong criticism. For instance, it has been remarked that “what [people] need to fulfil their many literacy roles ... is perhaps too diverse to be measured. Their literacy development (and occasionally its decay) operates in too many different contexts ... to be captured meaningfully by a discrete point scale, however carefully these points are described” (Withers 1990: 67).

3. On the other hand it would be quite unfair to suggest that the wish to establish competency standards indicates necessarily a narrow understanding of literacy or a naive adherence to any single measure of competency. There are in fact some clear and sensible statements by rating scale researchers about different levels of literate behaviour. For example, Griffin et al. (1990:60) explicitly recognise the importance of differentiating between three kinds of competency:

- (i) the basic capacity to use written language as a reader or writer, enabling literate individuals to gain at least initial access to various ways of communicating and acquiring information;
- (ii) the reliable exercise of particular literate skills required for a particular purpose, such as a job which can only be performed adequately if one knows how to interpret complex prose;
- (iii) the confident command of a range of higher-order skills involving critical and cultural understanding, a substantial degree of control over the power of words and a consequent ability to work towards improvements in quality of life for oneself and others.

4. One basic thing that profiles and scales are likely to miss is the distinction between literate capacities and literate habits. Merely being able to read and write is nothing unless that potentiality is activated and continuously renewed. It has been suggested that “aliteracy” — literacy without a context of current use — is on the rise in our society (Maushart 1991). Reduced exercise of reading capacities is part of this, though it is also noteworthy how seldom students now write anything much in the ordinary course of events: they have more access to

telephones, more opportunities for personal mobility and so forth, and their cultural environment no longer seems as print-focused as it was for previous generations. Yet this apparent movement away from writing is largely illusory, especially given the enormous importance of the written word for electronic communication, bringing a whole new vocabulary and grammar. Against this background, the prime task for teachers at any level of the education system is to assist the emergence of competent human beings who will be motivated to continue using and refining throughout their lives the potential skills they acquire. It is vital that they come to regard "literacy" as an ability to use resourcefully, in specific situations, the written language system through which knowledge is most fully accessible in our own society. Beyond the access threshold, literacy becomes situation-specific and relative; and accordingly it needs to be used and adapted and extended continuously. To be effectively literate is not only to have gained a certain competency in reading and writing, but also to go on exercising the habits, attitudes and values that equip a person to act on the language rather than be acted on by it.

### TERTIARY LITERACY

The great importance of ensuring that students learn how to handle the written language well for a variety of academic and other purposes should not be in doubt as far as people at this conference are concerned, despite the fact that academics generally place it only fifth on the list of desirable skills for graduates. At any rate, making the achievement of higher levels of tertiary literacy more than just a pious hope is an especially difficult challenge for the modern university because the nature of the student population is much more diverse than it used to be, and so is the curriculum.

People now come to tertiary studies from many different educational backgrounds, family backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds. Their socio-cultural attitudes vary greatly. Their academic aspirations vary greatly. And the programs they study also vary greatly: it's no longer the case that almost every undergraduate selects from a limited number of BA and BSc courses or builds on an arts or science foundation for one of the few professional degrees that used to be available. Degrees have proliferated and in most universities have become more compartmentalised and specialised.

While the general nature of changes in the tertiary sector is too familiar to need emphasis for the present audience, I'd suggest that we don't yet know enough in detail about the literacy issues arising from two aspects of those changes: (i) the cultural composition of the student body, in which so many now have a primary language other than English, and (ii) the current range of pedagogic practices in various disciplines, which may attach different values to a high level of competence in reading and writing.

## THE MULTICULTURAL STUDENT POPULATION

Community expectations about literacy skills are apparently at odds with those of many academics. Academic expectations in turn are apparently at odds with the language behaviour of many students from non-traditional, particularly non-English-speaking, backgrounds. (The following remarks draw on a previously published paper of mine: Reid 1995.) Although the composition of the tertiary student population in all states is increasingly multicultural, the consequences of this demographic transformation are seldom recognised adequately either in the formulation and implementation of university policies or in classroom practices.

Students whose native language is not English are now thought to comprise up to one-quarter of the university population in some states. At least one-third of that group comes from overseas, mainly from Asia (Kalantzis 1993, Trent 1993). Most have considerable bilingual skills and bring rich linguistic potentialities to what they study. But not only do Australian universities usually fail to draw in a creative way on those resources to enhance the scope for cultural exchanges across the whole learning community, they also often fail to provide adequate support — inside or outside the classroom — for students whose own first-language literacy practices differ significantly from those that are normative in Australian academic settings. More precise information is required about the extent to which cross-cultural factors may be affecting the literacy difficulties of some tertiary students.

A recent government-sponsored publication called *First Year on Campus* (Innes & James 1995) gives anecdotal evidence of concern by academic staff about lack of student preparedness for tertiary study (e.g. reading and writing skills) and about student attitudes (e.g. heavy reliance on teachers for answers rather than willingness to pose their own questions). The same research found significant differences between two groups of first-year students, Australian-born and SE Asian-born, with regard to general perceptions of their studies: “Australian-born students were more likely to be enjoying the intellectual challenge of their subject, finding their subjects interesting, and receiving satisfaction from studying. [On the other hand] ... there was little difference between those two groups in academic application — the scale which probed whether students worked consistently and were motivated to study. The differences in the workload scale were quite striking however, with SE Asian born students finding the workload more pressing here than at home” (79). And yet the percentage of SE Asian-born students who said they had difficulty adjusting to the style of teaching was only 8% more than Australian-born students (34). And another recent publication reports that “success at study for non-English speaking background students is comparable to students from English speaking backgrounds. Re-enrolment rates for NESB students are much higher than those of other students” (HEC 1995:12). This is a complicated and incomplete picture.

## THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL LITERACY

A recent Australian book, collecting several essays under the title *Reinventing Literacy: The Multicultural Imperative*, makes no bones about emphasizing the political dimension of this whole topic. Its editorial introduction states forthrightly that “the purpose of literacy is cultural literacy” and that “cultural literacy is what gives a nation-community its identity, its cohesiveness” (Myers 1995:xi), going on to insist that in Australia today this cohesion must nevertheless embrace a variety of cultural traditions. But some of the difficulties of doing so are discussed plainly in the first essay of that book, Colin Bourke’s account of “The Politics of Aboriginal Literacy.” Bourke remarks that “literacy in English for Aboriginal people is a two-edged sword. English is not culturally neutral.... There are enormous dangers to the future cultural life of Aboriginal people in adopting the English language pathway to tertiary education, but there appears to be no other way” (Bourke 1995:6-7).

As soon as we do more than scratch the surface of tertiary literacy, it becomes very clear that questions of cultural value lie beneath. If those of us who teach in universities can be fully alert to the culture-specific assumptions that frame our own approach to reading and writing, we’ll be better prepared to understand some of the quite different assumptions that many of our students, for their part, bring to their work from other cultures. To mention just one relevant research paper from overseas, Hinkel (1994) shows that discourse traditions influenced by Confucian and Taoist values lead nonnative English speakers to interpret texts quite differently from native speakers. Rhetorical criteria associated with western logic, such as clarity, specificity, supporting argument and relevance, often seem completely alien to many whose reading and writing habits tend to be regarded in our universities as problems of literacy at the functional level.

I know that at least one research project exploring some of these issues is under way, because I’m involved in it. Spanning four universities and funded by the ARC, “Framing Student Literacy: Cross-Cultural Aspects of English Communication Skills in Australian University Settings” comprises a co-ordinated set of investigations, with a different aspect of the topic being handled by each of the four participating universities: Curtin, Edith Cowan, Macquarie and Western Australia. This ensures that the inquiry as a whole has a comparative range, covering different disciplinary contexts, postgraduate as well as undergraduate programs, and students from both non-English-speaking and English-speaking backgrounds. We are focusing on both reading and writing skills, and will also consider their relation to oral communicative practices. At this conference, some aspects of the work in progress are being presented in papers by Susan Kaldor, Michael Herriman and Judith Rochecouste, by Andy Kirkpatrick, and by Denise Mulligan and myself.

## RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Previous published work on the general topic of tertiary literacy in Australia

has been patchy. Some recent discussions of English for academic purposes in Australian universities still barely mention non-native-speakers or cross-cultural issues. Despite the fact that general relationships between linguistic communication and cultural context are well understood at a theoretical level, it remains true nevertheless that much research in discourse interpretation “operates within a specific cultural frame”, as Chris Candlin observed some time ago (Candlin 1978). Ethnographers and linguists such as Michael Clyne (1988) are addressing this problem. Yet as Vijay Bhatia (1993) remarks, while “cross-cultural variation in spoken interaction has become a well-established area of discourse study, very little has been published in the case of written genres.”

The importance of the topic has been emphasised by some Australian writers on literacy, notably Freebody and Luke 1990, Hedrick & Holton 1990, Pauwels 1990, and Ballard & Clanchy 1991. What we lack is a comprehensive study of its intricacies. Cross-cultural aspects of English communication skills in Australian university settings, and their variations across different fields of study, have never been investigated on a large enough scale to reveal definitively the larger patterns. Instead, we are left with a multitude of issues that now need to be pursued in a co-ordinated way.

Questions about what teachers expect are particularly pressing. For instance, how common is the expectation that students from overseas will learn on their own to adjust their learning habits and literacy practices to an Australian academic environment? Is it generally assumed that students who are non-native-speakers of English should, by their own efforts, just “keep up” with native-speaking students in reading and writing for the same course? How widespread, and how effective, is the practice of establishing dialogue between staff and students to delineate their respective responsibilities regarding literacy issues? How explicitly do teachers indicate the literacy conventions that are normative in academic culture? Are they knowledgeable enough to do so?

## DIFFERENT DISCIPLINARY DEMANDS

Other questions that need precise answers concern different disciplinary demands. How distinctive, for instance, are the particular literacy norms of scientific courses? Is a student likely to encounter literacy-related difficulties earlier in humanities and social science courses than in other courses, insofar as the former tend to present texts, theories and controversies in which linguistic issues may be fundamental?

Perhaps we should step back further, to pose a more general question. Accustomed though we are to the notion of an academic discipline, can we say exactly what it is? Basil Bernstein gives a useful answer in simple terms: a discipline is a set of practices through which students are “learning to work *within* a received frame.... [It] means accepting a given selection, organisation, pacing and timing of knowledge realised in the pedagogical frame” (Bernstein 1971:214). In any discipline or field of study, certain ways of framing knowledge

will be associated with preferred forms of communication. For example researchers have found that, in the physics community, experimentalists favour exchanging information orally rather than reading written material, while theorists go more for written information; and a similar distinction apparently holds across the broader groupings of physicists and chemists: physicists generally pay more attention than chemists to informal sources of locating information such as conversation and correspondence (Becher 1989:81).

Until now there has not been much noteworthy investigation of the assumptions that underlie language-related aspects of coursework requirements for different fields of university study. Few researchers have looked closely at what a given group of students and teachers expect with regard to the learning of particular communication skills needed to acquire, evaluate and convey information in their discipline. Little seems to be known about the relative emphasis usually given in any subject area of higher education to different kinds of reading compared with different kinds of writing, or indeed to both those aspects of literacy compared with oral uses of language.

### FRAME ANALYSIS

Bernstein's definition of an academic discipline, just quoted, uses the metaphor of the frame. This is also a reference point for the multi-university investigation that I mentioned earlier. The research method known as "frame analysis" (Goffman 1974), which will be discussed briefly in the paper that Denise Mulligan and I give tomorrow, is increasingly being used in several fields including linguistics and the sociology of education. Recent book titles such as *Framing in Discourse* (Tannen 1993) and *Framing and Interpretation* (MacLachlan & Reid 1994) indicate its currency.

One of the basic principles of this approach is that appropriate interpretation presupposes an ability to interpret the framing devices (linguistic and paralinguistic) which convey metessages. Differences of socio-cultural background can result in a failure to recognise such cues, or in a mismatch of frames. The framing expectations that students themselves bring to the texts they read or write in academic settings may be an impediment in some cases. Since framing is often signalled indirectly, what we take to be poor literacy performance may indicate in many cases not a difficulty at the functional level but a difficulty in recognising the metacommunicative frames in a particular situation, perhaps because they have not been articulated explicitly enough by teachers.

### INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Whatever the eventual findings of our project, they can hardly guarantee that academic literacy practices will become more enlightened. Around any pedagogic situation there is always a framework of institutional policies, and if those policies do not include specific support for principles of cross-cultural education we should expect to see only the most gradual and sporadic

incorporation of appropriate perspectives into what is taught and learned. A paper at this conference by my colleague Maria Fiocco will be examining matters of institutional policy.

When developing guidelines and requirements for cross-cultural education, as Curtin University has done, an institution needs to be mindful of several subtle forms of resistance, some of these under the sign of pluralistic tolerance. In a recent case study of literacy policies and practices in Aboriginal education, Christine Walton remarks that the rhetoric of respecting “cultural difference” can sometimes be co-opted paternalistically, albeit with good intentions, to justify the continuation of disadvantage to minority groups. Instead of accepting a responsibility to provide equitable educational services while building on existing cultural and linguistic knowledge, some administrators are content, she suggests, to rely on “the discourse of ‘choice’ as an explanation of different outcomes” and thus to lapse into a “benevolent inertia” that leaves some groups with no genuinely expanded options (Walton 1993).

The details of a cross-cultural education policy will be specific to the institution's particular mission, to the ethnic composition of its student and staff population, and to the community that it serves. But certain principles should be fundamental, and one is that all students, irrespective of their cultural background, have a right to equitable treatment. It follows that staff are obliged to ascertain and value the various linguistic resources of their students, and to adapt their teaching practices accordingly. It also follows that adequate support needs to be provided to non-native speakers of English so that they can attain the proficiency needed to succeed in their studies.

Once such a policy becomes not only formally adopted by an institution but also widely known among its academic community, and accompanied by the dissemination of relevant research findings, surely pedagogic benefits will follow. Once tertiary literacy is seen not just as a student problem but also as a staff problem, there is some prospect for real progress. Once we have accepted the necessity for a cross-cultural perspective, once we have understood how reading is culturally framed, once we have learned to analyse the use of written genres embedded in literacy events, once we have mapped the differences between native-speaker and non-native speaker groups of learners — it will be possible for us to develop better curricula, better study materials and better learning strategies.

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# Communicating within Cultures, Communicating across Cultures, Communicating between Cultures

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Learning to communicate in the tertiary context especially at postgraduate level, is an initiation into a specialist discourse community. Each discourse community has its own valued texts and norms of communication which are determined both by the communicative needs of the discourse community and by the patterns of communication found in the particular culture of the writers. Native speakers are assumed to have access to the norms of their particular culture and typically enter into the discourse community through a process of socialization with very little explicit teaching. Non-native speakers learning to produce specialist texts in a second or foreign language may however receive explicit teaching focusing on the forms of the texts they will be required to write. This teaching and much of the research in the area of Languages for Specific Purposes, focuses on the relationship between the communicative demands of the discourse community and the language used in composing specialist texts. Less attention is paid to the fact that these texts are themselves also highly culturally contexted. The non-native speaker is therefore required to produce texts not only for the discourse community but also for the target culture. As such s/he is involved in a cross cultural exercise when composing a text in which the first culture the target culture and the discourse community may be in tension. In order to resolve this tension the second language writer needs to find his/her own voice between the two cultures - to reconcile what s/he thinks important with what the target culture expects. The writer needs an awareness of the native speaker norms, and an understanding of the values and expectations of the target culture but at the same time needs to be able to integrate his/her own culture with the target culture to produce texts which are satisfying both to the non-native speaker and to the native speaker discourse community.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of writing in academic disciplines has received a great deal of attention recently both for native speakers and for non-native speakers. There has, however, been little emphasis on the similarities and differences between the experience of native speakers and non-native speakers in acquiring tertiary level literacy skills. This paper aims to address the issue of learning to write specialist texts within the context of tertiary literacy, especially, but not exclusively, in post-graduate education. It will examine the experiences of both native speakers and non-native speakers and this is captured in the title. Communicating within a

culture is what happens when a native speaker of a particular language enters into the specialist discourse community using that language. Communicating across cultures is the task which faces the non-native speaker when s/he has to learn to communicate in a specialist community in another language. Communicating between cultures is the aim – finding of a niche within the specialist community in which the first language and second language cultures are valued in a balanced fashion.

The paper begins with the position that language use in a group is a form of cultural behaviour and in discussing the communicative purpose of texts, it is evident that there is a strong role for socio-culture in determining which text types will be classed as parts of a genre and which genres will be socially valued. Malinowski (1960) indicates that genres are socially and culturally significant and have an important function in the maintenance and cohesion of the culture. Oring (1986) goes on to say that genres are formed by the cultural traditions of the community. In such approaches to genre, genre ceases to become simply text, but becomes activity (Shopen 1993). The implications of these perspectives for the study of texts are that any study of a body of texts must see genre as culturally situated, culturally defined and culturally defining. Texts like other parts of language are cultural activities and the act of writing is an act of encoding culture as much as it is a case of encoding information (Kramsch 1992).

In many discussions of the relationship between culture and writing, however, culture tends to be seen as monolithic and there is an assumption that people who are writing within a culture are encoding this monolithic culture (Kaplan 1966, Clyne 1980). Thus, French writers encode French culture, American writers encode American culture and so on. This is not, however, a useful model within which to look at the sorts of texts which are produced in the context of tertiary institutions because linguistic uniformity does not mean cultural uniformity. Culture is instantiated in different ways by different individuals and different groups under the common cultural umbrella.

In the context of tertiary literacy, the cultural understandings present in the matrix culture are juxtaposed with the understandings of the academic community and the discourse community to which they belong. Each discourse community is oriented towards functions which are valued and which need to be transmitted through their discourse. As Swales (1990) argues:

In a sociorhetorical discourse community, the primary determinants of linguistic behaviour are functional, since a discourse community consists of a group of people who link up to pursue objectives which are prior to those of socialization and solidarity ... the communicative needs of the *goals* tend to predominate in the development and maintenance of its discoursal characteristics.

(Swales 1990:24, emphasis in original)

The culture of the discourse community then represents a culture which seeks to establish the professional and communicative goals valued by those who identify themselves as part of the community. The culture is driven not so much

by social considerations as task considerations. That is the communicative needs of a discourse community can modify understandings of the valued dimensions of a text. As a result, within a field such as science and technology the ways in which language is used will vary with the subject discussed and the audience for whom it is intended (Kocourek 1982).

As texts are created both within the culture of the discourse community and also within the general community, the cultural context may be quite complex. There is obviously an interaction between the cultural understandings of the general culture and those of the discourse community. In some cases the general culture may influence the discourse community in such a way that different local regions may have different text types, in other cases the discourse community's expectations may over-ride general cultural expectations to create a supra-local text form.

### COMMUNICATING WITHIN A CULTURE

When students are educated in their first language they learn to move from expectations of a general cultural context to the expectations of the specific purpose cultural context of the discourse community. Learning to communicate in the tertiary context, especially at postgraduate level, is then an initiation into a specialist discourse community (Swales 1990). Each discourse community has its own valued texts and norms of communication which are determined both by the communicative needs of the discourse community and by the patterns of communication found in the particular culture of the writers (Liddicoat forthcoming). In some cases these texts differ greatly from other texts found within the culture, while in other cases texts are much more closely associated with the more general body of texts. Each discipline is located on a continuum which ranges from culturally typical texts to culturally divergent specialist texts. Examples of this can be seen in French academic writing in which scientific texts depart quite greatly from the valued structure of general expository writing, literary texts depart very little and the social sciences are somewhere in the middle. Clyne (1980) indicates a similar feature for German scientific writing.

The starting point for writing specialist texts, regardless of the extent to which they diverge from other texts, is a command of the generalist genres of a particular culture. Native speakers are assumed to have access to the norms of their particular culture and typically enter into the discourse community through a process of socialization with very little explicit teaching. This becomes especially apparent when we examine the sorts of guidance which is given to neophyte writers. When we compare the sorts of advice given to neophyte writers with the features of the texts they are learning to write, we find many significant features of these texts are not considered. The following example from an instructional manual (Bénichoux et al. 1985) for writing French scientific prose is a typical illustration of this. Elsewhere (Liddicoat 1992, 1993, 1995, forthcoming) I have identified the following features as typical of French scientific writing.

1. Text structure is Introduction–Methods–Results–Discussion.
2. The paragraph structure is “linear” not “digressive” in Kaplan’s (1966) terms.
3. Tenses are not used primarily with time reference. The main tenses used are the present and the *passé composé* (in some articles these are the only ones used). The present is the basic tense of the article with the *passé composé* being used either to indicate events prior to the research or to focus aspects of the research. The next most common tense is the conditional - used for reporting results in a hedged way, then the future used for events subsequent to the research.
4. Hedging is central. It is usually done with verbs of epistemic or epistemological modality. There is a preference for middle level knowledge claims.
5. The passive is frequent (it is rare in French generally) and is used with a backgrounding function.
6. Texts are impersonal. 1st person pronouns are rare, although *nous* is found. If personal pronouns are used third person singular indefinite *on* is preferred.

The following advice is typical of the sorts of guidelines given to native speaker writers of French scientific prose. The text has been chosen from among a relatively small number of such texts for French native speaker writers because it has been prepared by a group of science educators at tertiary institutions in a number of disciplines.

1. Make the text readable. This refers to the form of the text - neatness, etc.
2. Clarity and elegance of expression with solid content
3. Use short, well-turned sentences (maximum length 16 words). Use S-V-Comp word order (i.e. standard French prose word order).
4. Begin a sentence with the most important fact or object.
5. Choose the right tense. Evidence should be presented in the present. New work should be presented in the imperfect. Cite other authors in the present or (rarely) the *passé composé*. Frame recommendations in the imperative.
6. Vary linking words.
7. Be concise.
8. Use concrete, everyday words, avoid jargon.
9. Abandon imprecise words. “*Que le oui soit oui et le non soit non.*” (Bénichoux et al. 1985:56) Don’t borrow terminology from English.
10. This text also has a lengthy description of the Introduction–Methods–Results–Discussion structure indicating what sorts of information should be included in each rhetorical section.

There are some things which require comment here. Most of this advice is general advice which is appropriate to writing in any genre (and any language). The advice given doesn't really treat the science text as a genre in its own right, with the exception of the Introduction–Methods–Results–Discussion structure.

Use short sentences: the average sentence length in my corpus of 150 texts in 6 scientific disciplines is 15.97 words.

Choose the right tense: This looks like an attempt to indicate some of the important differences between general ways of using the French tense system and discipline specific uses in science. Comparing this with my corpus we observe:

The imperfect is used rarely. If the imperfect is used, it is used in the Methods section primarily – not the typical cite for encoding new work. New work – depending on what that means – is encoded in a number of ways:

1. a novel procedure in the Methods section is encoded in the *passé composé*
2. a new finding or conclusion is encoded in the conditional or in the present with modal hedging
3. a new result is encoded in the present without hedging.

Both present and *passé composé* are used for citing other research and there is a functional distinction between the two. Research cited in the present is more central to the study than work cited in the *passé composé*. This also interacts with voice (Liddicoat 1993). In addition references may be made in the conditional when the citation involves interpreting the others results.

Imperative is never used for recommendations – although conditional or a hedged present may be. The only examples of imperative in the data are sign-posting expressions such as *considérons* (let us consider), *notons* (let us note), *rappelons* (let us recall).

Abandon imprecise words: This encourages the scientific writer to avoid hedges which are an important part of the scientific culture of French writing. The following quote sums up the French attitude to hedging just as well as it does that of English writers:

hedging is the mark of a professional scientist, one who acknowledges with which he or she does science and writes on science.  
(Crismore and Farnsworth 1990:135)

The gap between the explicit advice given to writers by teachers of science and the form of the text eventually to be produced indicates the knowledge which the scientific writer acquires through socialization rather than teaching. This information is detailed and in many cases quite subtle and is passed on to students implicitly, not explicitly. The neophyte science writer then is typically left to pick

up the generic features of his/her discipline's discourse community through immersion in the texts of the community. As such any socialization of discourse conventions is dependent on the amount of exposure the student has to the valued texts of the discourse community and his/her sensitivity to the textual differences which are found there.

An assumption which is inherent in Bénichoux et al. (1985) and in teaching approaches to scientific writing found among scientist-educators is that good writing is reasonably uniform across disciplines and that by learning to write in general terms one can learn to write in scientific disciplines. The assumption is that scientific writing is simply an adaptation of other styles of writing and that native speakers arriving at university have a repertoire of styles of writing which can be adapted because they learnt to write the sorts of basic texts valued by their society as a part of their schooling. Conversely, it is believed that the inability to write good scientific prose is the result of not having learnt this sort of literacy at school. This view implies that the scientist's job is to add content, not to develop literacy.

### COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

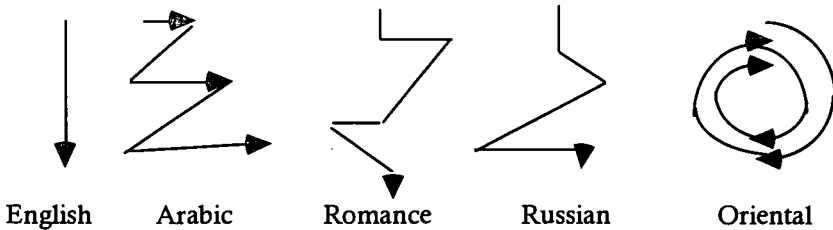
The apprenticeship in specialist writing discussed above is more complex still for the non-native speakers writer, as both issues of acquiring the genres of the discipline and issues of transferring and adapting existing cultural knowledge are important. It is no longer the case that language teachers believe that a student who can write an appropriate essay in his/her own language can automatically write an adequate essay in another language. It is recognized that valued patterns of logic and rhetoric are culturally based (Kaplan 1966). Moreover, it is recognized that a good command of sentence level features of a language does not automatically translate into a command of the discourse level features involved in constructing a text (Swales 1990).

For these reasons, many universities offer international students who are not native speakers of the language courses which are designed to help them to learn to produce specialist texts. This teaching now often includes opportunities for learners to investigate the construction of texts in their specific disciplines (Blanton, 1984, Hill et al. 1982, Swales 1990). This teaching, and much of the research in the area of Languages for Specific Purposes, focuses on the relationship between the communicative demands of the discourse community and the language used in composing specialist texts (for example, Adams-Smith 1984; Lackstrom et al. 1972; 1973; Oster 1981; Selinker et al. 1981; Tarone et al. 1981; Trimble 1985; Trimble and Trimble 1982). Less attention is paid to the fact that these texts are themselves also highly culturally contexted. The non-native speaker is, however, required to produce texts not only for the discourse community, but also for the target culture. As such, s/he is involved in a cross cultural exercise when composing a text in which the first culture, the target culture and the discourse community may be in tension.

Our understanding of this tension is limited by the fact that much of the work

on cultural differences in academic writing has been conducted in an anglophone environment. Moreover, there is some evidence of a cultural bias to English norms in this work (Kerbrat-Orrechioni 1994). In Kaplan's (1966) discussion for example, we have the diagrams shown in Figure 1, with the following descriptions:

English:	linear
Oriental style:	indirect
French style:	digressive
Russian style	digressive, irrelevant



**FIGURE 1: PATTERNS OF RHETORICAL ORGANIZATION IN VARIOUS LANGUAGES (SOURCE KAPLAN 1966)**

I do not wish to indicate that Kaplan is culturally biased but rather to indicate that the ways in which we describe different patterns of thought and patterns of writing may reflect the negative values our culture places on the rhetorical style. As a heuristic device such labels may be useful, but as a theoretical model they are fraught with difficulties and opportunities for misinterpretation. Within each culture, each of these patterns will be considered to be “linear” although the lines try to achieve different things. For example, the “digressions” of French show erudition. They represent an indication that the writer has a broad view of the topic which allows him/her to integrate a wide range of beliefs and issues into the text. So a digression, which indicates disorganized thinking to an English speaking writer show sophisticated thinking to a French writer.

Rhetorical differences, of course go beyond paragraph development and affect text structure (for example, see Kirkpatrick 1993a, 1993b). For example, in German academic writing there is what could be called the “save the best till last” principle. This goes beyond Kaplan's (1966) paragraph development to the organization of several ideas in the one text. The English language approach is to place the most important point first and to follow it with points of lesser importance. The German approach is to build up to the most important point through a series of lesser points. The effect is to provide a climax for the writing. For an English reader, however, the effect can be of wading through a lot of secondary material to get to the main point of the article.

What this sets up, is an inherent conflict for the English speaker writing in French



or the French speaker writing in English with conflicting demands on what is good style in terms of paragraph development and text organization.

We often assume that English styles are in some way natural or normal. It might be useful at this time to examine some non-native speakers responses to English style.

I feel that I am not giving enough respect to the reader. I have to tell them things they know. It is more like speaking to a child.  
(Japanese native speaker)

English writing only lets you scratch the surface of what you have to say about an issue. You can't get involved in your ideas.  
(French native speaker)

The hardest thing is to remember to tell people what you know they know. All these references seem to do nothing. They just boast about how much you've read. Anyone in your field should know these things anyway. (Spanish native speaker)

I often have trouble reading in English. You get part way and then there's nothing interesting happening. It doesn't seem to lead to anything much. (German native speaker)

There is obviously a tension between norms for these speakers. The style which is highly valued for English writing is problematic in the original cultures of these speakers. For writers having to write across cultures, there is a tension between the received cultural norms of their own culture which determine what is a "good text" and the new cultural norms they are being asked to adopt. Writing across cultures is a dilemma between choices which can be negatively valued in each cultural context. There is a need to learn that what constitutes "good text" is not always the same in all contexts and that a "good text" in one language may "lack" features of a "good text" in another.

The discussion so far, however, is really emphasizing the induction of the non-native speakers student into the conventional understandings of text types which exist in the culture. We need also to remember that there may be a large degree of difference between the valued rhetorical practices of a particular discourse community and those of the matrix culture in which the student is being educated. Much of what is done in the Languages for Academic Purposes classroom is aimed at developing an understanding of the sorts of texts which are valued in the culture rather than the sorts of texts which are valued in the discourse community. This is particularly the case where popularizing texts are substituted for technical texts themselves. There are a number of reasons why this is the case: 1) Languages for Academic Purposes teachers are not usually specialists in the disciplines of their students' discourse communities, 2) Languages for Academic Purposes classes may include students from a range of disciplines and thus a range of discourse communities with differing discourse practices. Spack (1988) has challenged the extent to which it is even possible to initiate

students into a discourse community in the academic classroom. What the Languages for Academic Purposes class can do, however, is sensitize students to rhetorical practices – that is, the raising of rhetorical consciousness (Swales 1990, Ronald 1988). The argument is that by encouraging students to reflect on texts from their own discourse community, we can give them strategies which will assist them in their socialization into that community. In this way, the Languages for Academic Purposes class offers not only a starting point for the process of socialization which is the typical feature of literacy acquisition in a tertiary context, but also seeks to develop strategies which will assist in that socialization.

### WRITING BETWEEN CULTURES

The starting position then of the non-native speakers specialist writer is that s/he has some exposure to the texts valued in the general culture, some strategies for understanding specialist texts and a tension between the valued practices of his/her first culture and second culture. In order to resolve this tension the second language writer needs to find his/her own voice between the two cultures – to reconcile what s/he thinks important with what the target culture expects. The writer needs an awareness of the native speaker norms, and an understanding of the values and expectations of the target culture, but at the same time needs to be able to integrate his/her own culture with the target culture to produce texts which are satisfying both to the non-native speaker and to the native speaker discourse community.

The learner needs to have a high level of receptive competence in order to be able to interpret the texts in the same ways in which a native speaker would interpret them. That is, a native speaker needs to be able to appreciate what a native speaker writer is doing when s/he makes rhetorical choices in a text and understand the cultural context value of these rhetorical choices. Production is, however, a more complex issue as the writer needs to present his/her own personality and values in the text. Where the mismatch is extreme, this can create a dilemma for the writer. It is not appropriate for teachers to force students to accept the norms of the target culture and abandon those of their first culture. This would be a form of linguistic imperialism (Philipson 1991, Mühlhäsler 1992), downgrading the rhetorical practices of first culture and maintaining the 'superiority' second culture. The issue in teaching writing is to teach in such a way as to value the cultural practices which the learner brings to the writing task.

In summary, the second language writer needs to find his/her own voice between the two cultures – to reconcile what s/he thinks important with what the target culture expects. The writer needs awareness of the native speaker norms, understanding of the values of the target culture and the expectations of the target culture, but at the same time needs to be able to integrate first culture with second culture to produce texts which are satisfying both to the non-native speakers and to the native speaker. The issue here is, of course, that the texts produced have to satisfy gatekeepers such as examiners and editors. We know

very little about the degree to which the rhetorical conventions of a discourse community are normative. That is, how much latitude is allowed for departure from the norms? There is some evidence that departures may be accepted at higher levels of rhetorical organization, but not at lower levels. But also, there is evidence to suggest that only superior quality will allow you to flaunt the conventions. Most research in contrastive rhetoric has sought to establish the norms at operation within a culture or discourse community. It must, however, be remembered that the norms identified are templates for constructing texts, not recipes (Freadman and Macdonald 1992). More research is needed on the latitude allowed in the application of templates in the strategic gatekeeping situations of tertiary literacy.

## CONCLUSION

Given that we cannot force students to abandon their existing rhetorical practices, the most we can realistically do is encourage insight into the rhetorical norms of a culture. Rhetorical awareness is an important key to this. Understanding of the discourse of specialist writing leads to control over that discourse and the ability to make decisions based on knowledge of expectations. This sort of awareness allows the learner to develop strategies for engaging in the socialization process involved in entering into a specialist discourse community.

We need provide awareness of and strategies for dealing with specialist texts for native speakers as well as for non-native speakers. Socialization is really only effective for those students who can absorb the knowledge. It is a way of teaching literacy which works primarily for the good students. We need a teaching approach which will work also for the students who are having difficulties understanding the texts they are required to manipulate. I am not suggesting a College English type course such as those available in the US. These courses tend to emphasize discipline independent literacy practices, which, while they may be useful, do not assist directly with the acquisition of specialist literacies.

The key to acquiring literacy through socialization, whether learning to write within a culture, across cultures or between cultures, appears to be strategies for deconstructing and analysing the specialist texts which the students will meet. These strategies give students power to analyse their own writing in comparison with valued texts from the discourse community, and thereby give power to determine one's own style of writing on the basis of the understandings this process creates.

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# Colloquium: Intercultural Variation in Academic Communication

## Introduction

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A colloquium that addresses the issues of intercultural communication in academic discourse is particularly timely. There has been a substantial increase in the number of international students studying at Australian universities over the past several years. Kalantzis (1993) has recently estimated that more than 25% of tertiary students studying in New South Wales speak a first language other than English. This figure is likely to increase in the next few years. It is also being understood, although more slowly in some quarters than in others, that more Australian students need the benefit of studying overseas themselves.

The questions addressed in the colloquium included:

Are there significant differences in the way knowledge is transmitted within different cultural and educational traditions? It is commonly asserted that, in order to succeed in 'Western' universities, undergraduate students will need to be able to think critically and evaluate information (Ballard and Clanchy 1991). By the same token, it is commonly asserted that students in 'Asian' educational systems, need merely to reproduce information transmitted to them by their teachers (Cortazzi 1990). Yet there appear to be several problems with these assumptions. First, it is nonsense to suggest that there is some uniform 'Western' model and that it differs from some uniform Asian model. As Spizzica has shown (this volume), the Italian model of tertiary education appears to have more in common with the Vietnamese than with the Anglo-Australian model. Second, recent research is showing that the belief that students need to be able to think critically to succeed at an Anglo-Australian university is based on myth rather than fact. (Gibbs 1992, Kirkpatrick and Mulligan 1996, Reid and Mulligan, this volume). And third, the belief that Asian models of education rely solely on the memory and reproduction of information is being seriously challenged (Biggs 1996). We need therefore to be much clearer about the actual study and literacy practices required to succeed in different cultural and disciplinary traditions.

A second and related question is whether there are disciplines in which the disciplinary norms and practices override cultural differences? It seems that there is a continuum here that stretches from the hard sciences at one end to the 'soft' humanities at the other, with the literacy practices of hard sciences located at the discipline determined end of the continuum and those of certain humanities

subjects at the culturally determined end of the continuum. For example, we might expect an international student who is studying a subject such as engineering in an Australian university to find fewer cultural and linguistic difficulties than a similar student studying sociology or philosophy as the study and literacy practices required by engineering are more universal than the culturally specific study and literacy practices of sociology.

The distinction between professional literacy and academic literacy also needs to be investigated. An academic who publishes in international journals needs to know how to play that particular cultural and linguistic 'game'. The rules of the game will be relatively stable within if not across disciplines. We can probably talk with some authority about intercultural and interdisciplinary variation among certain professional academic communities and several of the papers presented at the colloquium discuss these very issues. But the same is not necessarily true of university study. The literacy requirements for students are often obscure. Seldom are they explicitly stated and even when they are, they may be based on myth rather than fact. Literacy requirements not only differ across disciplines, but they also differ within disciplines and within universities and the emphasis an individual Head of Department places upon literacy skills is often the key to the acquisition of relevant literacy skills by the students.

The four short papers in this colloquium all make important contributions to answering the questions posed above. **Lesley Farrell** analyses forty academic essays written in English by Chilean and Vietnamese for primarily Anglo-Celtic Australian examiners. She concludes that cultural and social differences in writing are particularly important when the writing forms the basis for inclusion or exclusion. She urges the examiners and gatekeepers to remember that their reading and evaluation of the texts is as much shaped by social and cultural values as is the writing of the texts.

**Gillian Ferguson** studied ten essays written by highly proficient native speakers of English together with thirty written by less proficient native speakers and Japanese and Vietnamese speakers to see whether and how the initial orientations of the proficient writers differed from the other writers. She concludes that there are cultural differences in the orientations of these writers and that these differences need to be made explicit to both students and teachers, as the culturally appropriate use of orientation can spell the difference between academic failure and success.

In a study of paragraph organisation of literary and biology texts in Spanish and French, **Tony Liddicoat** clearly demonstrates that writers in these languages have a range of paragraph types that they can use and that the 'zig-zag' digressive structure that Kaplan claimed for Romance languages is but one of several paragraph structures available for such writers. He persuasively argues that culturally based academic writing (literary texts, for example) is culture specific while other types of academic writing (biology texts, for example) are more discipline specific and thus more easily recognisable across cultures.

**Zosia Golebiowski** reports on the rhetorical framework of the introductions to

psychology research papers written by Polish scholars in both Polish and English. She concludes that there is a fundamentally different approach to form and content between the Polish and Anglo-American academic communities within this discipline, with Polish intellectuals being relatively unconcerned with form. Her findings suggest that the discipline of psychology is located towards the culturally specific end of the continuum of academic disciplines.

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# Culture and Difference

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Three important questions around the broad issue of culture and academic writing are:

1. *What is the difference culture makes?*
2. *When does it make a difference?*
3. *What should we do about it?*

I confront these questions every day in my work as an academic. I notice them when I read students' work, when I supervise or examine theses, and when, as co-editor of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, I decide to whom I shall send an article for review. I find that these questions come into much sharper focus when I think about them in a specific context. I'd like to talk about them today in the context of a particular study, an intensive study of the written texts of four students preparing for their tertiary entrance examinations and of the public written texts of the examiners who would rank them. The students were preparing for examination in three subject areas: Australian History, Legal Studies and Economics. Two of the students, a boy and a girl, were from Chile, two were from Vietnam. Between them they wrote forty essays. The individual examiners, who would ultimately grade the essays, are, of course, anonymous, although examiners in general in this system are overwhelmingly of Anglo Australian background.

## **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE THAT CULTURE MAKES ?**

Culture certainly seemed to me to make a difference to the writing these young people produced but, to illustrate the complexity of the issue, I'd like to look at just one of the differences.

The candidate I have called 'Hang', who comes from Vietnam, consistently wrote essays which, to my Celtic Australian eye, contained explicit internal contradictions. In response to essay topics which her teachers believed invited, or even demanded, that she present an opinion, Hang would develop apparently contradictory parallel arguments and then neatly sidestep the requirement to commit herself one way or another. She had a neat trick that she used several times in her practice essays for her Politics examination. In a question on whether Australia had a unitary system of government, for instance, she would first put the case that Australia was, from a constitutional point of view, clearly and unambiguously a federation. Then she would put the case that an analysis of political practice since the second world war suggested that the form of

government was unitary. Then she would sum up the issues. Finally, just when her reader (me) expected her to provide a profoundly sophisticated conclusion, reflecting the careful argumentation that had gone before, the essay would spin out into the stratosphere. In one instance, her concluding paragraph read:

The important question remains, was the Constitution intentionally written to favour the Commonwealth???

This question, emphasised with three question marks, served to completely reframe the discussion that went before and left Hang's teacher bewildered. He wrote:

Why introduce such a major question in the last sentence?

Why indeed? This was clearly a technique, not an accident. In another essay on the Australian Constitution, Hang concluded her essay with:

The question remains, did the authors of the Constitution intend to use Section 128 effectively or was it written to prevent change?

In other essays she would simply place two contradictory statements next to each other and leave it at that. Tran, the Vietnamese boy, achieved the same effect, but nearly always simply by placing the two contradictory statements next to each other. (For a more extended discussion of Hang's and Tran's academic essays, and the readings they were subjected to from teachers and examiners, see Farrell 1996a (in press))

In some ways this can be understood to demonstrate divergent attitudes to politeness. For Hang and Tran it seemed inappropriate to directly express a point of view in the essay, it would be hubris, especially when the reader was a teacher or examiner. The demand that an unambiguous conclusion be reached may also have seemed less compelling to them, informed by a Confucian tradition that tolerates ambiguity and contradiction to a greater extent than is common in western school literacy.

But it would be unwise to attribute these features of Hang and Tran's writing exclusively, or unambiguously, to culture. If literacy is social practice, as I am arguing, although not very explicitly, here, then written texts must always be shaped by the complex social and cultural worlds to which the writers belong. Working on Hang and Tran's writing I found myself wondering whether the same degree of deference, if deference it was, would be expressed by Vietnamese students from higher social strata. Maybe upper-class students would have a greater sense of entitlement and that would be evident in their written work.

The same questions arise for me when I consider gender. I know very little about how gender politics is played out in Vietnam, but it would be surprising if gender doesn't make a difference too.

So, when I think about what kind of a difference culture makes to this academic writing, I want to argue that I have no doubt that it made a difference, but that

the difference cannot be understood in terms of ethnic culture alone. We have to think about the complex interaction of culture, gender and class in shaping discourse positions and framing written language. A practical outcome of this complexity is that, when we do research with students from specific cultural backgrounds, and especially when we seek to make comparisons between different cultural groups, we need to be aware that migrants from different countries typically have different class locations.

### WHEN DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE ?

My second question is about context, about the circumstances under which 'culture' might make a difference. One of the crucial features of the study I am talking about here is the context in which the writing was done. Hang and Tran were candidates preparing for an examination. The examiners, primarily from Anglo-Celtic Australian backgrounds, read the essays in order to identify differences between the essays. Having identified differences between the essays they were required to determine what those differences signified in terms of academic ability in the discourse of the examination. The examiners were not permitted to interpret differences in rhetorical structure as indicating differences in cultural and social background, they were required to interpret them as differences in academic ability. They interrogated these written texts for differences, and interpreted them as differences in academic ability, because they required apparently objective criteria on which to develop a rank order of candidates. Places at tertiary institutions were distributed on the basis of the rank order that they developed (Farrell 1996b).

So, in answer to my question 'When does culture make a difference?' it seems that cultural and other social differences in writing are more important in some contexts than in others. The really important contexts are those where academic writing forms the basis for inclusion or exclusion - tertiary entrance exams, Ph.D. proposals, submissions to prestige journals etc.

These contexts are important for two reasons :

- (i) There are material consequences for the writers, they are identified as people with relatively superior or inferior 'academic ability' and so they do, or they don't, get places in university, or scholarships, or jobs
- (ii) There are significant negative consequences for particular fields of inquiry. The way knowledge in a given field is framed can appear to be transparently natural and right, 'objective', when it simply reflects a particular cultural disposition to view the field in a particular way. I am not the first to suggest, for instance, that the Anglo-american viewpoints and orientations may colonise the definition and practice of 'science' as English becomes entrenched as the language of scientific discourse.

### WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT ?

The 'we' that I am referring to in this question is quite specific. It refers to those

of us who act as gatekeepers in crucial academic contexts, when we mark essays and examination papers, interview for jobs or act as referees for prestigious journals. Just as our students' writing practices are framed by the social and cultural practices of which they are a part, so too are *our* reading practices shaped by the social and cultural practices of which *we* are a part. Many forces are at work to encourage us to believe the opposite, that, while *their* writing is socially and culturally shaped, *our* reading is neutral and objective.

In the study I have been referring to in this talk my focus came to be on the codifying of the examination criteria. I analysed ten years of Examiners reports in three subjects, and I came to the realisation that the features of a 'good essay' were assuming the mantle of universal truth as examiners worked under the imperative of producing a rank order of students. Markers were quite explicit that they could not rank candidates according to the content of their papers as they all knew too much. They had to rank the candidates according to linguistic features of the text. I became aware of the extent to which certain linguistic features were, in my view, valorised, while others were being disparaged, without much discuss or explanation as far as I could see. Examiners expressed confidence that they could make judgments about the academic ability of a candidate on the basis of the linguistic features (the *how*) of an essay:

You will have noted that the dreaded word 'content' has not yet appeared in this description. This is not to suggest that it does not play some part in the process, but it does not loom as large as some people fondly imagine. . . . *But the discriminators are about how, not what.* If candidates use information with skill to answer the question, the accuracy of information is also clearly visible. *Content is easy to judge, as one would expect. The discriminators and the markers' reports constantly refer to how that content is used.. That is the key discriminator.*(VISE Australian History 1984:2 My italics.)

There is no evidence here that examiners have any hesitation in making judgments about the academic ability, or, indeed, the moral fortitude of candidates, on the basis of the rhetorical organisation of the written text:

Even if their [the able students] information is thin, they do not relent on the task in hand. They persevere with thinking, rather than writing tons of coherent but irrelevant stuff, all 'glued together' by a trite conclusion which fools no marker who has a list of discriminators in front of her or him. Few of the discriminators are attempted. They are absent from the essay. (VISE Australian History 1984)

For those of us who view literacy as social and cultural practice the certainty expressed here is alarming, and yet, I must suggest, in the contexts in which we work, and under similar pressures, we are likely to do much the same.

In our position as teachers and researchers, I think we have to acknowledge, and pay attention to, the power we have. Anna Yeatman refers to us as 'custodians', people whose position means that we have the power to entrench, or to challenge,

cultural assumptions. Stuart Hall thinks of us as 'cultural attendants', people who see their role as 'attending to' the culture, whatever it might be. Every day in our work we are involved in defining what constitutes academic discourse in various contexts in intimate, and important ways. I don't have the answer to what we should or can do - but I do think it is up to us debate specifically:

- what we believe is worth defending in the academic discourses of which we are a part
- what we believe should be discarded in the academic discourses of which we are a part
- what we believe should be developed in the academic discourses of which we are a part

While I believe these questions provide a useful framework for debate in forums like this one, I believe they have more immediate relevance. I believe they provide a useful framework within which we can interrogate our more intimate academic practices; when we mark an essay, assess a thesis, write a referee's report for a journal or decide whether or not, in the heated environment or Examiners' meetings, we should act as advocate for a student in danger of failing. It is in these everyday contexts that we assume our roles as cultural custodian or attendant and shape academic discourses.

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# Cultural Differences in Academic Essay Orientations

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## **BACKGROUND**

Among those making the transition to tertiary studies in Australia is an increasing number of students whose mother-tongue is not the language of instruction and whose native culture is not that of the host community. The majority of these students come from south-east Asia. For these students, problems of adjustment into the academic culture and disciplinary sub-culture are exacerbated not only by their difficulties with English but also by their traditional attitudes to instruction and learning processes. Students trained to conserve knowledge (Ballard, 1984:49) are confused by the shift to an “analytical/speculative” approach to learning, but their problems become apparent to the instructor only when written assignments are submitted for assessment. Complaints about irrelevance and plagiarism frequently reflect the disjuncture between academic expectations and the student’s notion of appropriacy. At the same time, the student is expected to recognise the way in which the disciplinary context of the writing task restricts and defines the expository options. It is important for the student to know how to interpret the wording of the task description, and how, within the conventions of the discipline, to organise ideas and evidence in support of a clearly formulated point of view. Instructors immersed in the patterns of discourse of their disciplines may fail to consider the possibility that some students will bring to the writing task their experience of basically different discourse structures (Ballard and Clanchy, 1990:3). Learning to write is a part of learning to be a member of a culture, and cultural knowledge and experience are realised in both the content and the form of the written text.

## **COHERENCE IN WRITING: A CULTURAL CONSTRUCT ?**

In the influential article titled *Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education* (1966), Kaplan looked to the temporal and cultural relativity of rhetoric to account for the inability of advanced English language learners to compose acceptable term papers, theses, and dissertations in their course work. In terms of rhetorical modes in the English language, he contends (1987:11) that the native speaker recognises circumstances in which various forms may be used, whereas the non-native speaker possesses neither a complete command of possible alternatives, nor a familiarity with “the sociolinguistic constraints on those alternatives”.

One of these constraints is the expectation of the reader, derived from prior knowledge of content as well as knowledge of the rhetorical structure of the text. The skilled writer uses various strategies to make clear to the reader the type of text, or genre, the topic of the text, and the sort of comment to be made on the topic. In academic texts, the title, the first sentences, and the thesis statement establish a mutual frame of reference for writer and reader. At each potential trouble spot, or introduction of new information, the writer continues to keep the reader in mind. For example, new sections are signalled with subtitles and introductory remarks, lesser shifts in topic are signalled by indenting of paragraphs, and technical terms are clarified with definitions or illustrations. The reader's experience of the text as coherent depends to a great extent on these strategies. Writers in English as a second or foreign language will find it difficult to predict how much help the reader will need, even if they are aware of the appropriate formal options.

### THESIS ORIENTATIONS

Given the importance to the reader of a clear statement of intention, it is interesting to consider the ways in which writers highlight and contextualise the controlling idea in introductory orientations - the words leading up to and including the thesis statement.

Most readers will be familiar with the work of Swales (1984) on introductions to research articles; he describes four predominating "moves": establishing the field, summarising previous research, preparing for present research and introducing the present research. These moves, in fact, provide a mutual knowledge base with the reader in terms of genre, context and writer intention - in other words they provide an orientation. Scarcella observes (1984: 683) that it "seems plausible that in all languages, writers are expected to orient their readers. ... However, the means by which this goal is accomplished probably vary from language to language".

Scarcella, in a study of the orienting skills of student writers, had found, for example, that the non-native subjects tended to write significantly longer orientations than their native English counterparts. She speculated that "they may have been transferring the rules and norms of their own cultures when communicating in English". Scarcella was studying a culturally unspecified group of writers: her generalisation provided the impetus for the examination of essay orientations described here.

The data base for my investigation consisted of forty essays in argument form, ten written by highly proficient writers, native speakers of English (L1:hp), the others by writers of average proficiency, a group made up of even numbers of English (L1), Japanese, and Vietnamese speakers (L2).

The essays were written by students enrolled in a large generic skills service unit, under end of semester test conditions, and during the lecture slot of one hour. Four days in advance of the test, the students were given a list of topics, but were unable to bring notes to assist them in writing the essay. At the time of

the test, students were asked to present an argument for or against one of a number of propositions derived from the topics. The directions outlined rhetorical specifications and the features to be assessed. The number of words was not specified, but time was stressed as being the obvious constraint. All students had previously studied the form in lectures and in tutorial exercises.

What I wanted to find out from my investigation was how, if at all, the initial orientations of L1:hp writers differed from those of the two groups of L2 writers and how the orientations of the two L2 groups differed from one another

In her study, Scarcella identified a number of focussing devices. An analysis of the introductory sections of the essays in my study yielded examples of most of these strategies, often in combination. One strategy not mentioned by Scarcella was explicit focus on form, particularly appropriate to argumentation. In order of frequency in the essays of the L1 writers, these strategies were:

- invocation of context - historical, political, social
- focus on form
- explanation of key terms
- thesis-related interrogatives
- cataphoric reference (only used by the L1 hp group)
- brevity
- statistics
- structural repetition

Analysis of the two L2 groups revealed instances of most of the **orienting strategies**, but the number of occurrences varied. Compared to the other groups, the Japanese students used fewer of all the strategies except for structural repetition (70%); this device was used principally for bringing together contrasted elements. The Vietnamese writers drew attention to the argument form (80%) more often than the other groups but exploited structural repetition (30%) less frequently than the Japanese writers.

Like Scarcella, I found that the principal discrepancy was in **the number of words** devoted to orienting the reader towards the thesis statement. The length of the orientation was determined by the position of the thesis statement in the introduction - initial, embedded or final. The majority of native English speakers, high and medium proficiency, chose the final position (60%) and wrote orientations of similar length (38 words av.) using at least one of the above orienting devices. The Japanese writers preferred to position their theses in the initial position (40%) or in the embedded position (30%) with 20% in the final position and one writer (10%) failing to state a position. In contrast, the Vietnamese group chose the final position (90%) far more frequently than any of the other groups. It follows that, compared to the top scoring L1 writers, the Japanese wrote very little, the Vietnamese a lot, in the initial orientation.

It is possible that both extremes could be due to the reduced syntactic options of the L2 writer, the one group avoiding, the other group rather wordily responding to the obligation to the reader, with a heavy reliance on bulky co-ordinate



structures, repetitions, and paraphrase.

Again, cultural differences will clearly affect the writer's sense of the type and amount of information a reader needs. One reason for the lengthy Vietnamese orientations was the writer's perception of the need to clarify the key term. Scarcella (1984:683) noted that her subjects tended to over-specify the theme, and to "underestimate their reader's knowledge of the theme by introducing information which the readers considered obvious". Both L1 and L2 writers felt the need to explain a key term, but the Vietnamese tended to write far more detailed, lengthier definitions. One student supplied a 150 word definition before arriving at his thesis. With greater relevance to the academic context, one could say that these student writers tended to overestimate the need to display knowledge - knowledge which the native-speaker reader, in any case, assumed they had. In addition to extended definitions of key terms, were overt references to form, stressing the contentiousness of the topic. In fact, they used a high proportion of almost all orienting strategies - almost an obstacle to proficient native-like argumentation, which is leaner and more selective in framing strategies.

A further difference emerged in the preferred **form of thesis**. Few writers (20%) in the L1 groups made simple assertions; the thesis statement far more frequently was in some way qualified, contextualised, or justified for clarification, using balanced, coordinate structures as well as complex structures, subordinating the qualification. While the majority of the Japanese writers made direct assertions (70%) in short simple sentences or in compound structures, the Vietnamese group provided only one instance of a direct assertion; the remaining thesis statements took the form of hedged and uncommitted assertions or rhetorical questions. The Vietnamese writers, in fact, showed a marked preference for presenting the thesis in a soft form, as an issue for consideration. The reader seems to be seen as someone who needs emotional persuasion, rather than logical argument. Choice of topic had little effect, with less emotive and more emotive issues being handled with the same kid-gloves.

The "over-servicing of the reader", combined with a formal word choice, gives much of this writing a hortatory style. I am assured by a group of post-graduate education students from Vietnam that much of the essay writing in schools is a response to questions about the works of literature studied in the English courses, predominantly nineteenth century. An embellished style is considered appropriate to both topic and esteemed audience, an academic register which could also owe something to the French influence in Vietnam. The most proficient writer in this group achieved economy and clarity in his orientation of thesis, yet retained the oratorical stance:

Death and dying - inevitable subjects for every human-being - are no longer a matter of concern reserved for scientists. During the last decade, discussions on these subjects become more commonplace. Is it now the right time for all concerned - patient, doctor, family, theologian - to come to terms with legalisation of euthanasia?

It would seem that isolation from contemporary English expository forms has made it difficult for the Vietnamese students of English to write with a native English speaking reader in mind. In terms of orientation, tone predisposes a reader to reject or accept what is to follow; in terms of overall coherence, an inappropriate tone can militate against the reader's experience of focus and flow.

Conversely, one might expect that **knowledge of the target culture** would make it easier for the L2 writer to build into orientations appropriate and sufficient information. Japan has no restriction on access to Western ideas, via literature, media, travel, and one might expect to find a shared pool of cultural knowledge and perspective. However, we may over-estimate the depth and influence of western ideas acquired by Japanese students. The distinctness of the Japanese language and culture is a barrier to assimilation of the sort of knowledge taken for granted by the L1 writers in this study, knowledge which made it easier for them to predict their reader's characteristics. A study referred to by Koboyashi(1984) noted that the effect on Japanese student writers of contact with the target culture became marked only when the students were studying within that culture. This study indicated a rhetorical preference for total omission of the thesis, or a movement from specifics to a generalisation at the end of the essay. This preference was modified when students went to America to study, and advanced writers seemed to fall between their own cultural practices and the target language practice.

The Japanese writers in this study had, of course, been exposed in their Australian studies to native -English writer rhetorical practices, and most appear partially to have adapted to native-English reader expectations. However, there is still evidence of cultural influence in the amount of inferencing required of the reader, and in the concreteness of the realisation of the argument. Again all the writers, without exception produced instances of paired and balanced opposites, the "Yin-Yang" principle at work. The following introductory paragraph exemplifies the writer in transition between cultural influences:

Euthanasia should be legalised because the burden of the family is too heavy to take care of the patients who keep alive at vegetative level. Somebody has to keep an eye on the patients all day long. Although their brains are still alive, the other parts of the body are almost the same as those of the dead. The patients are only living by artificial means on the bed. We were born as human beings, and we hope that we will die as human beings. If all people have the right to live, then we should all have the right to die. Euthanasia is one of the best ways for those patients to die with dignity.

## CONCLUSION

The practiced expository writer in English orients the reader at certain junctures in the text, in the title, in the introduction, in paragraph topic sentences and reorientations, and in concluding sections. A command of syntactic options

prevents the orientations from becoming distractions instead of aids to coherence. Likewise, familiarity with the conventions of academic genres ensure that writers will provide the appropriate signals of rhetorical frame. To the student raised in a different culture, perhaps with different rhetorical preferences, certainly with different cultural capital, instruction in these skills often means the difference between academic failure and success. The task of student and teacher could be made easier if the starting point were a mutual, non-judgmental recognition of culturally-determined differences in the styles and structures of expository texts.

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# Texts of the Culture and Texts of the Discourse Community

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There has been a great deal of work in the last two decades on cultural differences in text organization (for example Kaplan 1966, Clyne 1980, Kirkpatrick 1993a, 1993b). These studies show that there are substantial differences in the ways in which different cultures structure texts, even texts with very similar communicative purposes. These studies have focussed primarily on the general sorts of texts found in societies including essays written by school students. There has not, however, been a great deal of research which has examined the cultural differences in text organization within a specialist discourse community.

In the modern world, discourse communities in areas such as the sciences are typically supranational and supra-cultural in their scope. Given that such discourse communities exist and the communicative tasks of writers within the discourse community have common tasks, it is an obvious question whether the structural features of these texts vary from culture to culture or whether they are common to the discourse community.

Widdowson (1979) puts forward a universalist view of specialist texts claiming:

Scientific exposition is structured according to certain patterns of rhetorical organization which, with some tolerance for individual stylistic variation, imposes conformity on members of the scientific community no matter what language they happen to use. (Widdowson 1979:61)

This position raises two questions. Firstly there is the question of the extent to which the rhetorical organization of scientific writing is different from the rhetorical organization of general texts. If it is different this raises the issue of whether this rhetorical organization differs from the rhetorical organization of texts from other discourse communities which are more strongly based in the local culture, such as literary studies. In order to examine these issues, I propose to use paragraph organization as a means of discussing this issue.

Kaplan (1966) proposes a digressive model of paragraph development in Romance languages, exemplified by French. He uses the following paragraph as a demonstration.

The first point to which I would like to call your attention is that nothing exists outside the boundary of what is strictly human. A landscape may be beautiful, graceful, sublime, insignificant, or ugly; it will never be ludicrous. We may laugh at an animal, but only because

we have detected in it some human expression or attitude. We may laugh at a hat, but we are not laughing at the piece of felt or straw. We are laughing at the shape that men have given to it, the human whim whose mould it has assumed. **I wonder why a fact so important has not attracted the attention of philosophers to a greater degree. Some have defined man as an animal that knows how to laugh. They could equally well have defined him as an animal which provokes laughter;** for if any other animal or some lifeless object, achieves the same effect, it is always because of some similarity to man.

In this text, a paragraph from a work on the nature of comedy published in 1900, the italicized parts of the text represent a digression. Kaplan (1966) schematizes this rhetorical structure with a zig-zag line as in Figure 1 and claims that this discourse pattern is typical of writing in the Romance languages in general.

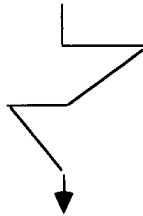


FIGURE 1: ROMANCE RHETORICAL STRUCTURE (KAPLAN 1966)

When we examine Table 1, a number of issues about paragraph development can be raised. Firstly it is clear that “digression” is not the only possible paragraph type found in writing in French and Spanish. Writers in these languages have a range of paragraph types which they can call on and digression is just one possibility. Secondly, the amount of digression varies with the discipline. In literary texts, digressive paragraphs are common while in biology texts the structure is more typical of that found in similar disciplines in English. What we see here is then a distributional rule covering the use of digression in different genres, or, in other words, a difference in the ways in which available paragraph types are exploited.

TABLE 1: PARAGRAPH TYPES IN TWO DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES IN FRENCH AND SPANISH

	French		Spanish	
	Literature	Biology	Literature	Biology
“digressive”	109	5	94	8
“linear”	91	195	106	192

This indicates the existence of two classes of texts within French and Spanish expository writing: texts which favour “digressive” paragraphs and texts which favour “linear” paragraphs. These preferences are mapped onto specific discourse communities. In order to discuss this I wish to establish two categories of texts: texts of the culture and texts of the discourse community.

Texts of the culture are the primary text types which are taught to all members of the culture through the education system and which are viewed by the culture as basic types of texts. It is these sorts of texts which are traditionally discussed in genre theory – report, expository essay, etc. – and which are usually assumed within the context of genre theory to be reasonably homogenous groups of texts (see for example Christie and Rothery 1990; Derewianka 1990, Martin 1990). It is primarily the rhetorical patterns of these texts which Kaplan (1966) and Clyne (1980) seem to be discussing in their work, although Clyne does consider some academic writing in Linguistics as well. Texts of the culture are the main concern of primary and secondary education which, on the whole, tends to emphasize more generic texts independent of disciplines.

Texts of the discourse community are specialist texts used by a restricted community for highly specific communicative purposes. They have highly specialized conventions which relate to their particular needs. These texts are the primary concern of tertiary education, but are not usually explicitly taught as a part of such education, rather students are socialized into these text types through exposure to valued texts. As we have seen with the French example above, texts of the discourse community may vary greatly from texts of the culture in their rhetorical patterns. This has important implications for tertiary literacy in that students need to learn that the sorts of texts valued in a tertiary setting may be very different from the sorts of texts valued at other points in their education.

What we observe in the construction of academic texts in French and Spanish is that internationalist discourse communities – such as the sciences – adopt a specific type of text which is recognizable across languages as a text of the discourse community. These texts appear to be heavily influenced by English language text types which are currently predominant in scientific communication. Culture centred discourse communities such as literature studies, however, adopt text types which are more congruent with the texts of the culture. That is, discourse communities with culturally salient content will be more influenced by the existing cultural practices of what constitutes “good writing” than discourse communities which have content which is less culturally salient. This can be represented diagrammatically as in Figure 2.

General expository writing	Culturally based academic writing	Internationalist academic writing
Strong influence of texts of the culture		Weak influence of texts of the culture

**FIGURE 2: DEGREE OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON VARIOUS TEXT TYPES**

The task for acquiring academic literacy within a particular cultural setting can, therefore, require students to move away from the literacy practices of school education which focus on culturally valued text types to text types which are discipline specific and based on different criteria. The amount of new learning a student will have to do will vary according to the discipline in which s/he is being trained. What becomes clear in the comparison of different academic communities is that there are cultural differences between discourse communities with which students have to become familiar as much as there are cultural differences between speech communities.

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# The Structure of Academic Prose: A Comparative Study

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## INTRODUCTION

Kaplan's seminal study on cross-cultural rhetoric (1966) has brought about a realisation that a broadening of discourse analysis was required to provide wider cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparative evidence in the area of textual studies. This resulted in a number of publications in contrastive rhetoric such as the 1983 volume of the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, and *Writing across languages and cultures, Issues in contrastive rhetoric*, edited by Alan Purves (1988) amongst others.

Hinds (1983) contrasted organisational patterns of Japanese and English expository writing and found that none of the organisational patterns of Japanese prose that he considered, are acceptable in English scientific discourse. Galtung (1979, 1985) compared "Teutonic" intellectual style with "Saxonic", "Gallic" and "Nipponic" styles and found that while "Saxonic" style facilitates dialogue, scholars influenced by "Teutonic" intellectual styles tend to get involved in a cryptic and elitist monologue-type academic prose. These findings have been confirmed by Clyne (1981, 1987) who described differences between English and German discourse patterns. His results have shown texts written by German-educated scientists to be more digressive, less symmetrical, and contain less metalanguage than texts written by their English colleagues. He found linearity and digressiveness to be related to cultural values systems. Similarly, in her study of the scientific Russian and English use of nominalisation and assertion, Nichols (1988) discovered differences between the two languages to be consistent with the broad cultural differences as well as caused by language-specific grammatical categories. Mauranen (1993) examined the rhetorical preferences of Anglo-American and Finnish academic writers and found that Anglo-American academics are more explicit, more reader-oriented and more personal. Finnish writers, on the other hand, favour more implicit rhetorical strategies, using less metatext and a more impersonal style.

## THE STUDY: LINGUISTIC CORPUS AND AIMS

In this study, I investigated the rhetorical framework of research papers written by Polish scholars in English and Polish. The linguistic corpus consisted of articles in the field of Psychology: ten papers written by Polish scholars in English and eight written in Polish. The sections I specifically targeted were introductions to



these articles.

The majority of Polish-written articles examined featured either unconventional subsectioning, or had textual items, prescribed by Anglo-American manuals and style sheets to particular sections, present in other sections. In contrast, English-written papers adhered to the schemata of an acceptable scholarly paper. However, the distribution of textual material into sections tended to present similar problems to those encountered in articles written in Polish. There were multiple instances of the non-adherence to the established contextual boundaries of sections, such as frequent spillage of the prescribed content between sections.

### APPLICATION OF THE CARS MODEL

The analysis of selected introductory sections was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, texts were analysed in terms of Swales' Creating a Research Space (CARS) move (Swales 1990). The aim of the investigation was to test whether Swales' categories are transferable and applicable to Polish scientific discourse.

The study found that in case of the English-written corpus, Swales' model could only be employed in very generic terms. In particular, moves corresponding to those identified by the CARS model did not follow a hierarchically prescribed order and a linear pattern suggested by Swales, but appeared out of sequence or cyclical. They were often downgraded, fragmented or the information was presented in "quasi" moves, which did not address tasks designated by Swales. Their realisation tended to contain indirectness or implicitness, leaving discovery of the writer's intentions to the reader.

Swales' framework also proved to be inapplicable in case of Polish-written introductions. Although the examined introductions aimed at creating a research space, the way to create this space, did not specifically correspond to either the moves isolated by Swales nor their sequence.

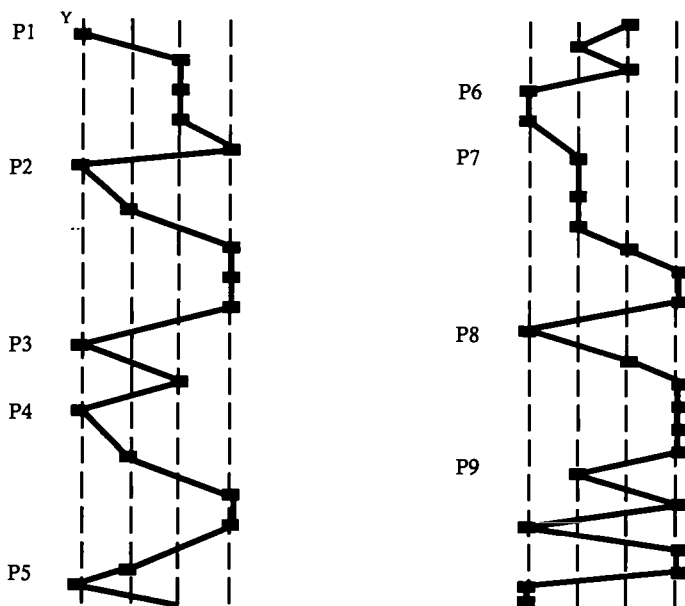
I concluded that the CARS model, developed for the analysis of introductions to English scientific papers did not hold in case of research article introductions written by Polish scholars either in English or Polish. I would like to argue that discursual frameworks and methodological tools, designed and suitable for the analysis of scientific prose composed in one language and written in its cultural tradition, are not universally applicable in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analysis.

### LINEARITY AND DIGRESSIVENESS

In the second stage of the investigation, I adopted an analytical framework introduced and utilised by Clyne (1981, 1987) and Clyne and Kreutz (1987) in their contrastive studies of English and German texts. Graph 1 follows Clyne's examples (1987) and illustrates the textual dynamics of Introduction to the article *Do it your own way: Cognitive strategies, intelligence, and personality* (Kossowska and Necka 1994). Nodes on vertical lines represent propositions appearing in paragraphs P1 to P9. Nodes placed on the Y axis signify the line of the main

argument. The further to the right the nodes appear the more removed from the main argument is the information they contain. A frequent occurrence of nodes to the right of the main axis signifies a high level of digressiveness of the text. Similar levels were observed in the remaining introductions.

**GRAPH 1: THE DIGRESSIVENESS OF THE INTRODUCTION IN THE KOSSOWSKA AND NECKA ARTICLE (1994)**



The general aim of digressions in the texts examined is to provide background information. Sometimes it is a kind of universal, more abstract or general information which the authors deem important for their reader to possess in order to understand the issues, and appreciate the purpose and importance of the research. At other times, it includes tangentially related issues, helping the authors to work their way through the text and reach final conclusions.

Presentation of the conceptual-terminological apparatus occupies a primary place in providing background information. By including frequent clarifications and affirmations of the writer's understandings of the concepts and terminology, Polish authors appeal to their readers to pay attention to particular conceptual-terminological distinctions.

Background information is usually highly referenced. The inclusion of multiple references serves two purposes. The first is to place the research within the continuum of an academic debate in a particular field of studies. The second is to testify to the authors' erudition, their knowledge about, and experience in the field. Introductions by Polish writers often look like abbreviated statements of all available knowledge. This phenomenon is not uncommon in academic styles of other cultures. Clyne (1987) noted the same feature present in German, and Nichols (1988) in Russian academic prose.

## IMPLICITNESS OF STYLE AND READER RECIPROCITY

Polish authors usually introduce their research by presenting a broad view of the area and gradually narrow it down, building up their argumentation through multiple digressions. As numerous associations are given importance and issues become mutually intertwined, topics, originally presented in a way signifying minor importance, unexpectedly become the main focus of attention. The style of academic writing characterised by a large degree of implicitness and a small amount of metalanguage to guide the readers through the text, leaves readers to their own resources in terms of selecting which information is necessary for the understanding of the article, or relevant to the reader's needs. While writers of English texts frequently use explicit signals, summarise their arguments for the reader, tell the reader what to anticipate and how texts segments relate to each other, Polish writers do not explicitly lead the reader through the text but leave the main conclusions for the reader to draw.

Hinds (1987) distinguished two types of languages: "writer responsible", and "reader responsible". The introductions of the articles written by English speaking authors seem to belong to the "writer responsible" category. They are more reader-oriented due to a more conventionalised and clearer structural pattern, as well as the usage of the metalanguage which organises the propositional content. The introductions of the articles written by Polish authors, on the other hand, belong to the second, "reader responsible" category, where the person responsible for the effective homeostasis is the reader. The writer is involved in the development of a line of argumentation and the creation of an academic polemic. It has been suggested that Polish style promotes an elitist attitude to knowledge, deliberately excluding outgroups. On the other hand, it is possible that the linear rigour imposed on English academic prose prevents English-speaking scholars from adopting more diversified and creative approaches, thus encouraging a one-sided treatment of topics. This, in turn, limits the possibility of looking at a topic from different angles, and restricts possibilities for lateral thinking, which might result in omissions of important, if at times, tangentially related issues

## CONCLUSION

A fundamentally different approach to form and content constitutes a major difference between Polish and Anglo-American academic styles. In the Polish intellectual tradition, content and form are not equally valued; the evidence of possession of knowledge is considered far more superior to the form in which it is conveyed. Presentation of content is the main focus of attention in Polish scholarly writing; that is, *what* is presented is more highly valued than *how* it is presented.

Genres are a kind of social activity realised in language, existing within social, cultural and linguistic parameters (Martin 1985, Swales 1990, Mauranen 1993) and generic constraints on academic prose reflect the cultural habits of the writer's

academic community. This view is shared by Duszak (1994) who argues that traditions of oracy, literacy, styles of intellectual debating, scientific prose and attitudes to knowledge and academia are related to underlying cultural values, norms and socioculturally shared beliefs.

Notions of linearity and digressiveness should also be seen as culturally sensitive terms. What is considered digressive by an English native speaker writer may be seen as linear by Polish, German, Japanese or Finnish speakers. For example, in discussing the rhetoric of academic writing with my Polish colleagues I often encountered defensive attitudes, indicating their dissatisfaction at seeing Polish academic style described as digressive.

In order to draw definite conclusions, it is necessary to test the claims made by this study on more extensive data. Research aimed at analysing the discourse of psychological papers has suggested that discourse rules of this discipline are less definable than those of other disciplines (Swales and Najjar (1987). Consequently, psychology might be more tolerant of different, novel approaches and less rigid textual patterns. There is a feeling (Bazerman 1981, Liddicoat this volume) that in humanities and social sciences there is less consensus relating to the structure of the research paper than in the hard sciences. The analysis of English and Polish research in natural sciences should reveal whether texts in the same discipline feature common characteristics which would over-ride cultural considerations.

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# Providing Scaffolding for Theses Preparation in Computer and Mathematical Sciences

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This article describes measures taken to ensure the timely production of high calibre Minor Theses within the Computers and Mathematical Sciences Department at Victoria University of Technology. The project received funding from the Quality Teaching Program. It involved collaboration between discipline area personnel and a language specialist. The aim was to make explicit the managerial, administrative, linguistic and stylistic expectations of a masters candidate. The measures are encompassed within the title Minor Thesis Preparation Programme (MTPP) which consists of two publications and a series of workshops. The first publication is a handbook dealing with the linguistic, rhetorical and generic aspects of producing a minor thesis which relates directly to the Computers and Mathematical Sciences disciplines (C&MS). The second publication is a booklet containing procedures, timelines, assessment criteria, the responsibilities of all parties, an overview of the program and information on university facilities. It is argued that the two booklets together with the workshops will make the research and the presentation of results a worthwhile and rewarding experience.

## INTRODUCTION

Successful completion of degrees is an issue charged with political, social and economic implications. It is related to retention rates which are emerging as a crucial criteria in quality review processes. The successful completion and timely production of research theses and associated activities have received considerable attention, for example Parry and Hayden (1994) and *The Quality in Postgraduate Research: Making it Happen* workshops held in Adelaide in 1994. It is in the details of how quality in postgraduate research is made to happen that the genre approach has significance.

As an institution emerging from the amalgamation and realignment of tertiary education of the Dawkins era, Victoria University of Technology (VUT) faced a significant change agenda. The development and maintenance of a post-graduate research culture was, and still is one of the critical tasks. The seriousness with

which this issue has been addressed is reflected in the establishment of the Postgraduate Studies Unit, the production of documentation dealing with such matters (VUT 1995 a, 1995b, 1995c) and survey of research students (Fairclough and Britz, 1994). One feature of a research culture is the examination of pedagogical approaches with a view to providing a framework for both teachers and learners which enhances the possibility of not only successful outcomes but also excellence.

In the Computer and Mathematical Sciences Department (C&MS) post-graduate students completing minor theses have exhibited problems and concerns similar to those of full research students. This article is a description of the Quality Teaching Scheme Project (QTP) aimed at bringing about improvements in the minor theses. The course is extremely flexible in nature, accommodating students from a variety of backgrounds. Students have many conflicting commitments such as families, jobs and payment of fees. For overseas students, living in a different culture and learning English present additional demands.

A survey of the course-work masters students was conducted in 1995 in parallel with the QTP. A brief summary of some of the survey results is shown in Table 1. It can be seen from the table below that there is a high proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Issues related to English language proficiency were highlighted with the first group of Minor Thesis students in 1991. This led to the introduction of the Minor Thesis Preparation Program (MTPP) which consisted of both language assistance and thesis preparation guidance. One useful metaphor for the MTPP was that of scaffolding or providing a framework for students to build their theses around.

**TABLE 1: SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY OF COURSEWORK MASTERS STUDENTS**

1/2 Full Fee (FF)	1/2 Local
1/2 Full Fee (FF)	1/2 PT
3/4 NESB	1/4 English Speaking background
3/4 Csc stream	1/4 C&MSc stream
3/4 males	1/4 Females
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilities level of sufficiency: Computer (70%), Library (60%), Lab Space (50%)</li> <li>• Problems: Work requirements (72%), Family commitments (79%-local), (67%-FF)</li> <li>• 58% students found English support at least adequate while 55% NESB students found English support adequate.</li> <li>• 71% of students liked the flexibility of the course.</li> <li>• 68% of students liked the minor thesis at least somewhat.</li> </ul>	

## THE HISTORY OF INCEPTION

The inception of a collaborative program occurred in 1992 with the approach of C&MS staff to the Educational Development Department. Over the proceeding years programs were developed, first by Rhonda Hallet then by Greta Caruso. The issue of contextualisation and the relevance of genre theory/ pedagogy were two emerging themes.

Funding was attained through the Quality Teaching Program. The aim of the MTPP was to provide students with organisational and academic structures. A series of workshops was conducted and a booklet of materials was developed. Examples of completed theses were used as models and students were asked to bring along work in progress. The aims of the course were to:

- provide a program of support which complements existing course structures
- provide language learning opportunities to students in accordance with their needs
- familiarise students with conventions of writing expected of post-graduates in Australia
- familiarise students with the expectations of their discourse community
- provide a genre-based approach to writing the Minor Thesis
- offer students learning opportunities in the areas of both written and spoken language
- recognise students as experts in their own field and provide them with an understanding of the culture-specific nature of their task.

## A GENRE-BASED APPROACH

Genre is a linguistic-social category concerned with describing the aspects of textual form which are determined by production in the social context of culture. Higher education institutions have clearly defined and organised discourse communities; they have an explicit emphasis on product and a graded structure for designating success. Genre theory provides a useful means of addressing writing tasks in higher education settings.

The difficulty faced by many students is that while the necessity to accord with established genres is made clear, what these genres are and how to create accordance is often a mystery. Students are commonly expected to know, find or discover this for themselves. The expectation that knowledge of genres will be acquired incidentally can create difficulties for any student. Martin, Christie and Rothery (1987:48) argue that the deconstruction of genre is necessary in order to make clear the pathways to acceptance by the relevant discourse community.

The problem becomes quite a conundrum when considered from the perspective of the student with a culture and language background other than English. Studies of contrastive rhetoric have revealed something of the way that the values and expectations of academic writing are culture bound. Gaining acceptance



into discourse communities, as signified by academic success, means learning to manipulate language within its cultural context to form appropriate genres in a particular educational discipline.

Swales (1990:45) has stressed the need to teach about genre in a way that students are afforded "opportunities for reflecting upon rhetorical or linguistic choices". Christie (1987:30) poses the learning of these sets of choices as empowering; enabling students to enter, understand, develop and change culture. Thus an information basis was laid for students to make choices about how they construct the meaning they hope to achieve while meeting the expectations of the discourse community of which they are emergent members.

The genre-based teaching cycle consists of four stages (Hammond et al. 1992):

- Stage One Building the context of field of the topic or text-type
- Stage Two Modelling the genre under focus
- Stage Three Joint construction of the genre
- Stage Four Independent construction of the genre

## THE WORKSHOPS

A series of eight workshops was offered from March to September. These workshops were focussed on the following topics: Conceptualising Research, Scientific Writing, Literature Review, Sentences and Paragraphs, Paragraphs and Chapters, Editing, Writing the Abstract, and Layout.

It was in this situation that the genre teaching cycle was put into practice. In the workshop on abstract writing, for instance, stage one (building knowledge of the context of field of the topic or text types) meant giving the students time to read and discuss the texts. As a language expert, but certainly not a C&MS expert, the teacher was able to make contributions to discussions of the text type. The students' content expertise could invariably be relied upon.

Stage two (modelling of text) was completed by a close examination of published abstracts in the field of C&MS and past students' work. This led to a review of the generic, linguistic, and rhetorical conventions of abstract writing in a general sense. This was sometimes reinforced by reading a chapter from a standard "How to..." text. At this stage set exercises were sometimes completed.

Stage three (joint construction of text) was completed as students and lecturer worked together to create an abstract. This sometimes took the form of a set exercise but was most successful when a student volunteered a draft. Students worked collaboratively and were able to provide suggestions and advise to each other. In some instances it was evident that where students were unable to see their own work clearly they were nevertheless able to act as informed critics when dealing with the work of others.

Stage four (independent construction of the text) was completed when students wrote their own abstracts using the knowledge and skills developed. The cycle was often repeated with students appraising and refining their work.

## **THE HANDBOOK**

The handbook developed is by no means a comprehensive text on how to write a minor thesis. It consists of extracts and excerpts from standard texts, advice about genre, language and style, examples of the work of staff and students and exercises aimed at guiding the writer to production of an acceptable form. It needs to be acknowledged that there is usually not one single correct form but generally appropriate schemata. The approach taken was that of providing students with knowledge and examples of the range of appropriate options.

## **DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC CONTEXTUALISATION**

One remarkable feature of the program was the degree to which contextualisation of the generic knowledge within the discipline was necessary. It seemed that students were only able to notice generic structures when the content or field was one which they claimed as their own. Students commented that they could not relate to materials derived even from closely related disciplines such as electronic engineering. In this program students were most able to learn the parameters of the generic expectations of their discourse communities when the content or field knowledge was directly relevant to them.

It is noteworthy that the published papers of the Head of Department were a valuable source of exemplary material. This had a number of positive aspects. Firstly, students were able to examine in detail specific aspects of writing in their discipline as completed by a recognised expert. Secondly, students knew the Head of Department, if not personally then by reputation. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the examples were regarded by the students as highly credible models worthy of close attention. The higher the status of the text the more likely were the students to notice the generic structure.

There seemed to be a directly proportional relationship between the relevance of the field and the ability to deal with abstract concepts related to genre. In attempting to apply generic knowledge set exercises were sometimes undertaken but the work-in-progress of students was the most highly relevant and highly authentic text type. In evaluation both the teacher and the students felt that discipline-specific contextualisation was not only valuable but essential to explicating requirements of a minor thesis. The higher the level of authenticity of the text the more able were the students to create accordance with conventionally appropriate generic structure.

The workbook draws on extracts from a number of sources. Students were appreciative of the fact that the examples were taken from current literature and that the instructions were in line with current practice. This was achieved by collaboration between the handbook author, Greta Caruso and the coordinator of the masters by minor thesis program, Peter Cerone. Collaboration between language and content specialists can prove a difficult relationship to exact. There were some issues where contradictory advice was given, in these instances students were advised to follow the advice of the supervisors. In this instance

the relationship was founded in a mutual commitment to social justice and a determination to build VUT's emerging research profile.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult to quantitatively gauge the success of the entire program since the assessment period was shorter than that for which the program has been run. Even so, indications are that a higher proportion of students than formerly have submitted their theses on time for examination. The material for the program is now ready so that full implementation will take place.

The development and trials of the materials and workshops have revealed some interesting propositions for genre theory. Most interesting is the relationship between the learning of abstract generic conventions and expectations and familiarity with content. The genre approach gives students cultural insight into the presumptions of discourse communities, a social framework for understanding linguistic issues and explicit knowledge of what is expected of them. The processes by which students develop competence in thesis writing are at least aided, if not guided, by the provision of a framework which explains, illustrates and clarifies the what, how, when and why of their task.

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# Never Say 'I'? The Writer's Voice in Essays in the Humanities

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One of the ways in which the discourse of the disciplines varies is a function of the writer's relationship to his or her material. In some disciplines, such as History, the researcher has no relationship to the primary sources, and the notion that he or she is treating them objectively is reflected (or created) by the use of impersonal language forms; this is the source of the idea, familiar to students, that you "never say I" in academic writing. In other disciplines, however - such as Literature, Cinema Studies and to some extent Art History - the researcher's response to the subject matter can be a part of what he or she is writing about, and here the tone, while still relatively formal, can be more personal, though the deployment of evidence must conform to academic ideas of what constitutes a demonstration. Within this category, there are interesting variations again. In Philosophy, for example, the writer's intellect is invited to the essay, but not his/her emotions, while in Art History a sensual response may be the subject of comment. On the other hand, Art History is History as well as Art, and the History part of it calls for impersonal discourse. My paper looks at some of these variations, and the linguistic forms that correlate with them; and I suggest ways of talking about this with students.

This paper is about the student's voice in a piece of academic writing in the Humanities. I want to suggest that this varies with the writer's relationship to his or her material, and that that varies in fairly predictable ways with the discipline in which the student is writing. Because the adoption of a voice involves rhetorical choices, I have found the perspective of systemic functional linguistics helpful in thinking about it, and I will draw on that perspective in this paper. It is not offered, however, as a paper in systemics, but rather as a bridge between systemics and academic skills teaching.

The aspect of voice I want to look at is the student's presence in the essay. This is something about which students already have a rule when they come to see me, which goes "You should never say 'I' in an essay." Clearly, then, they have had some advice on this point, but it is advice that they have some difficulty with applying. And I think this is because each discipline has some tacit assumptions about who it is appropriate to be in an essay, and these are not the same across a range of disciplines.

The idea that academic writing never says "I" does, in fact, embody a truth, if "I" is taken to stand for a complete or essential self. Although each person may

be seen as a kaleidoscope of selves, it is likely that students think of themselves as carrying a real self from one class to another, and it is true that no such self is looked for in an essay. We all have things to say that are not within the discourse of any discipline! - in particular, our spontaneous opinions; and academic skills advisers are familiar with the problems of students who answer questions that ask for their "opinion" by actually giving their opinions. It might be more accurate, then, to say that you can never be "I" in an essay; but it is not true that you can never say "I". For, although the academic voice is always a discursive one, the disciplines vary in where they draw the boundaries of the discursive self. We see this in the varying scope they give for apparently personal expression.

Generally I think it can be helpful to make a broad distinction between disciplines in which the writer's response to the material is part of the subject matter of the essay, and disciplines in which it is not. In History, for example, the writer has no relationship at all with the primary materials s/he is examining; they were not written to communicate with this reader, however engaged s/he might actually be with the events and voices of the past (and indeed, a student may feel much more strongly about certain historical events, of which s/he must write with detachment, than about a literary work for which s/he can profess strong feeling). So the student writes from a distance, and this is reflected in the impersonal tone of history essays and the virtual absence of the writer from the prose (with exceptions which I will return to). In English, on the other hand, the primary materials were written in order to have an effect on a reader, and that effect is at the centre of the essay. The student begins by examining what effect the piece of literature has had on him or her — "what does this piece do?" S/he may think that his/her reading is likely to be similar to other people's, but it is only his/her own reading that s/he can be sure of, and it is appropriate to take responsibility for it by saying "I" think, feel, wonder, infer, doubt, remain unconvinced by, am overwhelmed by, etc. Many students do say "the reader is", in this kind of observation, but the marker's response is often some variation of "speak for yourself".

The essay is not, of course, just a few sentences about what the reader feels. Out of the first question, "what does the text do?" arises the one to which the essay is mainly devoted, which is "how does it do that?" The interpretation has to be explained in terms of what is actually in the text, and that is what nearly all of a successful English essay will usually consist of. For this reason, almost all of it will be in the third person, and it will certainly be in formal language. But it will be personal, in two senses: one, that statements about the reader's perceptions can be in the first person, and two, that much more of the reader is invited to the essay. The reader's feelings, values, ideas and experiences, both cultural and personal, can be discussed as contributing to the reading; and where they do, they are part of the subject matter of the essay, not something to be suppressed.

The same is true of Drama, Cinema Studies, and Media, in various degrees, while Archaeology, History, and Politics are subjects in which the student writes from a distance. Art History is a hybrid, while Philosophy is in a class of its own. We could perhaps envisage a continuum with Drama at one end and

positivist Sociology at the other, in terms of the personal involvement with the material which is expressed in an essay. (While the focus of this paper is on Humanities subjects, it is useful to look at Sociology by way of contrast). So here, I want to examine some of these, to see who the writer is in each discipline, and how the language that is used to carry the work of argument varies with the writer's conventional relationship to the material s/he is writing about.

I have put Drama at one end of the continuum because in this discipline students are often writing not just about a text's likely effect on a reader, but about one specific event — a performance — where the text has been performed with no other purpose than to have an impact, intellectual, sensual, and emotional, on particular people in an audience. The immediacy of this experience is what the writer's review is supposed to convey, and the text is analysed in terms of the success of the one performance. Thus, in this passage from a drama student's review of a play from Chaucer, the student's own inexperience is a legitimate topic:

The language of the play, even though quite authentically of the period, was hard to understand for someone, like me, who is unfamiliar with Chaucer. So too was it hard to follow the the series of events that made up the tale. The players did try to compensate for the audience's difficulty by making bolder gestures and also by using simple puppets made of vegetables to illustrate what the narrator was saying.

Frequently, in Drama essays, much of the essay will be a personal narrative of the writer's encounter with the text or the performance. The speaker is "I" and all aspects of his or her experience can be included in the essay, as long as they are analysed in terms of the design and language of the play, factors of performance, personal and cultural expectations, etc.

The same is true of literature essays, except that they do not normally take the form of narrative because the reading is not regarded as one irreplicable event, even though current literary theory tells us that it is. Literature essays give less priority to the reader and more to the text, but their point of departure is, nonetheless, that person's response to the text. Of Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck", one student wrote "I felt able to empathise with much of her experience", and another wrote that it "is written, I think, from the writer's personal experience." It is difficult to imagine these remarks in any but the first person, and that is fine; but very soon the student must offer evidence, or the tutor will write "o.k. but how do you get this from the text?" This student, in fact, gets straight into the poem, with a mixture of first and third person:

Once she starts descending the ladder from the schooner side, she likens herself to an insect. "I crawl like an insect down the ladder." The image I see here is of a slow, creeping movement by the writer-diver who possibly feels small and vulnerable in her surroundings, hence the "insect" feeling.

At the end of this essay, the tutor has written "This is very good — a thoughtful

reading of the poem — you know when to assert something is in the poem, and when to signal your interpretation of what's there." This comment reinforces this student's understanding that she should be reflecting on her own role in the text she is creating, as she goes.

So strong is the expectation in literary studies that the student will be writing about herself in relation to the text, that one tutor read this meaning into a student's comment, as follows:

After reading "The Clod and the Pebble" and "Surprised by Joy—  
Impatient as the Wind" [this student wrote], one receives a feeling of  
intense disillusion created by both poets.

The tutor wrote "Puzzling. What, I wonder, were you previously illusioned about that these lyrics dispelled?" In fact, the student was not writing about her own disillusionment but those of the speakers of the poems. She did not put it very well, but a feeling one "receives" has got to come from somewhere outside oneself. Nonetheless, it was the student's response that the tutor expected to see here, though his own powers of interpretation had to be strained to sustain that expectation.

In Cinema and Media Studies, the approach to textual analysis is similar, but the role of the student is somewhat less personal. Whereas in literature the student is speaking for him/herself, in Cinema Studies s/he is more likely to see him/herself as part of an audience that the filmmaker thought of in mass, rather than individual, terms, and to look at how the film is designed to communicate with that mass. Thus the student is more likely to write "the audience" where in English s/he would write "I", and the discourse is less likely to tell of the student's response and more likely to be in terms of the intentions of the text.

In all of these disciplines the writer starts from a response to the primary material, and this response is considered relevant to the essay. The persona of the writer, however, is slightly different from one of these disciplines to the next, depending upon whether s/he thinks of him/herself as an individual or one of a crowd. (There are, moreover, differences within the one discipline depending upon the critical stance to which the writer subscribes. Peter Elbow (1991) has delineated ten different approaches within the discipline of English, and one should obviously be cautious about treating any other discipline as a single undifferentiated approach. Nevertheless, the generalisations offered here may help us in piloting students between disciplines, and all of those so far examined belong, at least, to a first person archipelago.)

When we turn to Philosophy, we still find writers calling themselves "I". The writer has a relationship to the material, because Philosophy is about mental processes and moral questions, and every writer is a typical owner of these processes and questions. A writer can approach a Philosophy topic by examining the workings of his/her own mind or the dilemmas of his/her own experience, and for this reason the primary evidence with which philosophical writing deals is often produced by the writer him/herself. It may be in Philosophy that we

meet the first person most often, as the examples adduced as evidence are often about "I". However, it is a very circumscribed "I"; for, while the writer's sensibilities are invited to a literature essay, only his/her intellectual faculties are invited to a Philosophy essay. An essay question may be about belief in God, but it asks whether it can be rational to hold such a belief. Or it may be about a single standard of right and wrong, but it asks whether such a standard can be consistent with logic. Thus, the "I" who speaks in a Philosophy essay is a very partial "I", and students often experience difficulties with Philosophy essays because they have never tried to narrow themselves down to that rational "I" before.

As we approach the midpoint of the continuum I am suggesting, the discipline of Art History is of particular interest, as a territory which has been colonised by both personal response and historical distance. This discipline has a distinctly pluralist discourse, in which the visual analysis of a work of art is very much like the analysis of a text in literature, while its location within a tradition(s) is a historical problem. This discourse has been explicated for students in an exceptionally useful book by Sylvan Barnet, A Short Guide to Writing about Art (Barnet, 1993). As in literary studies, Barnet (1993: 68-70) tells us that an Art History student, too, begins by asking him/herself, "What is my first response to the work?" His/her next question, "*Why do I have this response?*" ... requires you", Barnet advises, "to trust your feelings. If you are amused or repelled or unnerved or soothed, ... follow [these responses] up". The follow-up involves another question, and this too is like the questioning that shapes a literature essay: "*What is this [work] doing?*... Or put it this way: What is the artist up to?" Later, he puts this yet another way, again helpfully: "Analysis tries to answer the somewhat odd-sounding question, '*How does the work mean?*'" (p.72).

Here, the student's feelings are invited, as in a literature essay, if they are explained with reference to the work, as this student of classical sculpture has done:

A little child, peering upwards, yearns to be carried, and pulls on a toga of a man in front of him to get attention. The contrast of their sizes gives rise to sympathy for the little boy who is probably tired of standing in the procession.

He has not, however, laid claim to this sympathy himself, and Barnet would endorse this writer's approach. "It is usually advisable", he tells students, "to reveal your feeling not by continually saying 'I feel' and 'this moves me', but by calling attention to qualities in the object that shape your feelings... The point... is not to repress or disguise one's personal response but to account for it, and to suggest that it is not eccentric and private" (p.21) Barnet calls this discourse "persuasive description", and he gives an example from a student's essay on Edvard Munch's The Scream:

This lithograph is almost unbearably agitated: ... the thrusting diagonals pull the eyes to the left rear, yet the compelling picture of the central anguished figure pulls them forward again ... the isolated figure in the



centre is surrounded by, and seems assaulted by, strongly conflicting lines—at the right, verticals that crash into horizontals, and at the left, the diagonals. (p. 83-5)

Thus, the writer discusses her feelings, in response to this lithograph, as feelings, but not as hers. And this is consistent with the wholly impersonal discourse of the other component of Art History, that is, History. Barnett (p. 72) explains that, in addition to formal analysis, “Art-historical research is largely an attempt to explain certain results — let’s say, the new style of painting that arose in Flanders in about 1420 — by setting forth causes. That is, the historian asks, Why, and searches for explanations.” In this investigation the student stands at a distance from the material; s/he has a relationship to the work, but no relationship to the circumstances of its production — and it is here that we cross over into the impersonal disciplines.

The convention in History essays (as in Politics and Archaeology) is that the writer is speaking for his/her evidence, and not for him/herself, with the result that his/her voice is disembodied. S/he is, of course, fielding some kind of interpretation, but the work of presenting it must be done by the choice of what Systemic Functional linguists call “grammatical metaphors”. A sentence is metaphorical in this sense if the subject of the sentence is something that cannot really act, so that the idea expressed is an abstraction rather than something which is literally true. It has been observed (Rubino, 1989) that, in sophisticated historical writing, the actors tend to be not people, as in reality they must have been, but ideas or processes which are nominalised (that is, made into nouns — hence the metaphor is “grammatical” because it is achieved by a grammatical operation). We see this in the opening paragraph of an essay in Women’s Studies, in which not a single sentence has a person as its subject (in bold).

With the emergence of sexology during the late 19th Century and early 20th Century came both new sexual **stigmas and freedoms**. This new **discourse** had its basis largely in essentialist theories of women’s and men’s sexuality. **This** is probably most evident in the patriarchal “companionate heterosexuality” (Hoag, 1992, 548) ideal purported by sexologists. However within this, the **reconceptualisation** of marriage did emphasise the sexual. Similarly a more fluid **definition** of “appropriate” pre-marital sexuality was developing. This **focus** on women’s and men’s sexual desires can be seen in a liberating light. **This** is particularly evident when considering earlier Victorian constructions of women as sexless. The **medicalisation** of sexuality also created new sexual identities with which people could identify. Sexologists’ **construction** of the female invert was oppressive in its essentialism and alignment with ‘deviancy’. However, this **construction** did allow, as in the case of Radclyffe Hall, a space for lesbians to identify and speak.

The interpretive framework in use here is one which sees sexual identity as a socially constructed phenomenon, but this is not something the writer argues in terms of what people have said and done. It is assumed in the choice of grammatical subjects: “sexual stigmas and freedoms”, in the first sentence;

"discourse" in the second; the whole-sentence antecedent to "this" in sentence 3; "reconceptualisation"; "definition"; "focus"; "this" again referring to the whole idea in the preceding sentence; "medicalisation"; "construction"; and, again, "construction". The writer is not taking any risks here, for this framework is shared by her sources, her tutor, and her companions in the course. Nonetheless, it is a framework, and its control over the discussion is accomplished here by grammar rather than persuasion. The nominalisation of acts of interpretation has given them the status of facts. (This kind of writing is, it should be said, particularly characteristic of introductions in History essays; in the body of the essay, things are more likely to be done by people.)

This effect is helped, moreover, by the author's decision to absent herself from the discussion — except in one place. And it is interesting that the only error in that whole paragraph resulted from the writer's trying not to mention herself at all: "This is particularly evident when considering earlier Victorian constructions of women as sexless". "Considering" here lacks a subject, which could only be the writer herself, though she can generalise her reading by calling herself "we", and she should probably do this. The same error occurs in an essay on Art History, probably for the same reason: "To fully appreciate the diversity of the impressionist painters, a whole range of considerations rather than the single notion of light must be taken into account."

If these writers **had** owned up to their role in thinking about the material, that would be all they could own up to. While the "I" of a literature essay can feel, sense, or believe, for example, the "I" of a History essay can only perform intellectual operations, not emotional or sensual ones, and certainly not acts of faith. Nor can the authors of other secondary sources, and when a student writes "So-and-so believes that" it is likely to be crossed out as implying a slur on So-and-so's scholarship, and replaced with "argues", "thinks", "says", or "states". If anyone feels or believes in a History essay, it is only the author of a primary source.

Nonetheless, in any paper, including History essays, the writer can and probably should appear as "I" — the thinking "I" — when discussing the essay itself. Signposting sentences like the following are perfectly acceptable.

To demonstrate Mao's low status prior to the Long March, I will look at the period from 1927 to the decision to march in 1934.

In this essay I will consider the validity of these theoretical currents in the light of Chilean history since Independence.

As Barnet says, "Nothing is wrong with occasionally using 'I', and noticeable avoidances of it — 'it is seen that', 'this writer', 'we' and the like — suggest an offensive sham modesty." (p.22) Or, as I say to students, Who else could "the present writer" be, apart from you? In the signposting slot, **somebody's** got to speak, and I often see students criticised for using forms which pretend it is not they. It is rather unfair to criticise students for doing this, when they have learned these forms from published work in their field, but I am inclined to back tutors

up in their desire to stop the rot. Still, a less pretentious alternative is available in the form of "This discussion will..." or "This essay explores". These expressions are no less fictive than other grammatical metaphors, but at least they do not go to the lengths of drawing attention to the writer's absence. When a History student did this, by signposting his essay in the passive, his style was no longer that of History, but that of Sociology, modelled, in turn, on the science report:

In order to support the hypothesis, that The Sian Incident exacerbated the downfall of Chiang Kai-shek, and was the turning point in China's history, an examination of the facts to be established from the following questions was undertaken.

What was the reason for the Sian Incident?

Who was involved?

What was the outcome?

The information will be analysed to determine the accuracy of Chiang Kai-shek's interpretation of his involvement in the Sian Incident and its aftermath.

This is not intrinsically odd, perhaps, but it is very odd in History.

In Sociology, we find grammatical metaphor of the kind I have already discussed in the History essay, with concepts serving as grammatical subjects. But here, abstraction is taken a step further with many of the verbs in the passive, and some of those which are not might as well be; for example, in the following excerpt from an essay, we read phrases like "Ideology stems from", and "stability results from". Technically these have active verbs, but they describe a passive process! This paragraph received the marginal annotation, "Excellent introduction!", although if the student had submitted it to a computer grammar checker he would have been urged to change his passives to actives, since grammar checkers were evidently written by people in Humanities or by the ghost of George Orwell. (Until grammar checkers focus on grammar, rather than style, they are unlikely to be an effective replacement for academic skills advisers.)

The **concept** of ideology, derived from the French coinage "ideologue", is referred to by Plamenatz as "a set of closely related beliefs or ideas, or even attitudes, characteristic of a group or community" (1971:15).

**Ideology** stems from the ruling class, the material force of the society, which at the same time is "its ruling intellectual force" (Marx and Engels, 1940:61). According to Gramsci, **society** is dominated by ideology, but he refers to ideology as "hegemony" instead to refer to control with people's consent ...(1971: 161).

**Ideologies**, which in reality are people's impressions and attitudes to life which are influenced by the interests of particular groups, serve to change the "I wants" of the ruling class into "you should" and eventually "It is right and proper that" of the dominated class Gouldner, 1976: 28). The "**stability** of the capitalist societies", according to Gramsci, may be attributed to its dependence "on the ideological domination of the working class" (Abercrombie et al, 1988: 107). This "**stability**" he mentions results from the subordinate class accepting inequalities because of the incorporation of ideology in society.

The preference for passive verbs is characteristic of scientific writing, where the primary focus is on the process that is being reported, and the person carrying out the process is supposed to be irrelevant. It may be because Sociology is a very philosophical undertaking, in which interpretation plays a prominent role, that it needs the objective rhetoric of scientific discourse to bolster its authority. There is an austere and distant tone in the paragraph above which is hardly consistent with its topic of class domination; this tone is achieved, not by the subject matter, but by the abstraction expressed in the notion of concepts as agents and the bloodlessness of the passive verbs.

We have seen that, generally speaking, the conventional presence or absence of the writer reflects the degree of his/her involvement in the production of the primary material. Interestingly, however, this correlation breaks down when it comes to Sociology. While a historian has a role in the selection of material, positivist Sociology goes even further, since so much of its primary material is produced by a research design which includes selection of a sample, framing of questions, choice of statistical and other procedures for getting meaning out of the data, etc. In the very places where the researcher is most present, however, the language represents him/her as most absent, cloaked by the passive voice ("It was decided that", "the following test was used", etc.) While some sociologists appear oblivious to the contradiction in this practice, others are very much aware of it, and make a point of discussing their own role and those of colleagues in both producing and interpreting their material (e.g. Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Nelson et al, 1987). This is one of the most interesting areas of writing for people like us, who are interested in the rhetoric of the disciplines, but I have not noticed it having much influence on student writing.

In fact, and of course, it is always an "I" who responds to information, and not with his/her rational faculty alone. But how the person will go on to make a case about this information is mediated by the culture of the discipline in which s/he is writing. My suggestion here is that in Drama, English, Cinema Studies, Media Studies, and to some extent Art History, a personal response is accepted if it is articulated in terms of the material that is being examined. In History and Sociology, the work of persuasion falls upon the shoulders of various nominalisations which stand in for the writer so that the information appears to be speaking for itself.

And finally, what can usefully be said to students about these variations in voice? In my experience, they are interested in just the kind of discussion, and the kind of demonstration, that I have been presenting here. Elbow has recommended that we teach students not the discourse of each discipline they study, but the "principle of discourse variation" (1991), and this has the virtue of showing them that a disciplinary voice is not a matter of right or wrong but of convention. They can become more aware of what constitutes a writer's voice and its variations in the reading that they do, and they can adjust their own style if they wish to do so; but they will at least be more in control of these decisions of dialect if they know that that is what they are.

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# Making Sense: Cross-Cultural Variation in the Organization of Academic Texts by Taiwanese and Australian Undergraduate Students

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The different linguistic, cultural and education backgrounds of overseas students often leave them unprepared for study in Australia. Particular problems occur when these students have to prepare course-work expository essays for assessment. This study investigated the organization of the course-work essay writing of 18 overseas Taiwanese undergraduate business students in a first year unit in Bachelor of Business degree courses on three campuses. This was compared with the essay organization of a matched group of Australian students. The students' use of conjunctive elements and top level text organizers such as headings and sub-headings was examined. In addition, the students were interviewed about their reasons for choices in organizing their essays. Pertinent unit lecturers and tutors were also interviewed regarding their perceptions of these students' essay writing. The data demonstrated that the organization of these students' essays is the result of a complex interaction of cultural, linguistic and cognitive factors. These two groups showed similarities in their choice of conjunctive elements and headings, but differences in the extent of their use in various categories.

## INTRODUCTION

Overseas students are now an established and significant group on Australian university campuses. North-east Asian students in particular are enrolled in formal courses in Australia in considerable numbers. Taiwanese students form a growing percentage of these numbers.

Overseas students often encounter problems stemming from cultural and educational differences. One of the most difficult and persistent of these problems has been identified by academic support staff as the writing of the course-work essay (Ballard & Clanchy 1991, Ginsburg 1992, Crosling 1993). These form a significant part of the summative assessment, particularly in the faculties of Business in which overseas students are more often enrolled. Overseas students, and Taiwanese in particular, are immersed in a Confucian culture which stresses authoritarian relationships between teachers and students, reproduction in written work, rote learning methods (Smith 1991) and a marked emphasis on learning

and reproducing factual knowledge to the detriment of critical thinking (Smith 1991, Liu 1993, Lin 1995). Even after one or two semesters of ELICOS studies and another spent in university preparation studies, they are still inexperienced writers and encounter problems with the conceptual nature of Australian academic writing and its forms and the expression of these in English (Ballard & Clanchy 1991, Ballard 1992). The composition of these essays and the essay itself, then, illustrate the complex interaction of the profound cultural differences which these students exhibit, cultural differences which embrace language and approaches and attitudes to knowledge, learning and writing.

Australian students face similar difficulties (Cootes & Parry 1991). They fail to think through and understand ideas and then develop their own interpretation of them and they lack the knowledge of the academic language to express the ideas concisely (Ballard & Clanchy in Taylor et. al. 1988). They are also unaware of the critical and analytical nature of academic reading and writing and consequently lack the cognitive, rhetorical and organizational skills required (Bock in Taylor et. al. 1988, Ballard & Clanchy in Taylor et. al. 1988).

One fruitful way of exploring the similarities and differences in the academic writing of overseas and native speaker students has been to examine the use of conjunctive elements in their texts. Studies classifying conjunctive use concluded that Chinese (mostly Cantonese) learners of English used more conjunctions, either externally (Milton & Tsang 1993) or internally (Field 1994) and overused many of these compared to native speakers. They followed Crewe's (1990) explanation of this by suggesting that it was due to a limited ability to write well in Chinese so that these problems were transferred to writing in English.

## METHODOLOGY

The research was cross-cultural and focussed on contrastive rhetoric. It combined qualitative and quantitative approaches by using text analysis of a marked coursework essay and by exploring the contexts of the writing of texts by interviewing the student writers, their lecturers, tutors and EAP teachers as well as a Taiwanese high school English teacher and a Taiwanese academic. The data from these were subsequently analysed using the NUD.IST program.

To increase the authority of results in this context, Purves' (1988:16) five rules in the study of contrastive rhetoric were applied. The settings of writing and the writers themselves were as similar as possible. All 36 students (18 Australian, 18 overseas Taiwanese) were enrolled in Business degree courses and specific units at three university campuses at the same times and had to complete the same essays within the same time frames. The writing tasks had a consistent function, cognitive demand and specific subject matter as they were first-year, Faculty of Business subject, coursework essays, devised as general introductions to a discipline. While there was only one text language because of the nature of the context, there were two clearly identifiable language groups, English and Mandarin. Table 1 below shows the student coding, content of the essays and word length.

**TABLE 1: STUDENT AND ESSAY CODING**

<b>Student Code</b>	<b>Essay Content</b>	<b>Word Length</b>
AIM	International Marketing	2000
BE1-3	Business economics: Elasticity of Supply	2500
BE4-6	Business Economics: Unemployment	1800
AT,BT,HT	Hotel Management: Training Needs	1000

The essays were analysed linguistically using a layered approach as a range of text characteristics can mark relationships between elements of a text and assist in discovering how and why a text means what it does. Halliday and Hasan's concept of cohesion with regard to 'conjunctive elements' was seen as most useful in explaining the making of meaning in this way as:

Conjunctive elements are not cohesive in themselves but indirectly, by virtue of their specific meanings; they are not primarily devices for reaching out into the preceding (or following) text, but they express certain meanings which predispose the presence of other components in the discourse (Halliday & Hasan 1976:226).

'Conjunctive elements' are not merely the conjunctive grammatical form but also embrace lexical items and phrases which perform the same function. Halliday and Hasan (1976:242-243) classify them into four types, additive, adversative, causal and temporal. A further useful refinement in the context of this study categorizes conjunctive relations as either 'external' (X) or 'internal' (I). External relations are those that are inherent in the topic that is being written about. Internal relations are 'those that are inherent in the communication process', in the way that the writer has made meaning of and recorded these relationships. Halliday and Hasan (1976:241) admit that "the line between the two is by no means clearcut; but it is there, and forms an essential part of the total picture" and that it was based on the genres of conversation and narrative.

When applying these categories to conjunctive use in a different genre, the academic expository essay, some problems were encountered. When students were indicating the top level organization of their essays and ideas, it was in response to a set question and, in some cases, a marking guide. Therefore, the conjunctive elements students used in these cases should be interpreted as tending towards internal rather than strictly internal. Items marked as internal in Halliday and Hasan's (1976:242-243) table of conjunctive relations were used externally by students when either directly quoting or paraphrasing textbook content which included conjunctions and inherent relationships within that content. To accommodate this, an additional category,  $X_e$ , was introduced. When following instructions from their lecturers and tutors to give examples as often as possible, and with the preponderance of examples in the reference and text books, the use of 'for instance' and 'for example' must be classified as external, rather than internal.



Although analyses of texts at the lexical level, particularly those using conjunctive elements, are useful, they can be seen as reductionist when used on their own (Milton & Tsang 1993:216). After considering relevancy to genre and data, and suitability to the scope and depth of the study, Evensen's (1990) meta-textual lexis category of topic markers was expanded into headings and sub-headings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Halliday and Hasan's (1976:242-243) summary of conjunctive relations was taken as the basis for the analysis of conjunctive elements. Complex temporal conjunctive elements were omitted as these are usually found in the narrative genre and were not in these academic expository essays. Three broad types of use emerged. Preferred, less preferred and non-use. Non-use elements have not been included in the tables (Tables 2 and 4). There was generally a clear preference in the two groups for a small number of conjunctive elements, these were classified as 'preferred'. These were used by more than half of the students and more than once with most of the students who used them. Also included in this group are some which have been placed in brackets. These were either used by nine students, but not always more than once in an essay, or by eight students, with some multiple use in some essays. Another larger group of conjunctions was used by less than half of the students, and generally only once by each of them and was classified as 'less preferred'. The remaining conjunctive elements were not used by any of the students and were classified as non-use.

### TAIWANESE STUDENTS

#### *Conjunctive Elements*

Table 2 shows Taiwanese students' preferences. The preferred use of 'for example' is explained by considering the nature of the essays, the style of the text books and the admonitions of the lecturers to use examples to illustrate points. The adversatives and causals used are relatively simple and common forms. The temporals were used as there were many lists in the text books, and were inherent in the content used by the students. The less preferred conjunctive elements were more complex forms and were often derived from the text books, occurring in quotations and near paraphrases of portions of the text books. The non-use elements were again complex forms or those that were not particularly suited to an academic essay, particularly an explanatory one.

The Taiwanese student use of additives far out-numbered the use of any other category. Within the additives, 'and' was by far the most common (Table 3) with second preference for both 'also' and 'for example', and 'or' the least preferred in this group.

This overall preference for additives can be explained by considering the nature of the essay questions. The essays were in the main explanatory, requiring students to define, explain, describe and compare processes and sequences, and then apply these to specific circumstances. The text books and readings followed

**TABLE 2: TAIWANESE STUDENT USE OF ALL CONJUNCTIVE ELEMENTS**

USE	ADDITIVE	ADVERSATIVE	CASUAL	TEMPORAL
PREFERRED	and, also, or, for example	however, but	(so), therefore, because, (then)	first/ly, (second/ly), then
LESS PREFERRED	and also, nor, that is, in other words, for instance, thus, in this case, furthermore, in addition, moreover, as well as, not only...but also, like, similarly, in the same way, on the other hand, in contrast	in fact, though, nevertheless, although, actually, on the other hand	hence, consequently, instead, for this reason, as a result, since, under all circumstances, otherwise	third/ly, finally, in conclusion, to sum up, next, after, now

this pattern of use as they attempted to explain difficult and complex concepts. The organization of the content in texts and readings was influential as well; there were lists and examples throughout them. The one main reading for the AT, BT, and HT students was replete with tables and lists which replaced any other type of explanation for many of the processes and sequences. Given limited words to rework this material, students resorted to frequent use of additives, particularly 'and'. In essays where use was relatively low, conjunctive element use was replaced with lists and notes under headings (THT1, THT2) which these students said made it possible to stay within the word count.

Causals were the next preferred conjunctive elements with 'therefore' and 'because'; but there was no clear preference shown for either of them (Table 3). Adversatives were the least preferred category with 'however' and 'but' sharing almost equal use. Adversative and causal use was indicative of the explanatory nature of the task and the justification of the application of theory to practice. This type of reasoning was required only in the second half of the essays and so adversatives and causals were used less than the additives. Temporal use complemented additive use, especially in AIM and AT, BT, HT essays where action sequences were outlined (Table 3).

The other notable feature of the use of conjunctive elements was the overwhelming use of them externally, both in the usual sense and in quotations and paraphrases; 449 external and external quotation and paraphrase usages

TABLE 3: TAIWANESE STUDENT USE OF PREFERRED CONJUNCTIVE ELEMENTS

ESSAY	ADDITIVE				ADVERSATIVE			CASUAL			TEMPORAL			
	AND I X Xq	ALSO I X Xq	OR I X Xq	FOR EXAMPLE I X Xq	HOW- EVER I X Xq	BUT I X Xq	THERE- FORE I X Xq	BECAUSE I X Xq	(SO) I X Xq	(THEN) I X Xq	FIRST/LY I X Xq	THEN I X Xq	(SECOND/ LY) I X Xq	
TAIM1	- 4 4	- 2 -	- 4 -	- 3 3	- - -	- 2 -	- - -	- - 1	- - -	- - -	- - -	- 1 -	- - -	
TAIM2	3 5 8	1 1 2	1 1 -	- 6 -	1 3 -	- 1 -	- - 1	- - 2	- - -	1 2 1	1 1 2	- 1 1	- - -	
TAIM3	1 1 4	- 1 1	- 2 3	- 1 3	1 - 1	- 1 -	- - 1	- - 1	- - -	- 1 -	1 - 2	1 - -	- - -	
TAIM4	2 1 3	- 1 -	- 1 -	- 2 7	1 1 -	- 3 -	- 1 -	- - 4	- - -	- - -	- 2 -	- - -	- - -	
TBE1	- 6 11	- - -	- 3 -	- 1 1	1 2 1	- 2 -	- - 1	- - -	- - -	- 1 1	1 - -	1 - -	- - -	
TBE2	3 1 4	- 3 -	- 1 -	- 2 3	- - -	- 1 1	1 - 5	- - 6	- - -	- 1 3	- - -	- 3 -	- - 3	
TBE3	1 3 3	- 1 -	- - -	- - 3	- - -	- 1 1	- 2 3	- - 2	1 3 3	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	1 - -	
TBE4	1 5 1	- 1 -	- - -	- - 1	1 4 -	- 2 -	2 - 2	1 1 -	- 2 -	- 1 -	- 1 -	- 1 -	- - -	
TBE6	1 2 6	1 - 2	- 2 -	- - 1	- - 2	- 2 -	- 1 -	- 1 3	- - -	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	- - -	
TBT1	- 1 12	- 1 2	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	- - -	- 3 2	- - 5	- - -	- - -	- 1 -	- 1 4	- 1 -	
TBT2	1 2 9	1 1 -	- 1 -	- - -	- 1 -	1 - -	- 2 1	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	
THT1	- - 4	- 2 -	- 2 -	- - -	- - -	- 1 -	- 1 -	- 1 -	- 2 1	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	- - -	
THT2	- - 2	1 - 1	- - -	- - -	2 1 1	- - -	3 1 -	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	- - -	- - -	- - -	
THT3	- 3 3	- 2 -	- 1 -	- - -	5 1 -	- - -	- 3 -	- 2 -	- - -	- - -	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	
THT4	1 4 3	- - -	- 1 -	- 1 -	- - -	1 2 2	- - -	- 2 -	- - -	- 1 -	- - -	- - -	- - -	
THT5	- 10 2	- 2 -	- 1 -	- - -	1 - -	- 2 2	- 2 -	3 5 1	2 3 -	- - -	- 1 2	- - -	- - -	
THT6	- 3 6	- 2 -	- 2 1	- - -	- - -	- 1 -	- - -	- 1 1	- 1 -	- - -	1 4 -	1 - -	- - -	
THT7	- 2 5	- 4 -	- - -	- - -	1 1 -	- - -	- 1 1	- - 1	- 2 -	- - -	- 5 -	1 - 2	- - -	
TOTAL	14 59 90	4 24 8	1 21 6	0 10 28	14 14 5	2 13 14	6 16 17	4 9 32	4 15 5	0 2 8	7 7 8	4 10 19	5 3 6	

compared with 65 internal usages. Rarely did these students step out of a reproductive approach to the writing of the essay. This was due in no small measure to the nature of the task given to them. The essay questions for the most part only required them to reproduce material in the text books and readings. In one particular instance (AT, BT, HT essays), only one brief reading formed the main reference from which the question was taken. Definitions and descriptions were required, and these were generally presented in simple language and in similar ways in the text-books, making it difficult for students, especially those with limited English proficiency and knowledge of the discipline, to express it in alternative ways. Examples were required, but no-one went further than those in the text-books, even if it meant providing examples from the wrong category. These factors made it difficult for students already imbued with a reproductive approach to learning and writing to do little more than this.

When interviewed, the Taiwanese students explained their use of conjunctive elements mainly as a way of helping with the structure of the essay. The relationships of cause and effect and comparison were mentioned. They were used because it was easier to link the sentence, to 'get the structure of the sentence' and a good way of starting and linking paragraphs. They made the essay clearer and were a mark of a good assignment. Most students reported that they were taught this way of writing in their ELICOS and university preparation studies.

#### *Headings and Sub-headings*

Despite the academic task being an academic essay and not a report, a feature of most of the Taiwanese student essays (15 out of 18) was the extensive use of headings and sub-headings. The headings fell into five categories; none, labelling of the introduction and/or the conclusion, words in the essay topic, headings in the marking guide, and headings and sub-headings used in the textbooks and reference texts.

The use of headings ranged from none in three essays to extreme use of headings and sub-headings in two essays which rendered them little more than a series of notes. A further four essays loosely followed the report format: one added an abstract to the use of headings, two added numbering to their headings, and another included a table of contents and numbering of the headings.

In nearly all cases the text and sequence of the headings and sub-headings mirrored that of the essay topic, the marking guide, or one of the text books, or a combination of these. The headings and sub-headings were therefore virtually exclusively external. The first part of the explanation for this lies in the instructions and guidance given to students by their lecturers, tutors and study books. One lecturer (IM), in an attempt to simplify a complex academic task for their first year students, suggested the use of headings or report form as an aid to organization. Lecturers also advised that, when supplied, students should use marking guides as a guide to the balance of the essay, but they did this with reservation as they knew it was easy for students to directly address the marking scheme and not really understand the question or come to terms with the subject

matter.

Taiwanese students' explanations of their use of headings were that essentially it was easier for them to do so, for the organization of the essay, for ensuring that the question was answered fully, and to make it easier for the reader or lecturer to follow the ideas. Other factors were the typical sources used by students in researching their essays, first year business economics and marketing textbooks. They were found to be quite similar, (identical in most cases) in content, layout and sequence and in their use of headings and sub-headings. This reinforced students' understanding and organisation of their ideas along these quite structured lines.

AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS

*Conjunctive Use*

Table 4 shows the Australian student preferences. Similar explanations are offered for these choices as were offered for the Taiwanese student choices.

The Australian student use of additives outstripped that of other conjunctive elements with 'and' the one chosen more than the other additives. A clear second preference was for 'also', followed by 'for example' and 'or' (Table 5). Explanations for this must, as before, take into account the nature of the essay

TABLE 4: AUSTRALIAN STUDENT USE OF ALL CONJUNCTIVE ELEMENTS

USE	ADDITIVE	ADVERSATIVE	CASUAL	TEMPORAL
PREFERRED	and, also, or, for example, (as well as)	however, but, (although)	(so), therefore, because, (then)	then
LESS PREFERRED	and also, and...not, like, similarly, on the other hand, in contrast, furthermore, in addition, not only...but also, in this case, in such a case, that is, in other words, for instance	in fact, rather, contrary to, yet, and yet, even though	hence, because of this, with this in mind, as a result, consequently, since, for, under these circumstances	first/ly, second/ly, third/ly, finally, in conclusion, since, now, at the same time, next

questions, the text-books and readings. Lower use of additives in AHT3 and ABT3 was because these essays used headings and notes rather than prose. AHT5 used short simple sentences and AHT2 referred to an appendix which contained lists of relevant procedures and used lists in the second half of the essay. Adversatives and causals were equal for the next preferred type of conjunctive elements with 'however' being preferred over 'but' in the adversatives and 'therefore' over 'because' in the causals. This could be because 'however' and 'therefore' are considered more 'academic' than 'but' and 'because'. 'Because' is also a reversed causal and so more complex in use than 'therefore'. There was only one preferred temporal in the Australian essays, 'then', and it was used in the essays requiring descriptions of procedures. It was absent in the BE essays which required explanations of complex concepts.

Notable again was the use of these conjunctive elements in the two external categories (469) compared with internal use (76). These Australian students were still very much dependent on the material in the text-books and readings and the way in which it was expressed. Again the type of essay question, lecturer instructions, lack of experience in writing and lack of background knowledge of the discipline seemed to reinforce a reproductive approach to writing. Australian students explained their use of conjunctive elements as helping to 'keep the train of thought', 'keep the essay flowing'. Conjunctive elements also 'sound good', 'official' and 'like a higher education level'. Some students thought it was just their own 'style', while others were aware that conjunctive elements marked relationships somehow, and others that they linked ideas.

#### *Headings and Sub-headings*

With the Australian essays, just less than half of the students used headings and sub-headings (8 out of 18). The same categories apply here as applied to the Taiwanese students essay headings. The range of use was from none in eight essays, to extensive use in six, with four with only six or seven headings. Four essays followed a modified report format; as well as headings, one included a table of contents and an abstract, another used an abstract, another a numbering and a table of contents and one used a table of contents.

Australian students were influenced by the same external influences as the Taiwanese students: essay questions and marking guides, lecturer comments and instructions, study book instructions and text book presentation and treatment of content. Australian students reported that they used headings because they made the research and organization of the essay easier, it was easier to keep on track and make sure they covered everything with the right balance. Headings also made it easier for the marker to read. Some used them instead of linking sentences.

TABLE 5: AUSTRALIAN STUDENT USE OF PREFERRED CONJUNCTIVE ELEMENTS

ESSAY	ADDITIVE					ADVERSATIVE					CASUAL					TEMP
	AND I X Xq	ALSO I X Xq	OR I X Xq	FOR EXAMPLE I X Xq	(ASWELL AS) I X Xq	HOW- EVER I X Xq	BUT I X Xq	(AL- THOUGH) I X Xq	THERE- FORE I X Xq	BECAUSE I X Xq	(SO) I X Xq	(THEN) I X Xq	THEN I X Xq			
AAIM1	5 7	1 -	- -	3	- -	1 -	2 2 1	- -	- -	1 1 5	- -	- -	- -			
AAIM2	2 6 5	7 -	- 2	2 5	1 2	3 2	1 1 1	- 8	- 1 1	- 3	- 2 3	- 3 1	- -			
AAIM3	3 5 6	1 -	- 1	2 1	- -	- -	2 2	1 2 1	- -	- 2	- -	- -	- -			
AAIM4	- 6 4	- 4	- -	1 7	- 2	- 1	- 1	- 1	- 1 1	- 1 4	- -	- -	- 3			
ABE1	1 3 5	1 -	- -	1	- -	- 1	- 1	- -	- 1 5	- -	- -	- 1	- -			
ABE2	2 8 6	3 -	1 1 2	- 1	- -	- -	1 3	- 3	- 3	- 1	- -	- -	- -			
ABE3	4 2 2	1 2	- 2	2 2	- -	4 1	1 -	- -	- 2	- 3	- -	- 2 6	- -			
ABE5	4 8 2	3 2	1 -	- -	- -	1 2	- 3	1 1	- 3 4	- -	- 3 1	- -	- -			
ABE6	1 5	1 1	- -	- 1	- -	- -	- 1	1 1	- 1	- -	2 -	- 3	- -			
AAT1	1 3 13	3 -	- 1	- -	2 -	- -	1 1	1 -	- -	- -	- 1 2	- 1	- 3			
ABT1	2 5 13	5 -	- -	- -	- -	3 4	- 1	- -	- 3	- -	- 1	- -	- 2			
ABT2	- 1 5	1 -	1 -	- -	1 -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	1 4	- -	- -			
ABT3	- 9	4 -	- 1	- -	- 1	- -	- 1	- 1	- 4	- -	- -	- 1	- 4			
ABT4	- 3 7	1 2	1 -	- 2	- -	3 4	- 1 2	- -	2 1	- 1 1	- -	- 1	- 1 6			
AHT1	2 - 10	1 -	- 1	- -	1 -	- 3	- 1	- -	- 2 2	1 - 3	- -	- 1	- 3			
AHT2	- 3 7	1 -	- 1	- 2	1 -	1 -	- 2	- 1	- 1	- 1	- 1	- -	- 2			
AHT3	4 - 3	- 2	1 - 3	- -	- -	- 2	- 1	- -	- -	- 2	- -	- -	- 2			
AHT5	1 2 -	2 2	- 2	- -	- 1	1 4	- 1 1	- -	- 1 3	- -	- -	- -	- 2			
TOTAL	27 63 106	9 42 0	4 6 12	0 12 20	3 8 1	18 24 1	6 21 9	4 18 1	2 10 30	2 5 22	1 15 7	0 7 13	0 5 26			

**COMPARISON OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

CONJUNCTIVE ELEMENTS

Both groups of students used conjunctive elements with a far greater frequency externally than internally. Australian students used additives (313 compared with 265) and adversatives (102 compared with 62) more often as measured by total conjunctive use in these categories and by internal use as well as the combined external categories use (Table 6). However, Taiwanese students used more causals and temporals in each category. Preferred items were the same except in the temporals where Taiwanese preferred an additional two items, 'firstly' and 'secondly'.

**TABLE 6: COMPARISON OF PREFERRED USE OF CATEGORIES OF CONJUNCTIVE ELEMENTS BY AUSTRALIAN (A) AND TAIWANESE STUDENTS (T)**

CATEGORIES	I		X		X <sub>q</sub>	
	A	T	A	T	A	T
ADDITIVES	43	19	131	114	139	132
ADVERSATIVES	28	16	63	27	11	19
CAUSALS	5	14	37	42	57	62
TEMPORALS	0	16	5	20	26	33
TOTAL	76	65	236	203	233	246

The Australian students used more conjunctive elements internally and externally than the Taiwanese students. These results contradict the pattern of conjunctive use found by Milton and Tsang (1993) and Field and Yip (1992). This is because these previous studies analysed scripts from diverse genres and settings, and the students had different education backgrounds from those in the current study.

Students from both groups were vague on the reasons and conditions for use of conjunctive elements, seeing them more as devices for making relationships between parts of the text rather than signalling relationships that already existed and which needed, on occasion, some overt marker to make them plain.

HEADINGS AND SUB-HEADINGS

Nearly twice as many Taiwanese students used headings as Australian students (15 compared with 8) and the number of Taiwanese students using three sources for headings was double that of Australian students (10 compared with 5). Equal numbers of Australian and Taiwanese students used a modified report format. However, students using headings in both groups used them for similar reasons. Headings were used to supply organization and cohesion, and insurance that



the topic was covered adequately and was seen to be covered adequately.

Both these groups of students were inexperienced academic writers in terms of organization and form and had no relevant preknowledge of the disciplines they were studying. This was the first essay they had written for the subject and so had little understanding of the expectations of the lecturers. They were constrained by both an explanatory essay genre and either little or a range of similarly organized reference material covering the same content. The Taiwanese students had the added task of having to think, read and write about new, conceptually difficult subject matter in cognitively different ways from those that had been sanctioned culturally in their home academic environments. As well, they had to do this in a second language in which they had limited proficiency. It is not possible to tease apart or clarify these influences any further here, but they were instrumental in both these groups of students adopting a reproductive approach in the planning, organization and writing of their essays. This was evidenced by their choice of types of conjunctive elements and the overwhelming external use of them as well as the externally derived headings as organizers of most of the Taiwanese essays and just over half of the Australian essays.

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# The Teaching of Academic Discourse: A Collaboration between Discipline Lecturers and Academic Support Staff at RMIT

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This paper will report on the trial of an innovative form of collaboration between the Language and Learning Unit and lecturers of the first year Bachelor of Education subject 'Introduction to Language and Literacy' at RMIT Coburg, during Semester 1, 1995. The major purpose of this collaboration was to integrate the teaching of academic discourse with the content area of introductory linguistics. In addition, support programs from the LLU were to be targeted to the needs of these particular students and consultation between subject lecturers and LLU staff would hopefully result in a greater understanding of these needs on the part of the lecturers.

The paper will report on the outcomes of the program, the many factors: administrative, educational and political which affected progress and opinions of students and staff. The paper will conclude with some reflections concerning the relationship between a discipline group and an academic support group and recommendations for policy and further research.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fiocco (1994, 267) has commented that:

Universities through national equity and access objectives will continue to diversify their student intake. This diversity will lead to greater demands for the active teaching and modeling of literacy in tertiary institutions.

However, as the November 1994 conference, held at La Trobe University, "Integrating the Teaching of Academic Discourse into Courses in the Disciplines" demonstrated, the definition of academic literacy, policies on the part of the institution, structures for implementation and practice vary enormously. As Spiller (1994, 148) has stated:

We are still a long way from the optimal situation when students will see learning about a discipline as an integral part of mastering the discipline itself.

Whereas, in the past, academic skill support has been frequently housed in a separate unit under the auspices of student services, giving it a remedial aspect, Chanock (1994, 7), in her introduction to the 1994 Conference proceedings, commented on

the trend, both in Australia and overseas, towards extending instruction in academic skills from adjunct programs run by separate student support services to the subjects in which students are enrolled in their undergraduate courses. We were aware of a number of ways in which academic skills teachers have collaborated with faculty staff to draw students' attention explicitly to the academic discourse of their discipline and what they must do to become competent in it.

The way in which this collaboration occurs depends on many factors, including the following:

- Theoretical underpinnings, the way in which the required skills are defined, to what extent they are seen as general or discipline specific;
- Which group of students are targeted, whether it is an 'inclusive' or a 'remediation' approach, voluntary, 'recommended' or compulsory; what selection criteria are used;
- Structural support: whether it is a whole University policy, Faculty, Course or individual subjects.

Cootes (1994, 139) has described 4 different approaches used in her program. Her conclusion has been that:

...anything works (possibly because greater status is accorded to skills because they are included in the subject design).

The theoretical assumptions underpinning these approaches are varied, but systemic-functional linguistics - regarding the text types required by different disciplines as 'genres' and making explicit their structural, syntactic and lexical characteristics - is a commonly used framework. Critical theory is also implicated in a sociocultural representation not only of literacy in general but the literacy demands of the different disciplines and the way in which these might be interpreted by culturally diverse students.

There is also general agreement that for a program enhancing academic literacy (however defined) to be successful, there needs to be commitment from the University as a whole. Fiocco's (1994, 264) interviewees described a 'lack of coherence in terms of an overall University approach, and a lack of evaluation taking place in relation to overall University objectives (Curtin UT).' She has commented that:

policy on literacy development in a university can only progress...  
'beyond the generalities' ...if clear objectives and leadership are evident.

The approach at Monash University (Taylor, 1994, 26) provides a useful model:

major rethinking and reshaping of its teaching programs within the broad framework of a new Education Policy being developed by the University.

The approach taken in the project at RMIT described below has both 'adjunct' and the 'integrated' elements. In terms of theoretical underpinnings, it acknowledges the sociocultural and multifaceted nature of literacy and embodies the perspective that academic literacy is best learnt in the context of a particular discipline. Whilst the academic skills tuition was integrated with subject content, there were also specifically targeted academic skills classes. Thus the approach was based on collaboration between the Language and Learning Unit (LLU) and the discipline lecturing staff, using a variety of arrangements.

Given the diverse nature of the student group (consisting of native speakers, NESB students and overseas students), there was a commitment to an inclusive program, targeting the whole group, rather than specific subgroups being 'diagnosed' or 'recommended' for special treatment (see Brackenreg, 1994).

One element that was clearly missing was a commitment by the whole University, or even the Education Faculty, to a co-ordinated policy of enhancing the academic literacy of the student body as a whole. The project was initiated by lecturing staff in the first year Bachelor of Education course and members of the LLU. Once again, it was the language experts who were taking responsibility for the language skills of their students.

Another aspect which was insufficiently developed was the actual definition of what was to be learnt - what aspects of academic discourse were to be imparted. As will be further discussed below, interpretation varied considerably with the individual lecturer.

During the course of this project, the LLU was further reduced in staff and resources, so that it will be difficult to implement any of the recommendations contained in this paper. However, what has become clear is that a long-range view and careful planning at the highest level is necessary for such a program as the one outlined below to succeed.

## **BACKGROUND**

Motivated by concern about our students' language and literacy skills, Language Education staff applied for and were awarded a 'Teaching Innovation' grant during Semester 1, 1995, to plan for the explicit teaching of these skills. In collaboration with the Language and Learning Unit we planned a program which had the following aims:

- the teaching of academic skills should be an integral part of the curriculum;
- the program should be planned in collaboration with the LLU;
- it should be tailored to the particular group's needs.

The LLU was to be involved in the following ways:

- collaborating in the analysis of students' needs and planning a program to suit the group;
- planning and/or delivering presentations on topics related to academic skills, according to need, such as essay structure, research skills, notetaking skills etc.
- being available to conference drafts of students' essays in class time
- individual consultations with students as required
- collaborating in the research and tracking of students.

## IMPLEMENTATION

There were 9 groups and over 200 students. The implementation of the program consisted of two elements: revising the subject in order to integrate content and skills, and collaborating with the LLU.

### INTEGRATION OF CONTENT AND SKILLS

The subject was redesigned to remove some of the content and leave time for instruction by the lecturer in specific skills such as reading and interpreting academic texts, the structure of expository essays and aspects of syntax and spelling. The emphasis and the way in which this was done varied with the individual lecturer (see **Discussion**).

### COLLABORATION WITH THE LLU

Suzy Devine was released to the program for 4 hours per week. She worked with the team in the following ways:

- She introduced herself to all the groups, raising awareness of the existence of assistance through the LLU.
- She collaborated with myself on a handout for students and staff which expanded on the essay topics, clarifying their intent. This was disseminated to all lecturers and students.
- Students were surveyed about their preferred topics for out of class workshops and Suzy ran these towards the end of the semester.
- Suzy visited each group in turn, assisting with conferencing the essays. She worked in a variety of ways with the different groups. With some she had students come out to her. With others she worked inside the classroom.
- A handout of criteria for marking the essays based on the guide previously prepared was distributed to both staff and students, ensuring consistency in marking and making explicit the staff's expectations.
- Suzy organized a drop-in session for last minute help with the essays.
- Suzy and myself had many informal discussions about the needs of the group.

#### DATA COLLECTED

- interviews: 6 lecturers and 6 students were interviewed to ascertain their opinions of the program
- a sample of students' essays was collected for further analysis.

#### DISCUSSION

The following advantages were envisaged for the program:

- Academic skills would be explicitly taught as a part of the students' work rather than incidentally or not at all;
- It would be possible to demonstrate to the students that 'learning about language' can lead to an improvement in their own skills.
- The LLU would be used more effectively, as students would be familiar with the Unit and the staff;
- The collaboration would benefit both the LLU staff and the lecturing staff.

To what extent were these aims achieved?

THE TEACHING OF ACADEMIC SKILLS IN RELATION TO THE CONTENT OF THE SUBJECT;  
INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS.

The content of the subject 'Introduction to Language and Literacy' can be seen to fall into two major sections: a discussion of sociolinguistic language variation, including aspects such as dialect and register, and linguistic analysis, from the larger text structures, to sentence level syntax, morphology and phonology. At the appropriate stage, the students' own text organization, syntax and spelling would be dealt with. For example, a discussion of essay topics would be closely linked to a discussion of the expository essay as a genre. Spelling errors would be discussed in relation to morphology and phonology.

On interviewing the students and lecturers, it would seem that the aim of explicit teaching of academic skills and linguistic concepts had at least some success. However, the focus - which academic skills were emphasised - and the way in which the teaching of academic skills was integrated with subject content varied considerably with the individual lecturer.

Lecturers were asked (a) in what areas their students had developed over the semester and (b) what their focus had been. As the responses below demonstrate, the ways in which students were seen to have developed closely matched the focus of the instruction in most cases.

The areas in which students had developed according to each lecturer are listed below, with the focus indicated in parentheses:

- 1 'reading academic texts, essay structure' (focus: academic essay writing)
- 2 'spelling and grammar' (focus: organization of essays and library)
- 3 'personal philosophy, referencing, organizing research.' (focus: 'building on what they knew about language, reflecting on what they knew and how they felt about language')

- 4 'no doubt some of them did develop, because we did a lot of work with them on the essay' (focus: the essay, argumentative genre)
- 5 'moderate improvement in reading and research, essay writing development and structure' (focus: research and essay writing)
- 6 'in their literacy skills no, academically, they were learning the rules of the game at a tertiary institution' (focus: research and essay writing structure).

Students' opinion about the areas in which they developed generally reflected the focus of their lecturers. They believed they had mainly improved in writing, although it was heartening to see that at least some had understood the relevance of dialect and register to their own mastery of academic discourse. Comments in response to the question of how students thought they had developed included the following:

...it has made me more aware of the way I say things and the way I structure my sentences...It has helped me with essays...has made me more aware of issues, different texts, genres...made me more focused on what I'm writing, the purpose, understanding how authors come in at a different level...

One student even commented on the development of her spoken language:

You notice what you're saying, don't use as much slang, I am more aware of dialects, how people are talking. You use different words when you're writing.

The degree to which the two aspects of the subject were integrated also varied with the individual lecturer. Whereas one used academic context as the prime example of linguistic variation and dealt with a discussion of syntax, morphology and phonology in the context of the students' own writing, another commented that she didn't attempt to integrate the two aspects because 'the subject was trying to wear two hats and I don't think it did either successfully.'

#### THE COLLABORATION WITH THE LLU

Generally both the lecturers and the students had a positive opinion of the collaboration. However, they felt that in order for a program to be successful it needed to go much further:

I found it worthwhile both for me and the students...I think the collaboration needs to go deeper, it needs to happen at the faculty level...all subject specialists need to be language teachers. The inculcation of academic discourse should not be left to the so-called language specialists...

We need someone from the beginning, at the meetings where we decide course outlines and assessment...

The idea is a good one. I think we need to do much more careful planning and careful integration of the two things...



In terms of individual aspects, lecturers and students had the following comments:

(Introduction)

(Lecturer) I think it was useful but I'm not sure they did. Students didn't realize they were going to be struggling.

(Student) It made you aware there were people there if you needed help. Good to know.

(Guide to the Essay)

(Lecturers) ...helped them get a more specific focus. The essay questions were very difficult...It ensured some consistency between the markers...

(Student) ...it was almost like writing the essay...it would be great if we could have notes like this for every class.

(Conferencing)

(Lecturer) ...excellent...we worked as a team, giving clinics and individual conferences. I would do that again, given the chance to have someone of that kind to work with you.

(Students) ...Group work was great. I relaxed a bit. I put a lot into writing (the essay)...Brainstorming in groups was helpful. We combined our ideas.

(Workshops)

Very few students attended. These workshops should have been held earlier in the semester, but the rationing of Suzy's time meant that there was no opportunity.

(Student) I didn't use it but it is a good idea. I made an appointment, but ran out of time and cancelled the appointment.

In sum, many aspects of this collaboration were successful, in particular, the essay guide and the team approach to conferencing the essays. Although few students consulted the LLU out of class time, at least they were aware that this possibility was open to them. It seems that the workshops need to be better integrated with the subject and held at appropriate times to be successful (see **Recommendations**).

I was the only lecturer fortunate enough to have ongoing contact with the LLU, both as part of the project and as a member of the Language and Learning Assistance Advisory Committee. I found the sessions where Suzy and I prepared the essay guide, exploring the meaning and implications of the essay topics particularly illuminating. Her perspectives on how the wording of the topics might be interpreted were new to me.

#### DIFFICULTIES

Whilst there were many positive aspects to the project, there were a number of difficulties, which affected both the running of the project itself and the collection of data which might be useful for further research and tracking of the students. Problems included the administrative and political situation, lack of resources

and insufficient lead-in time to plan the whole project.

### *Timing*

By the time we got the money for the project the semester was already under way. Teaching had begun, therefore the subject outline had already been completed. This meant that the integration of content and skills could not be as thorough as it should have been. There needed to be a lot less content, and more focus on the skills.

### *Size of the group*

It would have been preferable to initiate the project with a small pilot group. A cohort of 200 students proved to be impractical for research and tracking with the limited resources available.

### *Time*

There was insufficient time for meetings. It was impossible to get such a large group of lecturers together on a regular basis. There was insufficient time to plan classes and assessments.

### *LLU time*

There was insufficient time allotted for Suzy. Her time had to be rationed so carefully that the workshops could not be scheduled till the end of the semester. By this time most students had finished their essays and were studying for the test.

### *Resources*

It was disheartening that while we were exploring the possibilities of collaboration, the LLU was under threat, and that the contracts of the temporary staff have since been terminated. Consequently, there has been no opportunity to plan a follow up.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Structure*

Ideally, the teaching of academic skills needs to be part of an overall strategy that should happen at the highest structural level, at the Faculty, if not at the University wide level.

The siting of academic skills instruction also needs to be part of an overall course plan. We need to look at the whole course and then plan a sequenced and developmental approach. It is not sufficient to just hit first year students with such instruction and then assume that the skills have been mastered. Ironically, it might have been preferable to teach the skills where the subject matter was not also the subject of the skills teaching. This is a matter for further research.

*Communication*

Communication with lecturers needs to be ongoing (see, for example, Brackenreg, 1994). The LLU needs to be involved in the design and the assessment of the subject or subjects where the collaboration is to take place. There need to be regular meetings between members of the LLU and the lecturing staff and if the subject is taught by a team of lecturers, these also need to keep in regular communication.

*Resources*

More resources need to be allotted to the program. In particular, more LLU staff time needs to be dedicated to it, and preferably also lecturer time. Time is also needed for following up individual students. As the attendance at out of hours sessions seems to be poor, these need to be planned as part of the students' regular commitment and perhaps taken for credit. This is more readily accepted in the case of ESL students, but may be as appropriate for mainstream students. As Beasley (1990, 18) has commented:

The voluntary, non-credit bearing nature of Learning Skills courses can be problematic in that it promotes the view that the classes are peripheral and therefore a waste of time. Many students feel that because they have succeeded at high school and have now gained admission to University, they already possess all the study skills and knowledge required to succeed. Indeed, for some students to admit that they are having problems and need to seek assistance from Learning Skills tutors involves a considerable loss of 'face' amongst their peers.

*Research*

At least a sample of students who have participated in such a program need to be monitored throughout their University career. It would be preferable to proceed with a small pilot project, and compare students' progress with a control group, than to submit the whole cohort to the same program. In the present context, this proved to be administratively difficult, but perhaps we need to consider whether some students might wish to volunteer for such an experimental program.

The Language and Learning Assistance Advisory Committee or some such interdisciplinary group provides an excellent opportunity for comparison between demands made on students by different disciplines. In such a forum perhaps it will be possible to explore which demands are common to the academic community and which are specific to particular disciplines. It would be interesting to consider also to what extent institutions have their own style.

**CONCLUSION.**

While there were difficulties, the program was a step in the right direction. It attempted to integrate content and skills, it was flexible and inclusive rather than remedial, and it was collaborative. What is clearly needed is commitment

at the highest level of the University administration. I am optimistic that this will occur, given a general recognition by the academic community of the need to initiate students into the academic discourse of their chosen discipline.

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# Promoting Language Skills through Collaboration between Content Lecturers and Language Specialists

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The delivery of appropriate language support programs for students is of interest to all higher education institutions; particularly those such as Victoria University of Technology which has high numbers of Non English Speaking Background (NESB) students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Communication between content lecturers and language specialists is desirable in the development, delivery and evaluation of subjects/courses so that learning outcomes for students are assured.

This paper reports the development and evaluation of a two year collaboration between a content lecturer and a language specialist in the Department of Computer and Mathematical Sciences at Victoria University of Technology. It describes the nature and impact of the collaboration and draws conclusions about the approach and its applicability in higher education contexts. Its broad conclusion is that collaboration is an approach with potential to considerably enhance learning outcomes for students in general, and NESB students in particular.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The value of communication between language specialists and content lecturers is well recognised as a vital element in the development of appropriate language delivery systems for students in higher education contexts (Shih 1986, Koh 1987, Benson 1987 Canseco and Byrd 1987 ). Although collaborations between language specialists and content lecturers are seen as useful in this context, there are a number of outstanding issues centred on debate about the extent of collaboration and contexts in which it may occur.

Issues relating to role determination and delineation for those collaborating focus around the amount of content knowledge required by language specialists/the level of language specialisation required of content lecturers.( How much language support can language specialists provide in highly specialised subject areas requiring strong content knowledge? Is it possible to integrate language

support into course delivery systems so that language is not seen as an “add on” and out of context? Can the language specialist have the same status to students as the content lecturer?)

Literature dealing with the area of language/study skill acquisition addresses the extent of involvement by language specialists in mainstream classes, and the corresponding nature of collaboration with content lecturers. The rationale for approaches involving collaboration is that in-context delivery of language skills is desirable, even necessary. Brennan & Naerssenn (1989) and Koh (1988), Graham & Beardsley (1989), Braine (1990), Benson (1989), Spack (1989), Canseco & Byrd (1989) Adamson (1990), Shih (1986) and Snow & Brinton (1988) offer examples of in-context delivery and describe a range of collaborations requiring varying degrees of content knowledge input. Shih (1986) for example, describes five broad contexts for collaboration, and corresponding strategies for overcoming the content knowledge/language skills problem. Strategies include: providing content lecturers with language teaching skills, employing language specialists with content knowledge, team teaching and the use of non-technical teaching materials (1986:636). The examples of collaborations cited by the authors above fit into the broad categories cited by Shih (or combinations of them).

Issues relating to contextual arrangements for collaborations are focused on the scope and nature of collaborative arrangements. (Are collaborations built only on the good will of collaborators? Can such arrangements be “institutionalised”? Should language specialists “fit in” where they can, and accept any collaboration offered? Do student needs- in terms of content knowledge required at certain stages of studies - determine the kinds of collaborations required? Can collaboration have high impact, or is it only useful for small scale implementation of change? Can collaboration generate long term change to courses/subjects?

A number of researchers address organisational and personnel issues associated with integrating language skills with mainstream delivery systems. (Braine 1990, Koh 1989, Benson 1989, Spack 1989, and Shih 1986). A framework of 5 approaches to content based writing instruction offered by Shih (1986) summarises the range of activities described by writers. The five contexts identified are: topic-centred modules/mini courses (conducted by the language specialist with minimal subject input), intensive content-based reading/writing programs (tailored after consultation with content lecturers), English for Specific Purposes content-centred courses (content knowledge supplied by content lecturers for topics related to subject/discipline), Adjunct programs (content in mainstream courses presented in parallel courses delivered by language staff) and individual help (from content lecturer or language specialist). In each case, the language specialist is “outside” the mainstream classroom.

Adamson (1990) raises the issue of organisation through discussion about integration of language skills with mainstream delivery processes so that learning outcomes for students can be improved. He concludes - on the basis of 15 case studies - that in order for students to achieve successful learning, a number of

principles should underpin practice. The principles which have organisational implications (and thus influence the nature of collaborations) are that: language skills should be taught explicitly (as part of the course/subject), structures should allow students to interact with each other, teaching approaches should integrate language and content, and that, where possible, teaching materials should be authentic (Adamson 1990).

Others such as Koh (1989), Spack (1989) and Braine (1990), also focus on the needs of students and argue that delivery systems for language support should be designed according to students' needs at various stages of studies. There is agreement that students at the end of an undergraduate degree program have specific needs (orientation to the professional discourse), although the level of language specialist intervention is open to debate. Spack (1989) for example, argues a diminished role for the language specialist at that stage of undergraduate courses because of the level of specialist content knowledge required, while others such as Braine (1990) suggest that language specialists should intensify involvement and focus on skills delivery rather than content.

This paper reports the conduct and scope of a two year collaboration between a content lecturer and a language specialist undertaken at Victoria University in 1990 -1992. The collaboration aimed to improve the quality of students' written and oral communication skills in the industry projects - a compulsory (and major) element of the third year Bachelor of Computing Science degree program offered by the Department of Computer and Mathematical Sciences. The nature of the collaboration undertaken, the organisational arrangements made, and principles underpinning practice are described. Conclusions about how collaborations can enhance learning outcomes for students are drawn on the basis of this experience.

## THE INDUSTRY PROJECTS

The collaboration was undertaken as a means of delivering the Language Support Program (LSP) - a program developed to meet the language learning needs of students undertaking the industry projects.

The industry projects require students to focus on problem solving strategies in mathematical and computing contexts, and aim to give them experience of "real world" work settings under the supervision of lecturers from the department. Students work in small groups, liaise with industry contacts and are supervised during each semester- long project. Supervisors oversee the production of one written and three oral reports each semester (for each project), and are responsible for the quality of students' written and oral work. Industry-based sponsors receive copies of the written report and attend sessions where oral presentations are made.

The collaboration was with the director of the industry projects. The director's role was to co-ordinate the projects, and make appropriate changes to their conduct to ensure meaningful learning experiences for students. He was committed to continuation of the projects, in the face of mounting concern that the quality of student outputs was in decline because of the dual effects of



increasing numbers and the changed student profile. The director controlled project-associated resources and in his role as co-ordinator of the projects, had access to and influence over all supervisors. The director's position included a time-release allocation for oversight of organisational aspects of the program. The position entailed liaison with industry sponsors, students and supervisors.

### INITIATING THE COLLABORATION

The request for specialised language support to improve the quality of students' written and oral course work was initiated by the director in semester 1 1990. The LSP emerged as a result of interaction between the language specialist and the director, and was based on an early decision to find effective ways to work so that language skills could be best integrated with content. The decision was made on the assumption that any language delivery system (including resources produced) would have greater credibility with staff and students if it was seen as "mainstream" and well grounded in content knowledge.

The LSP evolved in response to the effects of an increasingly diverse student population and expanding enrolments. This trend, which began in the 1980s, peaked in 1991/92 with approximately 100 students undertaking industry projects - 80% of whom were from non-English Speaking backgrounds. In 1990, by contrast, there were 50 students - less than half in the NESB category. As numbers increased, so did the average number of students per group, and groups per supervisor. For example, in 1992, there were 20 supervisors with 2-4 students per group. By contrast, in 1990, there were 15 supervisors, with 2 students per group. Tables 1a and b outline the dramatic increases over the three years of the collaboration.

**TABLE 1A: CHANGING STUDENT PROFILE, INDUSTRY PROJECTS 1990-92\**

	STUDENTS	% NESB
1990	50	43
1991	78	60
1992	100	80

**TABLE 1B: CHANGING SUPERVISOR WORKLOADS, INDUSTRY PROJECTS 1990-92**

	supervisors/ projects	students per group
1990	15	1-2
1991	16	2-4
1992	20	2-4

The LSP evolved during the peak period from 1990 - 1992. It was a direct response to concerns raised by supervisors and some sponsors about the quality of students' written and oral outputs. Concerns about the quality of the learning experience that the industry projects offered were also expressed by the director and supervisors. The broadest and most immediate aim of the LSP at its inception was to improve the quality of students' written and oral communication outputs. Its long term aim was to improve the quality of the learning experience for students.

### **STAGES IN THE COLLABORATION**

The collaboration became increasingly sophisticated during its two years as exploration of how language skills could be integrated with content was undertaken. It generated substantial changes to the LSP. In summary, the LSP rapidly evolved from an externally-positioned student-focused program, to an integrated process-oriented staff-focused one. The scope of the collaboration - in terms of activities undertaken in the changing context - broadened as a result. Emphasis in the work of the collaborators changed from generating, presenting and evaluating materials prepared for student use, to similar activities aimed at students and supervisors. The change in emphasis from students to staff implied changes for supervisors' attitudes and behaviours with regard to language teaching. The stages of the LSP and the corresponding changed nature of collaborative activities are outlined in Figure 2.

### **COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES: CHANGING LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICE**

Language-based activities undertaken by collaborators involved identifying language tasks required of students, clarifying assessment practices attached to such tasks, and linking agreed practice to assessment processes through provision of information and resources to staff and students about how language tasks could be delivered, evaluated and assessed.

#### **ANALYSING THE TASKS REQUIREMENTS**

In early stages of the collaboration, a survey of language tasks required of students during the conduct of industry projects was jointly undertaken to assess the range of competencies required of students. In order to undertake the survey, it was necessary to contextualise language tasks in terms of the range of other tasks (organisational and technical) also required of students. Twenty-five steps were identified. Eighteen were identified as steps involving language/communication tasks. Six steps were writing and/or speaking tasks which were assessed during the semester, and contributed to final assessment of performance. Writing tasks included project specifications, abstracts for talks, business letters to sponsor organisations, and a final detailed report. Oral communication was required in a number of contexts - from visits in the sponsor organisation, to communication within and across project groups and with supervisors, and in

TABLE 2: PROGRAM/COLLABORATION STAGES 1990-92.

PROGRAM STAGES	COLLABORATION SCOPE
<p><b>External (Sem 2 1990):</b> non-mandatory workshops /individual consultations for targeted NESB students outside of department context.</p>	<p><b>one-dimensional/delivery:</b> content input only for selected elements of Workshops. Language-focused consultations without input from supervisors/collaborator.</p>
<p><b>Transition internal (Sem1 1991):</b> non-mandatory workshops aimed at all students within timetabled project time. Consultations in department.</p>	<p><b>two - dimensional:</b> co- preparation and presentation of content-based language materials in workshops and individual consultations generated by and for the LSP.</p>
<p><b>Trial integration 1 (Sem 2 1991)</b> Content-based language materials delivered to supervisors and students in a variety of existing or LSP-generated settings.</p>	<p><b>multi-dimensional/shallow penetration:</b> co-prepared and presentation of content-based language materials in the context of collaboration-generated materials about the industry projects codifying assessment and other teaching/ learning practices. Limited range of delivery contexts (lectures/ consultations with staff and students).</p>
<p><b>Integration (Sem 1 1992)</b> Delivery of language-based materials as a component of information about industry project requirements (assessment expectations, etc) in variety of contexts including pre-project orientation, lectures workshops and consultations. Program elements target specific needs groups, but designed as a comprehensive program.</p>	<p><b>multi-dimensional/broad focus:</b> distribution of self- access materials to students/supervisors with emphasis on student self-sufficiency and locating responsibility for language support with supervisors. Co-presentation of pre-course program and some student consultations.</p>
<p><b>Integration/self sufficiency (sem 2 1992)</b> LSP embedded in industry projects documentation. Assessment practices integrated with overall course processes/practices.</p>	<p><b>multi-dimensional/monitoring :</b> Emphasis on self sufficiency for supervisors and students, development of modules for orientation course, and integration of LSP monitoring processes into industry projects design, allowed for disbanding collaboration.</p>

10E

reporting sessions to other students and supervisors. Three sets of communication tasks were assessed (either written or oral communication, or in combination),- a total of 30% of marks awarded. (See Attachment 1).

#### CLARIFYING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Collaborative effort focused on establishing agreed criteria for the assessment of language-based tasks during evolution of the LSP. Model examples of written/oral communication tasks were developed as a means of promoting agreement about minimal standards. All examples were based on authentic materials, and were structured in a 'how to' format, so that students could attempt written and oral communication tasks with minimal input from supervisors. (Written tasks were more easily presented in this format, though video recordings were prepared and made available for student use.) (see Attachment 2).

Checklists for use by supervisors in the assessment process were also produced for staff use and student information. Checklists provided guidelines for supervisors about required assessment criteria for language tasks, and feedback about group and individual performance for students. Supervisors were encouraged to provide input to individuals about performance of language tasks, and if necessary, refer them to the language specialist for additional support. (See Attachment 3).

#### PROVIDING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Emphasis throughout the collaboration was on the provision of high quality information and resources to both students and staff. As a result, all materials were produced with this dual audience in mind, and were distributed to all staff and students participating in the industry projects as they were developed. The first document produced was a comprehensive statement about the industry projects (*Information for supervisors and students*), and was followed by 'how to' booklets for the completion of specific writing/speaking tasks (*How to write a Project Specification, How to write a Talk Abstract, Giving a Talk video*). In addition, extra materials were prepared on an *ad hoc* basis for specific issues (*Correcting written text, Assessing a talk: pronunciation and other matters*).

The language learning needs of NESB students were not differentiated in the development of materials and resources. There was an emphasis on providing all students with basic information and resources so that they could best meet task requirements. Materials/resources prepared specifically for identified 'at risk' students (for example the *LSP Preparatory Program*) elaborated explanations/examples prepared in materials above, and were also made available to all students.

The language specialist convened small groups for assistance with the completion of specific assessment tasks when necessary. Self referral was the primary mechanism for accessing resources provided by the language specialist (although supervisors were encouraged to refer students, over 90% of students who sought assistance - 20 students - were self-referred). Although 80% (18) of those

presenting for individual consultations or small group workshops were NES background students, support was available for all students.

## **ROLES OF COLLABORATORS**

Role determination and delineation was undertaken early in the collaboration. Content knowledge and language specialisation were notionally delineated, with a determination to minimise "overlap" areas between the two. Roles were determined as a result of the delineation. The language specialist's role was to provide information about appropriate approaches to the development and evaluation of language materials. The director's role was to provide input about technical aspects related to the content area - its development and evaluation. The roles were operationalised through application the 'co-production/co-presentation' principle. In practical terms this involved team teaching in a range of teaching contexts - lectures, tutorials, and individual consultations. Team teaching minimised 'overlap' areas across the disciplines.

The increasingly sophisticated nature of the collaboration added elements to roles adopted by collaborators. Evolution of the LSP added a consultancy element to both roles. This was evident in a number of contexts in later stages; - providing resources/other support to staff, developing agreed assessment and other practices, and embedding language-based materials in each of the contexts identified. The director provided information about the teaching/learning culture of the department and identified ways in which changes to the overall program could be undertaken. He mandated changes in his role as director, and undertook responsibility for monitoring/evaluating how the changes were adopted by supervisors. The language specialist provided input about approaches to assessment of language elements, and their integration into course processes. In addition, the language specialist's consultancy role expanded to provide support to supervisors about their own and students' language learning needs. (All first year supervisors were NESB postgraduate students who also in many cases recognised the need for language support for themselves).

The gradual layering of collaborator roles was a feature of the experience as the LSP's organisational structures became increasingly sophisticated. The consultancy element included a significant dimension relating to staff skills development, as both the director and the language specialist were involved in initiating change to the industry projects in terms of how language task requirements would be assessed by supervisors. By initiating such changes to language tasks, course processes and practices were also changed, and staff were in turn required to change teaching practice. This dimension was of considerable interest to the collaborators, and the focus of evaluation of the LSP.

## **EVALUATING THE COLLABORATION**

The collaboration generated structural changes in the industry projects program in a relatively short time frame (2 years), and appears to have achieved it with the co-operation of all the academic staff associated with it. The key issue was

to determine how, why and whether co-operation was achieved.

A significant element of project evaluation focused on supervisor reactions to the collaboration:

- did they think the language specialist was effective in the role adopted?
- was the director's role in the collaboration appropriate?
- were the language learning needs of students well met?
- was there any obvious improvement in the quality of students' written and oral communication skills as a result of the program?

In order to elicit supervisor input, structured interviews were administered to all University-based supervisors (one supervisor was based in industry). A brief summary of findings follows.

#### USEFUL COLLABORATION-GENERATED MATERIALS/RESOURCES DELIVERED IN A TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE MANNER

Supervisors identified the timely and appropriate delivery of collaboration-generated materials as a primary reason for acceptance of changes required of them. They reported high usage rates of collaboration-generated materials; for example, 90% (18) of all supervisors used some materials provided, and all NESB supervisors reported use of 'how to' materials. Similarly, when asked to rate usefulness of various materials, all supervisors (and again, particularly NESB supervisors) rated the materials highly. For example, eighteen supervisors reported using materials which provided comprehensive information about the industry projects, its aims and baseline assessment criteria. NESB and inexperienced supervisors (those with less than one years experience as supervisors) identified the value of all materials because they provided high quality information about course requirements and expected standards (including language standards). The provision of materials at an introductory lecture and distribution of specific materials before tasks were due was also seen as an important element of the program .

#### GENERATION OF DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM SPECIFIC PROCESSES AND MATERIALS

Supervisors identified the status of the director as a feature of the collaboration, and an important factor in the adoption of changes undertaken. When asked to reflect about the collaboration and whether there should have been more consultation about changes made to the industry projects, all supervisors expressed support for the director's role as primary decision-maker about course-related issues. Although one third of supervisors indicated an interest in more consultation about changes, all of these were experienced supervisors who wished to support the director's efforts through consultative mechanisms such as regular meetings. Changes to assessment procedures and other aspects of the program were thus seen as appropriate for the director to have undertaken.

The language specialist's role was, in this context, seen as complementary to that of the director's. When asked to reflect about the appropriateness of

collaboration as a means of delivering language support, all supervisors expressed support for the concept on the basis of their experience. NESB and inexperienced supervisors in particular, endorsed the role of language specialist as a support for both staff and students. The language specialist's role as adopted within the collaboration was endorsed; as someone responsible for language skills development for staff and students, with no mandate to provide expertise in content areas.

#### PERCEIVED CHANGES TO SUPERVISOR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

Eighteen supervisors reported changed behaviours as a result of collaboration-generated activities; - a direct result of changed assessment procedures, altered timelines and refocussed task requirements. Two thirds of supervisors felt their attitudes about language issues changed as a result of exposure to the LSP. Most cited the opportunity the program gave them to reflect on such issues as the reason for the change. The broad consultancy role of the language specialist (as some one responsible for sensitising staff to the language learning needs of students) was identified by supervisors as a factor in changing attitudes.

#### IMPROVED QUALITY OF OUTPUTS FROM STUDENTS

Supervisors expressed the belief that the quality of students' written and oral communication tasks improved as a result of the LSP. They acknowledged a direct connection between the 'how to' approach adopted in the development of specific materials (including the assessment criteria for each task) and outputs from students. Although supervisors commented on the similarity in format of writing/speaking tasks submitted for assessment with the modelled examples in the 'how to' materials, the consensus was that a set of 'baseline' standards across the program was achieved. Supervisors also reported less time than in the past spent on correction of drafts and rewrites as a result of the self-access materials generated by the collaboration. they reported an improvement in all students' work - and particularly that of NESB students.

Supervisors reported that the approach appeared to be of particular value to students at the end of degree programs - where information about business cultural practices and beliefs were required of students. The focus on context in the 'how to' and other materials produced by collaborators was seen as highly useful in this regard.

It would appear that the collaboration - generated changes were achieved with the co-operation of supervisors because of the status of the director, and the relevance of materials produced.

#### CONCLUSION

The collaboration reported here provides insight into the debate about the extent of collaborative arrangements between language specialists and content lecturers and the contexts in which such arrangements may occur.

The collaboration-generated LSP materials reflect clear role determination between the language specialist and the content lecturer from the beginning of the collaboration. Experience of the collaboration is that clear separation of the language specialist from content/technical area knowledge was successful in this context. The director's input of content/technical information to the development of LSP materials appears well-recognised and received by supervisors. Supervisor responses indicate that the clear role delineation within the collaboration contributed to acceptance of changes required of them in terms of behaviours and attitudes. Such experiences confirm assertions by writers such as Koh (1989) and Spack (1989) that the language specialist's role should focus more on language skills acquisition than content areas.

The 'layering' of collaborator roles to include the staff development dimension arose as the scope and nature of the collaboration broadened and in turn generated changes to project processes - most notably assessment practices associated with language tasks.

Experience of the LSP is that the collaboration achieved rapid and "deep" in context (lasting) change because the content lecturer collaborator was in a key organisational position. That is, the director of the industry projects mandated changes which were seen as within the scope of that role. The language specialist's (expanding) role was also mandated because of the director's status.

This experience - which "mainstreamed" the program and thus embedded the changes provides insight into approaches suggested by Shih (1986) and Spack (1989) (both writers suggest a number of externally positioned contexts). Whereas Shih (1989) and Spack (1989) for example present a number of discrete contexts in which language specialists can operate, the LSP combined each of these contexts and provided opportunities for the language specialist to operate on a number of levels - often simultaneously. This complexity of the language specialist's role in addition to the broad consultancy aspects such as course design, assessment policy and practice and consultancy with staff about language teaching skills development, appears to be different to other language specialist roles identified by other such as those above.

The mainstreaming aspect allowed accommodation of language learning needs of all students - including NESB students. In addition, the multi-dimensional aspect of the language specialist's role provided flexibility in the design of programs for such students within the parameters of the LSP.

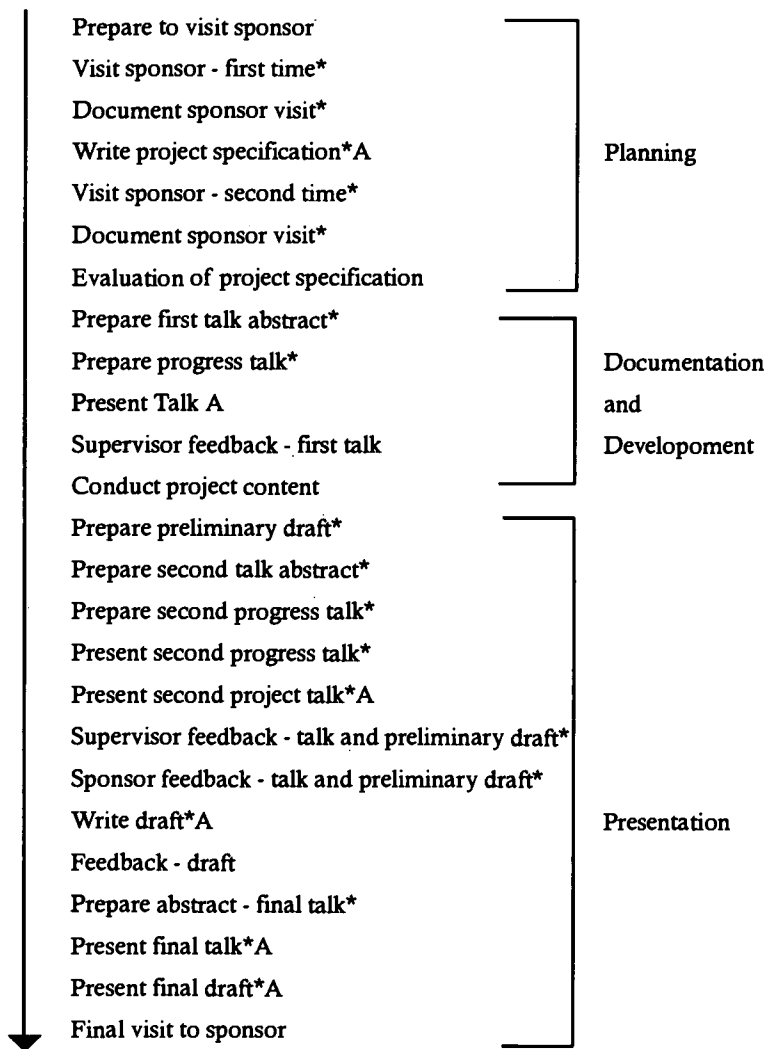
To conclude, the experience of the LSP collaboration is that the language specialist role should broaden so that consultancy functions - particularly the staff development dimension - can be undertaken as a means of changing behaviours and attitudes with regard to language learning tasks. At the core of the change process (to be partly managed by the language specialist) is the linkage of language tasks to assessment practices and processes. The needs of NESB and other identifiable groups with specific language learning needs can be met through this approach, as it provides flexibility to design programs according to the needs of students.



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**ATTACHMENT 1: COMPUTER AND MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT INDUSTRY PROJECTS**



\* written and/or oral communication skills required  
A directly related to assessment

Source: Diamond, N. & Hallett, R. (1992) *Industry Projects Orientation Program 1992(No.1)*.  
Department of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Victoria University of Technology.

## ATTACHMENT 2: WRITING A PROJECT SPECIFICATION

NOTES	SAMPLE: BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION	COMMENTS
<p>The background and description should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>introductory statement which explains who the sponsor is, and what they do</i></li> <li>• <i>some information which describes the problem under examination</i></li> <li>• <i>a clear statement of the purpose of the project</i></li> <li>• <i>a brief statement of what should be achieved during the project</i></li> </ul>	<p>Initiating Explosives Systems, jointly owned by ICI Australia and Ensign Bickford, design, manufacturing and supply detonating systems used in the mining industry.(A)</p> <p>In order to optimise the rock-breaking efficiency of a blast, 'delay' detonators with various nominal delay times are used to detonate blast hole charges in a controlled sequence. (B)</p> <p>Statistical variations of the delay times of the detonators cause some blast holes to detonate out of sequence, lessening the efficiency of the blast. (C) The purpose of the project is to assist in the designing of blasts by writing a computer program that will simulate blasts, allowing the quantification of the effect of the statistical variations on the chance of out-of-sequence firing. (D)</p>	<p>This is a good statement of the background, and a description of the project because.</p> <p>Each sentence has a purpose</p> <p>(A) <i>Name the company, who owns it, and what it does</i></p> <p>(B) <i>Provides background information to the problem under discussion.</i></p> <p>(C) <i>States the problem clearly.</i></p> <p>(D) <i>States the purpose of the project.</i></p> <p>All sentences are grammatically correct and there are no surface mistakes (e.g. spelling, punctuation).</p>

**Source:** (1992) *Writing a Project Specification*. Department of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Victoria University of Technology.

**ATTACHMENT 3: PROGRESS TALK**

**Project Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluator:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rating Guide**

**5 = excellent**

**4 = very good**

**3 = good**

**2 = fair**

**1 = unsatisfactory**

**GROUP EVALUATION**

**1. Technical Content**

Statement of Project Aims    5    4    3    2    1

Understanding of the problem

under investigation        5    4    3    2    1

Understanding and explanation

of methodology used        5    4    3    2    1

Progress to date            5    4    3    2    1

Tentative conclusions      5    4    3    2    1

Quality of Talk Abstract    5    4    3    2    1

**2. Organisation**

Timing of talk              5    4    3    2    1

Organisation of speakers    5    4    3    2    1

Quality of audio visual aids 5    4    3    2    1

Logical presentation of information    5    4    3    2    1

Group total /50

**INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT**

Control of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation 5    4    3    2    1

Composure (stance, gestures, eye contact)        5    4    3    2    1

Use of notes/organisation                            5    4    3    2    1

Use of audio visual aids                              5    4    3    2    1

Evidence of contribution to project                5    4    3    2    1

Individual Total /50

# Between Logic and Rhetoric: Advance and Complication in the Teaching of Reading Comprehension

**Dirk den Hartog**

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The Academy seems at last to be attending to the issue of student reading comprehension as something that might be taught explicitly in the tertiary classroom. 'Schema theory' from cognitive psychology can be drawn upon to teach text structures (formal schemata) and to attempt either to pre-teach presupposed background knowledge (content schemata) where not contextually provided (eg. in prior lectures) or metacognitive strategies for deficiencies perceived whilst reading. These developments may create new problems, however, if they focus exclusively upon teaching students to grasp the argument of a text through discerning its logical structures (both at paragraph and whole text levels) and ignore the enjoyment of detail as something vivid and memorable in itself that can be available to readers unsocialised into the schemata necessary for perceiving argument. Whilst not in itself adequate for tertiary literacy, such 'academically deviant' reading is an important way in which readers can become imaginatively and subjectively involved with texts, frequently found in some humanities disciplines, in which the rhetoric of texture is important as well as the logic of structure. This paper derives from the observation of neglected continuities between teaching literature, with its characteristic pedagogy, and teaching elsewhere in the humanities.

Reading the other day through the paper abstracts for this conference, I was struck again with regret that the various bits and pieces of student work that I have come to photocopy and retain before handing back have not yet blossomed into anything presentable as 'research findings'. Basically I am a content teacher who has drifted into the academic skills area without yet putting down the firm professional roots that would produce such a crop. On the other hand this drift has positioned me interestingly in relation to the area of academic skills I have been particularly drawn to, the teaching of reading comprehension. My paper, then is a personal narrative of this intellectual semi-migration and the tensions it has entailed, insofar as it raises issues for me about developments in the field. I've come to define these tensions in terms of the historical conflict in the history of the Arts degree between Logic and Rhetoric. I was first inducted into this as an undergraduate at Melbourne University in the 1960s, where I vacillated between the disputatious hammer-blows of argument in what later became known as 'the philosopher's bar' in Naughton's hotel and the slightly nervy scintillation of critical judgement in English Department sherry gatherings. Here,

around my naive and historically unwitting ears, echoes of Abelard and the University of Paris clashed with a faint aroma of the court of Urbino. A parallel division plays through me today, as a humanist teacher of literature turning to the teaching of non-literary expository texts.

I first became aware of how my literary background was skewing my approach to my new teaching when a historian colleague referred to my “textual” approach to the course in cultural history we were co-teaching. Of course we both set texts on reading guides, expected our students to read them, got upset when they didn’t and reacted with top-of-the-head diagnostic cliches when many of those who ‘did the reading’ made a mess of it. What seemed odd to my colleague was my habit of repeatedly drawing attention to the set expository text within class discussion. For him these texts were simply things to be read before class: doing this competently gave one knowledge by which one was able to contribute to an in-class discussion. It was this discussion that for him, at least at the level at which we were teaching, was *the* narrative of importance: the set readings were not so much narratives in themselves as script-sources for the classroom’s oral text. I suspect that his assumptions were typical of perhaps many if not most tertiary teachers in the humanities and social sciences. My oddness, on the other hand, came from my transfer across of the orientation of the literature classroom, in which the text was traditionally the centre of attention.

For me this personal memory encapsulates one of the main difficulties facing the promotion of tertiary literacy. Most of our colleagues in the content areas, however much they may lament that their students don’t and perhaps can’t read, don’t regard the complex and fascinating act of reading as an integral domain of their pedagogic scrutiny but as an external preliminary to it. It is only in literary pedagogy and its offshoots, and of course linguistics, that the opposite applies. So we have this communication problem to add to the institutional barriers of contracting budgets and shrinking contact hours if we want the teaching of how to read academic texts made an integral part of the content teaching programme. In the current atmosphere, too, one even feels uneasy asking all but trusted friends amongst one’s non-literary colleagues what they actually do with expository texts in their classes, for fear of being seen as a kind of undercover Quality Assurance agent out on the prowl. On a more positive note, nevertheless, I *can* report that with the new integration this year of the first-year content and skills foundation units in our B.A. here at Footscray, reading in the content area will be a prominent topic in the skills curriculum.

If my first anecdote of pedagogic migration bespeaks the side of my disciplinary origins that I professionally adopted, my next tells of a somewhat schizophrenic *volte-face*. Looking around for tools to help my non-literature students read, I had the good luck to be put onto the well established field of discourse processing and reading comprehension that more or less comes out of cognitive psychology (Spiro et. al. 1980; McLoughlin, 1995). In particular I was attracted to schema theory and its top-down interactive model of the reading process: I suppose literature teacher with an interest in Romanticism and its epistemology would be. Yet my next move was anything but Romantic: fired by notions of text

structures and patterns, formal and content schemata, I designed a series of classes in our Academic Skills Unit designed to implant an explicit awareness of them in our students as an attempt to improve their reading skills. For a variety of reasons the initial classes were not a success - one of these being that the reading material we chose was not as 'authentic' as we thought it was. There were grumbles of student perplexity at the prospect of further doses of the same medicine. In response I wrote a handout explaining what we were trying to do, ostensibly an enlightened missive in the best traditions of humane sweet reasonableness and academic debate, but also somewhere, too, a cross little note. Drawing on my accumulated impressions of how many students in previous years had handled expository texts, I more or less accused them of what I called 'fruit-cake' reading. Lacking consistent awareness of the logical structures holding texts together, I alleged, their natural tendency was to decontextualise details, just like someone picking out the currants and glazed cherries. Learning about text structures, I argued, would put an end to this. We returned to our chosen, pseudo-authentic text - not so much a fruit cake but a dried-up Anzac biscuit of a text it was, too, admittedly - with modest results. Student summaries spectacularly confirmed 'schema-theoretic' arguments, but it was all a rather joyless affair.

It was some months later that I realised the meaning of what I had done in terms of my nomadic intellectual allegiances. My uptake of my reading of reading comprehension theory had been in the spirit of construing text - reductively - strictly as an instantiation of Logic. The subordination of illustrations to topic sentences, the patterns of cause-effect, comparison-contrast and problem-solution, etc. - I had embraced these so exclusively on the assumption that to *comprehend* the text (as distinct from personally and critically engaging with it) was simply to follow an unfolding argument, the logic of which was objectively there in the text. In doing this I had in fact departed, perhaps with a degree of relief, from the reading models of *literary* pedagogy, with their tortuous dialectic of the objective and subjective, their current tendency to empower the reader over the text, etc. Imagine my surprise when I discovered, on further reading (for instance Judith Irwin's 1986 book, *Teaching Reading Comprehension Processes*), that reading comprehension theory had itself become epistemologically complicated in like manner. Not only was top-down processing a matter of having in one's head the schemata necessary to see the text for what it objectively was; there was now a stress on the role of one's head - and heart and soul and memory and ideological formation, etc., in creating validly subjectivist readings of expository texts. In quite specific ways, too, the reading protocols of the literature classroom had reemerged as at least desiderata, if not the established norm, of the reading comprehension class. Hence the literary practice of inviting students to associate freely in response to textual details was now matched by Irwin's recommendation of class exercises to encourage what she called 'elaborative processes', ie. those trains of thought by which, in response to something in a text, we 'make a prediction about what might happen ... form a vivid mental picture, or think about how the information relates to something similar we have experienced' and respond affectively (Irwin, 1991; 1986). With both kinds

of texts the function of elaborative processes was the same: ie. to energise the reading by interrelating the objectivity of the text with the subjectivity of the reader.

Thus to read an expository text, as conceived by the more recent comprehension theorists, is not just to follow and critically appraise an argument, but to enter, to quote Doug Brent, 'in the fullest possible sense of the phrase, into a conversation between human beings' (Brent, 1992). The point of expository texts is not just to inform and rationally convince readers, but also to move them; even reading such texts, it is now argued, can be to some extent, to quote the classic distinction of Louise Rosenblatt that has been revived, an *aesthetic* as well as an *effeferent* act. In other words, the logic of expository texts is no more important than their rhetoric. None of this had been taken into account, obviously, in my little *jeremiad contra fruit-cake*.

Not that even amidst my excitement at this discovery there wasn't also the undertone voice of Logic speaking to me of contradictions besetting even such an impressive work as Irwin's, in her attempt to absorb subjectivity into her still fairly text and logic-centred model of expository reading. I was intrigued if just a bit alarmed when she announced in her introductory chapter that:

the goal of reading is not inferring the intended message of the author, but, rather, creating a message that is useful to the reader...  
Comprehension can be seen as the process of using one's own prior experiences and the writer's cues to construct a set of meanings that are useful to the individual reader reading in a specific context.  
(Irwin, 1991; 1986:9)

But this didn't quite fit, nevertheless, with some of the student-teacher interactions she later cites as models - I'll quote one- a teacher is commenting on a student response which, Irwin notes, involves an inappropriate application of background knowledge:

I see - you are using what you know about birds to understand this story about fish. It's good to try to use what you already know. But, since this is about fish, could you look at it again and use what you know about fish? (Irwin, 1991; 1986:23)

This exemplifies a teacherly tact that, in the setting of old-style tertiary literature, wouldn't be out of place in classrooms run by Louise Rosenblatt or a genial Leavisite. It also fits with Irwin's comment elsewhere:

Students need to feel that their reasoning process will be valued. Because elaborations are divergent responses, they are difficult to grade, but this does not mean that they are not an important part of the comprehension process. (Irwin, 1991; 1986:104)

But this itself resiles from the previous claim about comprehension not being about inferring the intended message, etc., just as the quoted student-teacher interaction quite firmly implies, beyond the tact, that there *is* an intended message



in the passage to be summarised, and that the student has missed it. The teacher is nurturing and valuing the student's personal response but, with Irwin's endorsement, is in no doubt that in one important sense it is just wrong. If the teacher had also taken on board Irwin's earlier recommendation that 'there is no one right answer', and publicised this as a way of encouraging response, the student would feel justifiably confused and betrayed.

Actually the real motive in the shift towards the rhetorical in theorists like Irwin is, I suspect, strategic rather than epistemological. What is at stake is the same for them as it was for Petrarch in the Italian Renaissance when he urged the superiority of literary studies (which included history) to scholastic philosophy:

[Aristotle] teaches what virtue is, but his words lack the sting that set aflame the urge to love of virtue and hatred of vice. (Petrarch, cited in Trinkaus, 1983:14)

Hence for Irwin, et. al., rather as in the older style humanist literary pedagogy of a Leavis or Rosenblatt, an active engagement of the reader's subjectivity in responding to the text is crucial for the reading to be a personally vital and meaningful event, but carries no necessary purchase on 'rightness'. What has validity in its necessary uniqueness, therefore, is the reading event itself - but only insofar as this does not obscure perception of what, in a simple propositional way, the text is actually saying. (We know both from experience and formal research, for instance, that whilst the activation of prior knowledge aids comprehension, it can also block it when text becomes merely assimilated to activated schemata without necessary accompanying accommodation (Winne, et. al., 1993)).

A rhetorical approach to teaching expository texts, then, is an energising supplement to logic rather than a substitute for it. For me at this stage the question remains of what the rhetorical options are in the teaching situations I'm engaged in, and how these can be balanced against the claims of Logic. The historical comparison I invoked just before with the Renaissance is instructive in its difference. As we know, Renaissance humanism, in partially displacing scholasticism, redressed the latter's emphasis of logic over rhetoric, which involved a major change in reading practices. It also involved a major change in the cohort of the educated, from exclusively male but socially somewhat diverse trainee clerics, lawyers and doctors, to a more gender mixed but less socially diverse aspirants to gentility in general. Hence the shift from logic to rhetoric arguably involved a more subtle and diverse set of reading practices - to relish a Ciceronian cadence, for instance, as well as to follow syllogistic subtleties. Where does this put the present-day turn towards the rhetorical, which is occurring, by contrast, in relation to a student cohort for whom, by and large, reading practices need to be kept fairly simple?

Basically, I'd suggest, there would seem to be a twofold division of rhetorical options, those that emphasise reader-based and those that emphasise text-based comprehension processes. The former kind includes pedagogies that pay a lot of attention to activating prior knowledge, cultivating elaborative processes and

which encourage metacognitive reflection on one's own reading. Brent's recently developed model (Brent, 1992), which develops a dialogic relation between reader and expository text that parallels more widely recognised notions that have been promoted in relation to specifically literary works, can offer a lot of guidance here, I think. The latter kind, by contrast, refers to teaching that emphasises the rhetoric of the text itself, its power to move and charm through its stylistic features and the creation of an authorial personality that seems to speak through the text. Both these kinds of rhetorical attention can relate to both the submissive and the agonistic relations of reader with text, the impulse to be moved to agreement and admiration, and the impulse to disagreement and critique. One can be prompted to the latter, for instance, both by reflecting on related personal experience and discovering thereby a critical perspective on what one is reading, and by locating signs of spurious or ideologically unacceptable persuasiveness in the text itself.

Generally speaking it would seem, on the face of it, that it is the reader-based rhetorical options that would seem most broadly useful today. It is these, for instance, that can be used to create involvement in that great mass of academic expository texts that may be saying things of potential interest to the reader but certainly aren't saying them with much rhetorical flair. In a way the term 'elaborative process' only refers to the well-established common-sense practice of bringing something dry alive by finding connections and analogies between it and things that are alive for student readers. Furthermore, it would seem largely true that most of the expository texts that are rhetorically powerful are so in ways which demand reading practices of a sophistication way beyond most undergraduate student readers: it's enough if they can logically follow what an academic text says without being asked to see the rhetorically appealing ways in which some of these texts say it.

Nevertheless I do think there is a valid place for some sort of text-centred rhetoric today - that there are certain kinds of *literariness* within, say, historical texts, that our students can see and which it is worth them seeing. And this brings me back to the episode of my note about fruit-cake reading. One text which I at times have had some success with is E.P. Thompson's "Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism". Overall a pretty demanding piece of expository prose, and a long piece to set for seminar reading, it is obviously one which requires all the reader-centred tricks of the trade one can muster, such as careful contextualisation in related prior discussion that makes connections between past and present, the objects of Thompson's study and the readers' own experience. Yet there are also qualities of the text itself that recommend it even in today's classrooms - I'm quoting from the section in the essay in which Thompson is outlining his notion of the pre-industrial measurement of time:

It is not difficult to find examples ... Thus in seventeenth-century Chile time was often measured in "credos": an earthquake was described in 1647 as lasting for two credos; while the cooking time of an egg could be judged by an Ave Maria said aloud. In Burma in recent times monks

rose at daybreak "when there is light enough to see the veins in the hand." The Oxford English Dictionary gives us English examples - "pater noster wyle", "miserere wyle" (1450), and (in the New English Dictionary but not the Oxford English Dictionary), "pissing while" - a somewhat arbitrary measurement.

Pierre Bourdieu has explored more closely the attitudes towards time of the Kabyle peasant (in Algeria) in recent years: "an attitude of submission and of nonchalant indifference to the passing of time which no one dreams of mastering, using up, or saving ... Haste is seen as a lack of decorum combined with diabolical ambition". The clock is sometimes known as "the devil's mill". (Thompson, 1991;1967)

It would be a shame to set students loose on expository writing like this armed - or rather fettered - exclusively with the categories of logical analysis: 'what's the gist of what Thompson's saying here - select the main point and delete illustrative details.' For of course it is in the details - at times picturesque at others challengingly significant - that the life and, in a real sense, the point of the writing lies. How much more appropriate are some of the key terms of rhetorical analysis of the Renaissance humanists: "copiousness" and "amplification", qualities animated here by an "inventio" that most definitely has, to quote Erasmus discussing history as literature, "the spice of antiquarian knowledge" (Erasmus, 1512). Marxist Thompson may be, and profoundly serious in his argument. But his rhetorical success is also due to the fact that it is a very plum pudding of a text that he serves up to us.

And for such a text, isn't a fruit-cake reader one kind of appropriate consumer? Certainly some of the limited success I have had with texts like Thompson's has been due to the modest textual nibbling of students who, dazed at the prospect of getting hold of his argument as a whole, SQ3R or not, have established an initial involvement with it around details, such as the above, that have simply, in a logically decontextualised way, caught their fancy. So in my punitive missive, in fact, there was a goodly element of cutting off my nose to spite my face. I still believe in the validity and usefulness of the 'top-down', chunking-by-schema approach and my most recent use of it, with *authentic* material, has been encouraging. But perhaps there is also value in a reverse method which, beginning with an interest such as the Thompson extract might provoke, would work slowly up from the particular to the general<sup>1</sup>. A lot of help could be offered here by the old literary critical concept of the 'concrete universal', the particular detail that metonymically embodies a larger significance. Likewise students of literary studies proper, as traditionally defined, will find a useful carryover in this process of the kind of attention to the vivid detail that they have elsewhere - hopefully! - been encouraged to see as a distinctive cognitive bent of their other discipline - and of the kind of *aesthetic* attentiveness which such savouring requires. In this way we can proceed from rhetorically enticing detail to overall logical argument: the Algerian peasants' belief that haste is diabolic, for instance, speaks, as we can come to see - for Thompson's overall critical stance. Though in such blending of Rhetoric and Logic we should perhaps also reserve a bit of time for

mutual enjoyment of the occasional interesting detail simply for its own oddity - the in-class equivalent, so to speak, of a break for afternoon tea.

## NOTES

1. Suggestions somewhat similar to this have been made in the formal psychological field of reading research, focussing upon the value for comprehension of what is called 'the seductive detail'; (see S. Wade et. al. "Seduction of the Strategic Reader: effects of interest on strategies and recall", *Reading Research Quarterly*, 28, 2, 1993). A provisional conclusion here is the need for details which engage attention in a way that leads to comprehension at a more general level, as against an interest which remains trapped on the detail itself. A model of good use of such detail in a text written, unlike Thompson's, specifically for students and the general reader, is Morris Bishop's, *The Penguin Book of the Middle Ages* (1978).

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# Developing Critical Literacy for Nursing and Health Science: Philosophy, Policy, Theory for Practice, and Research for a Subject-integrated Approach

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*The long held idea that learning might be improved by reforming teaching practice has gained impetus from many studies of the way in which students do in fact learn*  
*(Ramsden 1992)*

In this paper Ana Smith narrates the development of a philosophy for the School of Health as it pertains to the characteristics of the student body; Robyn Moroney describes some background material in the form of a history of the in-house policy for the development of academic critical literacy for the School; Mary Harvie explains the subject-integrated approach adopted as one of the teaching and learning strategies for critical literacy and discusses some of the merits and difficulties encountered by staff and students when units for critical literacy are integrated with foundation subjects in the curriculum. Finally a research project is mentioned which considers some important cultural factors which influence teaching and learning for tertiary critical literacy such as gender, prior subject-content knowledge, and years of professional experience. Factors which concern learning outcomes are considered and diversity is celebrated as an aid to teaching and learning.

## **WRITING DOWN THE BONES: PHILOSOPHY**

Natalie Goldberg describes how we can immerse ourselves in the world, 'burn' with experiencing it and come to a knowing of how we are and what we could become. She challenges us to be, 'the frost on the window, the cry of a young wolf, the thin blade of grass' (1989:82). This challenge to transform ourselves and our world has been echoed by theorists of teaching and learning. The School of Health's first exposure to such theories of teaching and learning came about six years ago with the discovery of the writing of Paulo Freire (1972). His words beguiled because he spoke of education in the context of emancipation, control

and endless possibilities, for those who approach university education from positions influenced by cultural difference, socioeconomic status, age, and gender. As if for the first time, academics within the school came to understand that pedagogies are never neutral. They can either maintain the power of the dominant group or position students for action against dominant ideologies. Traditionally learning about nursing has been firmly set within a positivist medical model of health care provision. This model has maintained, and indeed continues to maintain, nursing knowledge in a subordinate role to the knowledge of medical experts. In turn, nursing practice reinforces the pattern of dependency and powerlessness in clients who are the recipients of health care.

The challenges were enormous for a group of academics who were striving to construct a framework for the Bachelor of Nursing program which was predicated upon a commitment to social justice, access and equity and guided by the principles and practices of primary health care. Essentially our vision for nursing practice, then and now, embodies a view of health care that demands a focus on the power and control that individuals, families and communities should have over their own health.

It was inevitable that we came to an understanding that it was necessary to embrace an educational perspective which was congruent with our vision for nursing practice. Such a perspective views learning as a liberating process which enables learners to reflect upon and understand themselves, their world and the circumstances of their lives. It provides for learning activities which assist students to promote, enact and adapt to change, to make real choices about how they construct their world and to more effectively manage the complexities of their private and public lives.

We adopted an experiential approach to teaching and learning, as expressed by Kolb (1984:21). His theory posits four stages to a learning cycle: concrete experience which provides the basis for critical reflection that then leads to analysis and conceptualization and to the final phase which is active experimentation. This experimentation occurs because newly acquired ideas and understandings offer the possibility of reconstruction, of creating a new personal and social reality.

Of the 450 undergraduate students enrolled in the School of Health approximately 60% are mature age and approximately 85% are women. Although nearly 40% of the students have completed the Higher School Certificate, a significant number have attended disadvantaged schools. The School of Health is also enriched by its large cohort of international students who nevertheless experience academic difficulties that are similar to local students for whom English is a second language. The implementation of our approach to nursing education has not been without difficulties. The accreditation process was, at times, fraught as we sought to explain the need for revolution if health for all was to be attainable. We quickly learned to be strategic and to speak with clarity as well as with passion when defending our educational approach.

More recently feminist, post-structuralist thinking, whilst highlighting the

importance of the committed academic being concerned with issues of power and authority, has challenged us to consider some of the 'problematic assumptions' that we hold about academic literacy given that students are recruited predominantly from the western region of Sydney (Luke and Gore, 1992).

Our curriculum now provides a learning environment that is diverse, flexible and democratic with a clear orientation towards activities which are learner and issue centred. The subject called Practicum is central to our approach. Boud, Keogh and Walker argue that reflection is the most important component of Kolb's learning cycle and, that it is through reflection that learning actually occurs (1985:26). Practicum is a springboard for social change as students make personal meaning of their experiences as trainee practitioners and become increasingly *concientized* (Freire, 1972). Reflective practice, because it is action orientated, has the capacity to enable learners to change. Nursing practice based on a biomedical model for health care is increasingly seen by young graduates as lacking. Nursing graduates become resource professionals, working collaboratively with people in times of wellness and also at time when bodies are broken and families are vulnerable, assisting them to make decisions about their health.

### **TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS: POLICY**

We have become increasingly aware in the last few years that in spite of a curriculum that addresses critical approaches to existing nursing practice and even with a place in the curriculum, Practicum, for integrating learning with reflection on clinical placements, students require specific teaching and learning for academic literacy. The School of Health initially advocated for campus wide support for academic writing but eventually we recognised that subject-integrated critical literacy for the subjects taught within the Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Health Science programs was the preferred option around which we should build policy. The minutes of the various school meetings and undergraduate and postgraduate coordinators meetings, for the last few years, record concern over learning outcomes. Academic literacy is identified as an issue for teaching as well as learning. Simply asking students to reflect upon experience and to think critically about issues is like asking the same students to assess a client's health status without any teaching and learning for the techniques and tools for making that assessment.

Generic writing skills were taught in the Learning Development Centre to groups of students who were divided according to their status as local, English-speaking or non-English-speaking and international students. The remedial approach adopted was based on the recognition of the student's language deficiency as the source of the learning problems. The more complex issue of differential access to academic language as a resource was not addressed and the requirement for all students to develop critical literacy in disciplines for nursing practice was not addressed. We recognised excellence in academic writing but required skills to facilitate that in our students. We acknowledged the responsibility for

developing a policy for integrating academic literacy units within existing subjects in the curriculum. All students would then have access to teaching and learning for academic critical literacy.

The School had been paying for the services of a casual writing tutor for some time. The recurring nature of the problem led to the decision to set aside an academic position for a person qualified to teach academic literacy for the disciplines within the School and qualified to team teach with staff in the development of teaching and learning strategies for academic literacy. The lecturer in Academic Writing became part of the School's academic profile after the recognised process for approval. The politics surrounding the creation of an academic position in a discipline (Education) that did not normally fall under the School of Health was substantial. A Teaching and Learning Centre was being planned and executive management believed that the lecturer in academic writing should be placed within the TLC. After much negotiating the job was advertised as level A with a fixed term contract for two years. The Deputy Vice Chancellor decided the successful applicant should reside in the TLC but be part of the academic profile of the School of Health. The position is under review again, after nine months, because the School and the Faculty of Health, Humanities and Social Ecology believe that it is in the best interests of the faculty and the lecturer in the position to work collaboratively with faculty first, and secondly, to act as faculty's liaison with the Teaching and Learning Centre. The battle to secure the position has been won and having the lecturer in academic literacy working on day to day problems is changing the way subjects are planned, implemented and assessed.

### **BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORIES OF LITERACY AND PRACTICE.**

Texts on literacy as theory and literacy as practice, which span the entire history of education, have been constructed relating theory to practice in varying degrees of intimacy. In different disciplinary sites, however, where tertiary literacy is taught and learned, there is a great disparity between theory and practice which angers those who consider themselves good teachers and frustrates those who consider themselves good theorists. The central assumption in this paper is that anger and frustration in education managers, teachers and students is due to previous attempts to impose top-down and outside-inside pressure on teachers to adopt theories of literacy, assessment strategies and quality evaluation based on an ideal, universal subject of pedagogy. Harvie (1995) concludes that, far from a universal subject of pedagogy, disciplinary discourses construct the subjects of pedagogy. The relationship between theory of literacy and practice, which influences how subjects are positioned, is not naturally occurring but is necessarily differently negotiated between teachers and learners at different disciplinary sites and at different cultural sites.

A subject-integrated approach for critical literacy contrasts with a crisis-based approach to the provision of adjunct programs for academic skills based on



principles for remedial education. The latter implicitly places the student as lacking in some respects. We question this process of 'placing' the student which often makes women, ethnic minorities and working class students suspicious of intellectual work and doubtful of their own potential to acquire language resources for academic literacy. An explicit pedagogy for the spoken and written genres valued by each discipline, we believe, must emphasise that student texts are constructed within discourses in social institutions with a history of regulated conventions in the form of the valued genres of assessment.

The usual view of 'academic discourse' inherited from linguistics tends to focus on matters of correct usage, style, clarity and genre conventions which are prescriptive. Such an approach abstracts language and its usage away from subject specific contexts. Such an approach has no gendered and no cultural users and uses. The taxonomy, grammar and stages of academic writing genres are not taught but learning is assumed to take place by contagion with teacher's discourse and repetitive rewriting. Students, it is assumed, acquire critical thinking by inspiring a kind of medieval academic rigour that is expired by the teacher.

This view of pedagogy for critical reflection also assumes that the critical thought comes first and then it can be expressed directly and without impediment in writing. The writing, it is assumed, will be decoded without hindrance by any reader. This simplistic model can work only if there is a unique one-to-one correspondence between thoughts and writing, between forms of words and meaning. The existence of a fixed code of language which secures this one-to-one correspondence is now questioned widely in the literature on language and learning. The simplest of linguistic exchanges involves a constellation of factors: disciplinary discourse, taxonomy, grammar, register, genre, social context, gender, age, and so on. Meaning is always more than the sum of these parts. The notion of one-to-one correspondence between written words and thoughts and the possibility of an academic language which ensures objectivity is now discredited.

### **'MIND THE GAP': TEACHING AND LEARNING CRITICAL LITERACY IN 1995**

The statistics from the report on teaching and learning in the School of Health for 1995, 'Mind the Gap', tells the story of *ad hoc* small group teaching and learning for 269 undergraduates, arranged according to discipline and assessment genre, and a large number of 1:1 tutorials. These small groups and tutorials are still available on demand for undergraduate and postgraduate students but important decisions have been taken recently, through proper process of consultation at faculty and school committees. These decisions have resulted in the following strategies for improving student access to resources and staff collaboration for subject assessment and subject development: team teaching for critical literacy on award subjects at 100 and 200 level; team teaching in a research subject at 300 level; team teaching the subject 'Nurse as Educator' on the local and international Health Science program; team teaching on Practicum for the language of teaching and learning as it concerns reflective practice.

The School of Health now distances itself from the claim that academic discourse in English is distinguished, singular and creates objective, logical and lucid writing. Although we embrace Freire's view (1972) of pedagogy as dialogic, we seek to extend his thinking to include gender and ethnic factors as they influence power relations and learning outcomes. We reject the Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' as an impossible ideal. The place to start teaching and learning for critical literacy is not some Habermasian counter-factual ideal place but actual, cultural institutional sites taking into account local, specific, gendered, ethnic characteristics of the teachers and students. Staff and students in the School of Health recognise that teaching and learning for critical literacy takes place within discourses that are socially-constructed, plural and discipline specific and the writing genres appropriate to academic writing need to be taught and learned. The disciplines within The School of Health include Health Studies, Sociology, Education, Psychology, Microbiology and Pathophysiology. We have adopted an explicit pedagogy for generic texts such as the reflection paper, journal, procedures, protocols, reports, case-study, expository essay and argumentative essay which recognises that student texts are constructed within disciplinary discourses. Some discourses are subject specific and, since our students have different prior-learning profiles for content knowledge, teaching and learning for specific writing tasks can only take place using a subject-integrated approach to teaching and learning critical literacy.

The nature of the relationship between theory of literacy and practice is contingent upon particular pedagogical events which are in turn influenced by institutional policy on literacy, specific disciplinary discourse and genres, culture, gender, ethnicity and prior subject-content knowledge of both teachers and students. Our collaborative enterprise in the School of Health seeks to subvert an ideal view of the relationship between theory of literacy and practice by advancing a subject-integrated approach to teaching and learning tertiary critical literacy which articulates pedagogy as discursive events to gendered, ethnic subjects of pedagogy at different cultural sites.

### ***EVALUATING CRITICAL LITERACY FOR INTERNATIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION : PROJECT SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE***

Critical Literacy, its definition and assessment, has emerged in recent years, as one of the most significant issues confronting tertiary teachers, students and education managers in the discipline of Health Science. In Australia and its near neighbours in Asia, employers are now looking for critical thinking, flexible learning and adaptability in the Health Science graduates they employ. This project aims to extend recent research in Europe and Australia by evaluating the integration of Critical Literacy units with health education in the Bachelor of Health Science (Nursing) program offered at three cultural sites: the University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury, the Baptist University Hong Kong and Sunbshire Education Singapore. The project has significant implications for the design of future tertiary health education programs and for the design of

international flexible learning packages. Both international tertiary health education and flexible learning for Critical Literacy in English are essential features of a healthy future for the third millennium.

The shift in Health Science education in Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong from hospital apprenticeship programs to tertiary institution has exposed Critical Literacy for students and Nurse Educators as a priority area for both research and evaluation projects. The student profile for the School of Health has changed very quickly over the last five years due to the Federal and State government's policy and the UWS Hawkesbury Strategic Plan to increase participation for groups traditionally underrepresented in the tertiary sector. This, together with the most recent move in Strategic Planning at UWS and other Australian universities, towards internationalisation, has resulted in students with a more diverse range of professional nursing experience, language skills, cultural and academic skills.

The response to these changes to date has included a range of support programs for academic skills and language proficiency skills. Wallace (1992) and Harvie (1995) distinguish between critical reading as a matter of 'free response' to particular texts and critical literacy as learned awareness of how reading strategies position readers and how learned writing genres position writers and their readers.

Becoming critically literate requires explicit teaching and learning to attend to the discourses particular to a discipline and writing genres that are discipline specific. This project will evaluate an explicit pedagogy for Critical Literacy as opposed to an implicit pedagogy that assumes any literacy, including what is most often labelled as 'critical thinking' or 'critical analysis', can be simply be acquired in the process of teaching/learning subject content. Evaluation of this proven teaching approach for an international curriculum is long overdue because no project has evaluated an explicit pedagogy for Critical Literacy taking account of prior professional learning, gender, age or ethnicity and how these factors influence curriculum design for international programs.

*Some objectives for the research project and areas of strategic planning concerned*

- 1 To evaluate an international curriculum design for critical literacy as demonstrated reading and writing skills, in nursing graduates, necessary for the critique of research literature and writing genres essential for a productive professional life and varied cultural life.
- 2 To evaluate a discipline based and subject-specific pedagogy for critical literacy at three cultural sites for the same degree program.
- 3 To compare, at each of the three cultural sites, the effectiveness of the subject-specific pedagogy, measured as students' perceptions of learning a subject-integrated approach to teaching and learning critical literacy. Pre, mid, and post questionnaires will be administered.
- 4 To measure, at each of the three cultural sites, the effectiveness of the subject-specific pedagogy, using students' learning outcomes measured

as grade levels. The cohort of 1995 will act as control group.

- 5 To evaluate the influence of cultural variables gender, age, ethnicity and levels of prior learning on students' learning outcomes.

*Areas of Strategic Planning addressed by this project are as follows:*

- 1 Addressing the need to improve on outcomes for all student learning at local and international campuses.
- 2 Designing curriculum for teaching and learning for a multicultural student body.
- 3 Responding to initiatives from government on priority areas for educational research: adult literacy, health workers' education and international education.
- 4 Initiating, planning and implementing Australian innovative research on teaching and learning.
- 5 Consulting and collaborating with international teachers on approaches to teaching and learning.
- 6 Keeping up to date with current international educational and research developments.

## **CONCLUSION: PLANNING FOR DIVERSITY AND CHANGE**

Academic writing genres only exist in so far as the social group made up of tertiary education managers, teachers and students, declare and reinforce the pedagogies that constitute them. Pedagogical texts are embedded in social and disciplinary discourses. Pedagogy as text is a concrete material object produced within and by discourses and has meaning because it projects a version of reality (a version of the relationship of theory to practice for example). The promotional texts, the pedagogical texts and the curriculum documents produced by many schools in many faculties of health, emphasise teaching and learning for change. Because there can be no teaching and no learning for change without the academic critical literacy required for scholarship and dissemination of ideas for change, we have initiated a subject-integrated pedagogy for critical literacy.

We believe we have demonstrated, in the School of Health, a creative, collaborative and productive approach to both subject assessment and teaching and learning academic critical literacy for faculty's academic disciplines and for faculty's diverse student population. This work has important and exciting potential for the future. In our experience, successful, long-lasting change comes only from close collaboration between groups and individuals who share ownership of the production of particular products, knowledge or scholarship. This conviction of shared ownership does not exist naively or ideally. It costs pain, perseverance, trust and pride and is jointly constructed by projects within schools and across faculty. This much we have learned from collaboration.

Although we have already been given generous opportunities for conversations around our work, we encourage you to write to us to extend our conversations.

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# EAP: Making Risk-taking in Academic Writing Less Risky for International Students

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Academic writing in English is far from a narrowly linguistic activity for Asian learners. Besides mastering different approaches to learning they must become members of new discourse communities. However, full membership involves "challenging the task" (Hamp-Lyons 1991) and not simply adopting its conventions. Unless the conventions are challenged the writer's personal "voice" will not emerge and the knowledge expressed is likely to remain at the descriptive level. To progress beyond this reproductive stage necessitates an authoritative sense of self on the part of the writer. For learners placed in an unfamiliar culture and working in their second (or third or...) language, the expectations can be intimidating and can involve considerable risk-taking. This paper will present case study material of the literacy practices that enabled two Asian postgraduate students to cope with these demands during the preparation and completion of their theses.

This paper deals with the issue of the presence of the writer in academic writing as it relates to the special circumstances that face international students studying in Australian universities. Two students, one from Thailand and one from China, were involved in the study. They were each enrolled in a one year coursework and project master's degree and use is made of material drawn from their writing and audio-taped consultations during the supervision process in the preparation of their dissertations/projects. The increasing number of Asian students attending Australian universities has stimulated continuing interest in cross-cultural learning patterns and this paper attempts to refine further the useful but over-simplified distinction between conserving/reproductive and critical approaches to learning.

There is often confusion about how Asian students are perceived to cope with Western academic culture generally and its academic writing specifically. Research (Biggs 1990, Kember and Gow 1990, 1991) has documented some of the misinformation that has become part of the folklore surrounding Asian behaviour in Western academic contexts. Some of this confusion comes about through unfamiliarity with non-local students, so that any difficulties experienced are quickly attributed to cultural factors, masking the reality that monolingual English-speaking students frequently display similar characteristics in their academic development. Probably more of the confusion stems from inadequate knowledge and understanding of the actual process followed by tertiary students

in their progress towards mastery of appropriate academic skills, particularly in their ability to present their learning in academic writing.

### PHASES IN ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

As the student progresses in academic development different phases exhibit variations in the knowledge/learner relationship. Perry (cited in Belenky et al, 1986) sees the movement as alternating between the authority for knowledge being external or internal to the learner. Belenky et al (1986) identify a similar sequence in students engaged in academic activity. Initially students are seen to 'embrace objectivity and logical analysis as important tools for knowing' in 'separate knowing'. At this stage the dominant behaviour for students is to regulate their view of knowledge according to the techniques of the academic world whereby subjectivity in knowing is viewed with suspicion. Logic and reason in the use of factual evidence becomes the dominant paradigm for knowledge and learning. Opinion gives way to argument and at this stage the objective view of knowledge implies self-effacement by the learner. Traditionally this phase has represented a high point in academic training. It has been used as a significant means for members of academic communities to define their exclusivity. They are no longer susceptible to the 'inaccuracies' of feelings, intuitions and emotions and are disciplined by the rigours of dealing with 'hard evidence'. Following this phase, which Belenky et al see as 'procedural knowledge', is a stage wherein there is recognition that the personal and the individual have valid contributions to make in the formulation of understanding and knowledge. At this stage, termed by them 'connected knowledge', truth and knowledge is perceived to be the result of construction by the learner, rather than something 'handed down' by an external authority. This final stage integrates 'separate' and 'connected' knowing and equates with Perry's 'relativism' phase. The whole process results in an amalgam of the objective and the external with the subjective and the internal and allows the student to reach a compromise between 'idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other.' (Bartholomae, 1985, p.135)

In responding to the expectations of the academic communities and utilising their conventions, a student has limited degrees of freedom. This is particularly the case with academic writing discourses. Although there is no single generalised version of academic discourse, the range of discourses available still exerts constraining pressures on the student. Once a discourse, or a combination of discourses, is chosen by a student, the writer is 'appropriated' (Bartholomae, 1985, p.145) and 'there is no such thing as a personal "voice" in this respect: just an affiliation to or unique selection among existing discourse types' (Ivanic, 1995, p.23). It is more in the construction of personal ideas and content rather than in the form of the writing that the subjectivity of the writer can be expected to emerge.

Any discussion of academic writing needs to be placed within the context of a

sequence of academic development of a writer. There are times in that sequence when the objective and matters external to the student will dominate; there are times when there will be a swing towards the subjective and matters internal to the student. It depends where a student is on the developmental continuum and what is being done with the writing at a particular time. To paraphrase Bartholomae, the balance between imitation/parody and invention/discovery changes and this has particular relevance for international students whose learning and writing abilities are often accused of being too oriented towards 'knowledge-telling' rather than towards 'knowledge-making' (Hamp-Lyons, 1991, p.97).

Often while a student is concentrating on becoming a member of the academic community through the objectivity route, the personal imprint of the author will be lost. The student is 'writing for camouflage' (Hamp-Lyons, 1991, p.99) and the presence of self becomes a casualty as both the personally naive and the personally interpretive are excluded. However simply to inhabit the territory of the community is not enough. The student is expected to express knowledge that is not common and become a knower who is different in significant ways from everyone else in the community. Having adopted the established conventions of objectivity, the student still needs to take the next step and challenge and contest them. This means the student appropriating the task for his/her purpose. After striving to join the community and succeeding, the student then needs to oppose it and not abdicate authority in the writing to the collective membership of that community. This movement approximates an external-internal cycle on the part of the student in 'a process that begins with mere "lip-service" and parroting and ultimately leads to a real voice'. (Belenky et al, 1986, p.108). The positioning by the student needs to be both 'within and against a discourse, or within and against competing discourses.' (Bartholomae, 1985, p.158). Ivancic and Simpson (1992, p.148) argue for the use of the informal 'committed-I' rather than the impersonal 'ego-I' style of writing as a major way of resisting the depersonalising tendencies of academic writing.

## THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND ACADEMIC WRITING

As with all tertiary learners, international students can be located at different points on the academic developmental continuum and that they experience difficulties in the adoption of a personal presence in their writing cannot be attributed exclusively to cultural factors. Effective academic writing requires intellectual exposure and for monolingual English-speaking and bilingual learners alike the process involves taking risks. The confidence and experience necessary to cope with these risks takes time to develop. For international learners studying in a new institution, in an unfamiliar culture, often separated from the support of their families, having to work in a non-preferred language, for a finite and often unrealistically brief period of time, the development can be painstaking and intimidating for them. The questions of self-doubt and uncertainty are numerous and predictable: Will I be able to manage? Will the university accept my topic? Will I finish my thesis? Will my English be good enough? What if I



get sick? Will my marks be high enough to satisfy authorities in my own country?

All of these anxieties formed a backdrop to the actual writing done by my two students as they worked on their research projects. Following are some of the ways I attempted to moderate the risk levels for them during the supervisory process.

#### NO ONE WAY

At the early stages much of my energy was directed to the attainment of logic and objectivity in their design of the proposal and in the development of the data collection instruments.

My university provided guidelines in this regard but very quickly my students interpreted these prescriptively. For learners who come from a tradition in English teaching where a single textbook dominated the classroom, it was difficult to treat institutional guidelines non-prescriptively. Conversations and comparisons with other students about their projects only exacerbated the situation. Constant assurance was needed that their work did not need to be completely standardised. However my students were committed to 'the correct way' whether or not their topic and its project design fitted. Their membership of the academic community required absolute loyalty to it. It took considerable persuasion to convince them that a project was still acceptable and it was not as risky as they imagined if it deviated at points from the 'idealised' version. It gradually became liberating for them to realise that there was actually no 'one right way' and that projects, and academic writing generally, had to exist within the 'indeterminacies, unevennesses, diversity, tensions and struggle of real sociolinguistic orders' (Fairclough, 1992, p.53).

This flexibility also applied within a single project where they had to learn that it was quite acceptable that the entire work did not need to be massaged to fit a single, well-defined academic discourse. Indeed I encouraged them to relax their concern with 'having it right' by pointing out that discourse types often leaked into each other at different times and that 'discourse types are not hermetically sealed from each other' (Ivanic, 1995, p.15). Swales (1990, p.15), in documenting internal variations within single pieces of academic writing, highlights the fluctuations in the incidences of authorial comment in different sections of research writing - a finding of particular relevance for my students. They needed to understand that sometimes they could expect to be more overtly present in their writing than at other times.

#### INSTRUMENTAL APPLICATION OF CONVENTIONS

A second way in which I sought to reduce the risk level for my students in their writing was to keep reminding them that they were always free to choose the extent to which their personal views were masked or declared. The element of academic game-playing was always part of their writing for them to utilise. While their writing was to be at a high level and it was to deal with matters of significance, especially in the context of teacher education in their own countries, it was within the control of each of them to set the level at which they became

personally integrated into the process of their writing. It has been argued that tertiary writing pedagogy has suffered from too much emphasis on what the writer is 'doing' rather than who the writer is 'being' (Ivanic, 1995, p.20). For example, Cadman (1995, p.51) suggests that international students, before they can study effectively need to 'redefine themselves at many levels of human experience'. This would require:

a context of 'knowing' which is holistic and organic, an environment which precedes and conditions teaching and learning and which by its very nature makes it possible for students to take all the risks necessary for a transformation of self through the activities of education. (p.53)

For students with a brief to stay in Australia for twelve months and to complete the degree within that time, I believe the risks involved in re-invention of self would be too daunting, considering the number of other relational adjustments required of international students at a foreign university (Janks and Ivanic, 1992, p.309). I saw it as important that my students were assured that their projects could be successfully negotiated without the need to abandon or compromise any deeply held values that impinged on their personal identity. In defining the characteristics of a discourse community Swales (1990) contends that membership does not require the forfeiture of distance and separateness:

... to deny the instrumental employment of discourse conventions is to cast a hegemonical shadow over international education. Students taking a range of different courses often operate successfully as 'ethnographers' of these various academic milieux and do so with sufficient detachment and instrumentality to avoid developing multiple personalities ... I do not want to accept assimilation of world-view as criterial, so neither do I want to accept a threshold level of personal involvement as criterial. (P.30)

#### RELATIONAL ROLE

The relationship between the supervisor and the student, always of importance in a formalised study programme involving research, assumes heightened significance with culturally different international students especially when questions of self-projection and individuality in learning are involved. I saw one of my roles as a supervisor as mediating in the transition of the students to a less 'sociocentric' (Shweder and Bourne, 1984, p.193) view of their academic identity. While accepting that the dichotomy of independent - interdependent views of self represents descriptions of only generalised cultural tendencies (Miller, 1988, p.273; Berry et al, 1992, p.94), I found that my students displayed a tentativeness as individuals in making the transfer. There was a constant need for them to monitor their progress towards separateness of self paradoxically by receiving feedback within a relationship of an interpersonal nature and our meetings became the vehicle for this development. The reciprocal, collegial relationship became central in the provision of an environment that promoted sufficient affirmation to allow the required self-assertiveness to emerge in their writing. The nurturing dimension in our relationship was crucial because 'given the

appreciation that those with interdependent selves have for self-restraint and self-control, the various self-enhancing biases that are common in Western culture may not be prevalent in many Asian cultures' (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p.242).

In our meetings I attempted to function less in an adversarial role but rather adopted a 'believing' than a 'doubting' stance (Belenky et al, 1986, p.219) towards ideas being expressed. Although there was a continual juggling of the balance in our sessions, as the projects progressed less of my energy involved judgmental responses and a pattern that approximated what has been described as a cycle of 'confirmation-evocation-confirmation' (Belenky et al, 1986, p.219) developed. The collaborative relationship emerged as critical in the negotiation by my students in the presentation of self as an autonomous and independent learner.

## SUMMARY

Some of the difficulties faced by Asian students attending Western universities are related to cultural factors but many are not. Many of their struggles are also experienced by monolingual English-speaking students and are part of the normal progress in academic development made by all students during their degree studies. However there are culture-specific dimensions in adjustments that need to be made when non-Western learners study in foreign universities. In courses which include a research element, the supervisor-student relationship is critical in the negotiation of these adjustments.

This paper has examined the issue of a writer's presence in academic discourse and the contribution a supervisor can make to the effective positioning of the student in academic writing. It is clear that an author's personal voice takes time to emerge and, in the case of non-Western students, requires that the relational aspects of the supervisory role be emphasised. In this sense, the processes of supervising Western and non-Western students involved in research appear to differ, resulting in quite different demands (in both time and kind) being made on supervisors. Those responsible for the funding and administration of higher degrees in universities have yet to acknowledge these differences.

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# Literacy, Culture and Difference: Feedback on Student Writing as Discursive Practice

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As educators we are aware that the teaching of literacy skills is not a culturally neutral act. This paper contends that the marking of students' written assignment tasks and student response to such feedback are also framed in discursive practices. A pilot study of a small group of native and overseas university students reveals that when markers concentrate exclusively on the mechanics of non-English speaking background students' assignments they ignore the complexities of the subjectivities these students bring to their learning environment. In such situations the rhetoric of a culturally inclusive curriculum is disguised as a pedagogy which maintains privilege and limits possession of "proper" literacy to those who share a common cultural knowledge and history. The strategies used by the two cohorts in response to feedback differ widely in cultural forms and effectiveness in interpreting and resisting lecturer feedback as a learning tool. This paper concludes with a challenge to educators and planners to design and implement policies and pedagogies to enable all students to become full and reflexive members of a discourse of literacy and difference.

## INTRODUCTION

Issues of cultural and linguistic diversity have long been recognised by Australian schools. For more than two decades (starting with the federal Immigration Education Act of 1971) the federal and state governments have consciously implemented education policies to acknowledge the increasing diversity of the student population. Whether these policies have been for objectives of assimilation, integration or multiculturalism, schools have maintained, at both the planning and pedagogical levels, a strong commitment to addressing the needs of minority students (Kalantzis et al, 1990).

However, at the institutional site of the university, pedagogical reforms in affirming the cultural and linguistic diversity of its students have not been as forthcoming. As Gunew (1993) argues, just as " 'migrants' are a passing phase, eventually [being] assimilated and subsumed by the settler group" (p.62), so too, international students, positioned as sojourners, are often not considered to be necessary participants and full beneficiaries of Australia's multicultural project.

Although students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are frequently constructed by the academy as members of a uniform and discrete group with common needs, the realities are quite different. Such students may be Australian citizens, private and government sponsored full-fee paying international students, visiting post-doctoral fellows, advance-standing students, exchange and study-abroad students. These students bring a wide range of language proficiencies, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, academic preparedness, work experience and motivation to their learning environments and yet the pedagogy of tertiary literacy frequently fails to recognise this complexity. Instead NESB students, many of them entering the academy against a background of traumatic cultural and social adjustment experiences, are frequently constructed as 'oppressors' who place extra burdens on the already over-stretched academic and general staff with their 'low standards of literacy' and competition for the scarce resources of the academy.

To date two dominant agendas have monopolised the discourses surrounding NESB students (including resident and full-fee paying international students) enrolled in award courses in Australian universities. A rhetoric positioning of these students in a subjectivity of a compensatory and deficit cultural and linguistic model has encouraged the growth of a small but increasing group of texts, workshops and research projects. But it is the economic rationalist agenda viewing tertiary education as a global commodity which focuses the attention of the policy planners and is actively promoted through the media (notably the Higher Education Supplement in *The Australian* and *Campus Review*). The strength and influence of this market discourse is destined to increase as the current demand for tertiary places by local students drops and are filled by full-fee paying international students. Marketing personnel and their agents have been so successful in promoting their products in the globalised market that a report commissioned by the International Development Program found that for Australian tertiary institutions there was a potential for a five-fold increase in the overseas student intake to 200,000 by 2010 (*The Australian*, 11.10.95).

Except for a dialogue centred on 'literary deficiency' as a major contributor to the 'falling standards' of the academy, educational policy analysts have been recalcitrant in publicly debating how issues of identity, representation, linguistic and cultural diversity impact on the institution and its discourses. I intend to argue in this paper that such a restricted dialogue does little to develop issues of tertiary literacy, ethnic diversity and the globalisation of education beyond a reductionist and market-driven discourse. Nor is it helpful in attempting to rupture an essentialist representation of the marginalised and in opening up the debate surrounding the political positioning of NESB students in the academy. In arguing my case I will call on theories and perspectives from a range of disciplines, particularly critical literacy, applied linguistics and post-colonial studies. My argument is grounded in data from a research project investigating the differences in the feedback native speaking and NESB tertiary students receive on their written assignments and their responses and resistance to this feedback. In particular this paper will focus on how NESB students respond to lecturers'

comments which concentrate solely on the mechanics of their writing, the discursive practices which produce such feedback and varying strategies employed by the two cohorts in interpreting and resisting it.

## RESEARCH PROJECT

The research involved a small qualitative pilot study of eight students, four native speakers (NS) and four from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), enrolled in three universities in Queensland. Four students were studying undergraduate courses (2 NS and 2 NESB) and the remaining four students were enrolled in course work post-graduate courses. The NESB students were all full-fee paying international students and citizens of Japan, Indonesia and Thailand. The eight students were enrolled in a variety of faculties, including humanities, science and engineering. Their ages ranged from 19 to 37 years of age. A semi-structured interview design was incorporated to ask questions such as: What types of comments do students commonly receive on their written assignment tasks? What are the reactions to such comments? What types of feedback do students consider most beneficial? How is feedback used by the cohorts to improve their future assignments?

## POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORY OF DISCOURSE

You have a very serious problem with writing. Most of your sentences are poorly written containing basic grammatical errors. The assignment has not been proof-read well. On the other hand, what you tried to do in your assignment is not bad at all, but the poor writing eclipses the true value of your effort. You should try to do something about this.  
(lecturer comment on NESB science student's assignment)

I want to commence this study with a comment made by a lecturer on a first year NESB student's assignment, which was, for the student, her first written assignment of the semester as well as the first assignment she had written in an Australian educational environment. An analysis of this statement above can be at multiple levels. From a humanist perspective where "truth", in this case, is represented as the "true value of your effort" and is considered to be a scientifically measurable and discrete unit waiting to be discovered, it could be interpreted by such questions as: What types of grammatical errors were most common and how many? How long has the student been studying English? How much experience has the lecturer had in teaching NESB students? What second language support services are available to help this student with her English problems?

From a poststructuralist concept such questions concentrating on statistics and the personal feelings and motives of the writer (the lecturer) will tend to obscure the belief that discourses of pedagogy are not produced within a vacuum but represent the ideologies of the institution in which they are practised. Bearing this in mind, we could ask "how is it that [this] particular statement appeared rather than another?" (Barrett, 1991, p.126). That is, why was this the only

comment the lecturer deemed necessary to make on the student's essay? What theories and views held by the academy and the individual about tertiary literacy, culture and difference, produced such statements? In attempting to analyse these questions Foucault's definition of discourse helps in the understanding of "how what is said fits into a network that has its own history and conditions of existence" (Foucault, 1979, p.126).

At this point it is necessary to define what I mean when I use this term 'discourse'. The dictionary defines it as "to talk, converse, discuss; to speak or write at length on a subject; a talk, a narrative, a treatise, a dissertation, a sermon" (Oxford English Dictionary). This definition being similar to the French *discours*, is, however, limited if we wish to gain an explanation of the theory of discourse beyond the common sense one. Barrett, in her *The Politics of Truth* (1991) explains how Foucault's use of the word 'discourse' was much more in relation to context rather than in the textual language sense offered by the dictionary meaning.

Foucault (1979) theorised that discourses are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivities and power relations which are inherent in such knowledges and the relations between them. Gee (1990) also reminds us that each of us is a member of our own discourse and "[w]e are constructed by them, and we theorise about ourselves through them; and we do all three of these at once" (p.175). This complexity of the nature and relationships with a discourse is often ignored or not appreciated by its members. Thus being a member of a discourse does not mean all things to all people. This definition can then be further extended to all spheres of life: "Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes (Gee, 1990; p.126).

From these concepts of discourse, we are able to extrapolate that within a given language, words and meanings differ from one discourse to another. This knowledge has encouraged the view that individuals are constructed as subjects and that their writing reflects these subjectivities. Such a view of language was a departure from humanist and structural linguistics. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure believed in the universal and homogeneous nature of a language which reflected a humanist notion of society (Macdonell, 1986). Meaning, then, according to structural linguists, only exists within and through language and its pre-determined structures or systems. Saussure regarded the production of speech or written text, *parole*, to be purely the choice of the individual. The author is considered the sole agent of production of the text and meaning is conveyed through the conduit of language which is "individualistic" and "asocial" (Fairclough, 1995, p.73). Thus the lecturer's comments on the student's assignment reflect his and the institution's ideology that if meaning is not expressed in a recognised and imposed standard variety of "correct" language, there can be no meaning. After all, "if the paper seems to be the product of a relatively immature writer, then there is not much point in taking its intellectual content seriously" (Hake and Williams in Sullivan, 1995, p.424).



However, poststructuralists consider that this view is a naive and simplistic interpretation of language. They argue that it is not language alone (Saussure's *langue* and *parole*) which determines meaning but discourses, which both reflect the diversity of those that use the language and recognise that such discourses are temporal, fragmentary and constructed through struggles of power (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). Deleuze and Guattari argue:

there is no language in itself, nor any universality of language, but a concourse of dialects, patois, slangs, special languages. There exists no ideal 'competent' speaker-hearer of language, any more than there exists a homogeneous linguistic community... There is no mother tongue, but a seizure of power by a dominant tongue within a political multiplicity. (Deleuze and Guattari in Macdonnell, 1986, p.8)

### THE SUBJECTIVITIES OF GRAMMAR

The humanist notion of an individual constrained within a simple relation to power was deconstructed by Foucault (1979), instead the individual is considered to be simultaneously located in a number of different and conflicting positions. To gain a better understanding of the complexities and cultural knowledges which inform the students' comments on lecturer feedback, an interpretation of the data linked to poststructuralist concepts of agency, resistance and the assertion of difference by minority cultural groups are helpful in analysing power inequalities within the institution.

The research findings revealed that all four NESB students voiced strong opinions regarding the types of feedback they considered to be most effective (and ineffective) as learning tools. They spoke of their frustration and disappointments in receiving comments (like the earlier example) which concentrate only on grammar, spelling and punctuation, and in doing so exclude the arguments, supporting evidence, structure and style presented in their essays.

I want him to comment on ideas, reasons, if there is sufficient data. I don't want comments on grammar or spelling because that's just a silly mistake. (M, NESB)

I got two spelling mistakes and he just marked them but I wasn't sure if he understood the whole or he just checked the points I got. I think he just checked the points...because I'm writing in a second language so I don't know how much he could understand from my essay. (S, NESB)

The students want their multiple subjectivities to be acknowledged and recognised but instead the hegemonic praxis of the academy denies and makes these invisible. By such a refusal, the literacy abilities of students from non-English speaking backgrounds are at once/already defined as deficit, fixed and totalising. A concentration by markers on the mechanics of NESB students' writing limits tertiary literacy to an individualised and homogenised skill or technology which either one possesses or does not; a developmental view of the acquisition of this 'gift' can not be entertained. Gee (1990) argues, "[d]iscourses are connected

with displays of an identity - failing to display an identity fully is tantamount to announcing you do not have that identity - at best you are a pretender or a beginner" (p. 155).

A humanist theorising thus defines literacy as "entirely a matter of how reading and writing are conceived and practised within particular social settings" (Lankshear with Lawler, 1987, p.43). Such a functional or *improper* interpretation of literacy can be contrasted with a description of *proper* literacy which "enhances people's control over their lives and their capacity for dealing rationally with decisions by enabling them to identify, understand, and act to transform, social relations and practices in which power is structured unequally" (p.74). The 'improper' pedagogical and evaluative discourse constructed by the lecturer positions the student's assignment as meaningless and illegitimate even though the "serious problem with writing" is in reality two spelling errors and a lack of cultural reproduction of the required genre.

We have discussed that literacy denotes more than the ability to perform at a native- like proficiency in the macro skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In entering a discourse as an apprentice, a student acquires a new identity which at various points may conflict with his or her original culture (Gee, 1990). This period of apprenticeship implies a time of learning where the student is 'scaffolded' by the 'master' in acquiring and developing new skills of production and critical thinking. As in the work place, during this period mistakes will be made, but Derrida argues:

Unreadability does not arrest reading, does not leave it paralysed in the face of an opaque surface; rather, it starts reading and writing and translation moving again. The unreadable is not the opposite of the readable, but rather the ridge that also gives it momentum, movement, sets it in motion. (Derrida in Minock, 1995, pp.497)

## RESISTING DISCOURSE

Friere (1973) advocated that within discourses people are able to resist and become agents of their own constructed positions. A description of a sense of contestation and resistance to their discursive positionings was limited to the comments made by the native speakers. For example, targeting the reader when writing an assignment was something only they spoke about:

When I take notes I highlight comments the lecturer has made about her personal opinions of a topic or an author. When I'm writing the assignment I'll reread them and be careful to back up my statements if I'm going to disagree with her. (T, NS)

A highly motivated native speaking student who was planning to do a higher degree course the following year was even more explicit about her techniques used to gain high marks:

I study the lecturers' personalities during the lectures. I know if they'll

penalise me for disagreeing with their opinions, for example if they're inexperienced or immature, or if I can use some irony or humour in my essay. I'll give them what they want even though I don't agree. I hate doing that but I can't afford to take a gamble and get a low mark.  
(K, NS)

These comments on how native-speaking students T and K exercise power in the classroom can be analysed from a Foucauldian viewpoint. Although the exercise of power is usually considered to be in a descending direction (for example, in a Marxist sense, from the bourgeois class to the workers), Foucault contends that its analysis from and within an ascending perspective can be a more effective focus. In the two cases above, lecturers are put under the panoptic gaze of their students. At each observational checkpoint the teachers' sexed bodies and knowledges are carefully scrutinised and observed until, like the wardens in Bentham's Panopticon, the student K considers all details of her lecturers' identities are made visible to those who are able to read the discourse. Although this act may at an initial reading be considered an overturning of the tendency to view power as hierarchical domination, Foucault argues that this is merely a delusion since "it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated within [the discourse], according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (Foucault in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p.66). For students, then, the idea that they *possess* power in the classroom is flawed. "[S]uch a notion of freedom is a sham" advocates Walkerdine (1992, p.16) since the lecturer, by the hegemonic institutional authority invested in him or her, has the ability to *exercise* this power by passing or failing the students' assignments.

No NESB students reported contemplating resisting the comments or marks received on an assignment. This is despite the fact that dominant discourses, which seek to become "naturalised and personalised", are also constantly under threat. "The lack of discursive unity and uniformity means that individuals, whom educational policies seek to govern, have available to them, at least potentially, the discursive means to resist the implications of existing social policies" (Singh, 1995, p.22). Many NESB students, positioned in the margins, are powerless to resist or subvert the praxis of power of the dominant ideology. The power of a discourse is its ability to engage the individual in its practices and "thus to lead them to construct social identities or subjectivities for themselves that [are] complicit with it, and against their own socio-political interests" (Fiske, 1991, p.177). Mimicry of discourse 'expertness' may suffice for a short time and convince some observers that the student has full competency of it, but such imitation will not withstand sustained attacks from the hegemony.

## IDENTITY AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

Many times I'm surprised at the mark, I think I do much better. Then I go through and work out the red marks, I ignore when he corrects my grammar - it's not important. Some lecturers say "good, good, good", but give only a Pass. I don't know why. (R, NESB)

Some lecturers correct grammar and content, I appreciate it, but if you consider the mistake of the grammar which doesn't change the meaning, so what for you consider giving the mark? (Y, NESB)

In attempting to clearly understand academic expectations, NESB students can be positioned as outsider members of their discourse. Through a failure by lecturers to make overt the assessment criteria and high level critical thinking skills demanded by the discourse, they contribute to and continue the dominant ideology of the institution. This action, in maintaining subject positions, continues to reproduce the marginality of NESB students. Literacy is constructed as positioned within the individual, with the student being responsible for 'fixing' their own problem of illiteracy not the hegemonic practices of the academy which deny heterogeneity. Institutional and pedagogical practices are relieved of all obligation in demystifying discourses. Only those lucky few who have been gifted with the common culture are able to gain access to the hidden discourse, the 'doubly secret' expectations of lecturers (Freebody in Threadgold, 1992). Berlin's (1993) comment on the overt discourse of literacy is worth quoting here:

The triumph of the middleclass in discourse studies has been to naturalise its own rhetorical practices, concealing its ideology by denying the role of language in structuring experience when utilized according to its recommendations...Both text interpretation and production are effaced, made invisible, their procedures readily accessible to those of the right class, gender and racial background, while of course remaining inaccessible to the wrong sorts. (Berlin, 1993, pp.263-264)

Let me be quite clear that I am not arguing for an acquiescence of individual student's cultural and linguistic difference into the politically constructed identity of "NESB". Nor am I denying the duties and responsibilities all actors have in negotiating discursive practices. But I am calling for the recognition that NESB students' identities are as fragmentary, shifting and temporary as any student's in the classroom and that pedagogies should reflect this complexity. When students are given an opportunity to include their own cultural experiences in the meaning-making of the classroom, they should not be expected to be the "resident experts" on their own country's political, social and economic affairs. Ethno-centric Australians are notorious for failing to distinguish between races and ethnicities, the "they all look the same" syndrome can be quite disconcerting when all students of "Colour" are represented as "Asians". Such an action does not add to our understanding of identity construction and negotiation in relation to our post-colonial neighbours and fails to deconstruct the totalising discourses of what it means to be "Asian-Australian".

## MULTILITERACIES AND THE WORKPLACE

It has been my experience that calls to pedagogically acknowledge difference in the classroom frequently result in a defensive retreat to two discourses: (I) a

compounding of 'the literacy crisis' in tertiary educational institutions and/or (ii) the academic's gate-keeping role in upholding the literacy standards demanded by the community and workplace. I have already commented on the former, and now let me address the latter. I am not suggesting teachers totally ignore the mechanical errors made by their NESB students in written tasks. Such a paternalistic action in constructing the students as deficit would be to deny them access to full membership of the academic discourse. Equally, pressure applied by the economic rationalist agenda to 'donate' higher grades to these students' assessment tasks weakens the value of the institution's credentials which the students as graduates seek to achieve.

Grammar cannot be perfect in the immediate time, so substance is more important ... so far as grammar doesn't change meaning, it's OK for the grammar. But if grammar changes the meaning then [the lecturer] can correct grammar. (R, NESB)

As I have argued, a concentration on 'correctness' of form in the written task denies the different and complex subjectivities all students bring to the classroom and promotes improper literacy. If we extend this definition to the workplace, The New London Group (1995) asserts that it is 'multiliteracies' which are required in order for students to be able to function "properly" in the workplace. Critical analysis, decision making and report writing are all demanding skills, yet little research has been conducted on how NESB graduates' literacy competencies are perceived once they have left the halls of academia. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many local and overseas employers are able to look beyond the mechanics of written texts and acknowledge the technological and multicultural skills non-English speaking background postFordist employees bring to the workplace. In doing so, employers recognise that:

Cross-cultural communication and the negotiated dialogue of different languages and discourses can be a basis for worker creativity, for the formation of locally sensitive and globally extensive networks which closely relate a business to its clients or suppliers, and structures of motivation in which people feel their different backgrounds and experiences are genuinely valued.

(The New London Group, 1995, pp7-8)

## PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The argument that increasing numbers of NESB students enrolling in faculties exacerbates the 'literacy crisis' in the academy misses the point since "it is not the possession or otherwise of 'literacy' that defines the literate or illiterate, or that gives them the 'key' - it is the construction of the identity of a literate or illiterate within particular discourse sites that positions the person." (Wicket, 1993, p.37)

It is this positioning which causes some teachers to lament at the beginning of each semester over the number of NESB students enrolled in their lectures and tutorials. Such a deficit discourse does not spring forth from the staffroom within

an ideological vacuum. Agendas of multiculturalism, equal opportunity, quality assurance and the globalisation of tertiary education have meant that many academics, most with no formal teaching qualifications, are pressured to become knowledgeable in areas of applied linguistics and effective cross-cultural communication strategies, whilst at the same time teaching large classes in an environment of financial restrictions. Some address this problem by simply denying the reality of the diversity of the students in their classrooms and retreating to a call to 'maintain the standards' of the academy. Others seek to collaborate with peers and literacy staff to design and implement curriculum, teaching practice and assessment procedures which recognise the complex and problematic issues of culture, literacy, language development and content knowledge which are played out in the tertiary classroom.

Poststructural theorists recognise the impossibility of fixing meaning within discursive practices and acknowledge that any interpretation is at best temporary, specific to the discourse within which it is produced and is open to challenge both from within and outside the discourse. A demand that the student "should do something about it" [grammar] is problematic since it fixes the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student in a humanist and universalising subjectivity of binaries centred around a problem / solution discourse. Similarly, generic packages of 'culturally-inclusive' teaching strategies 'dealing' with the increasing numbers of NESB students in the academy may be helpful in promoting a consciousness of the 'Other', but in their enactment deny the multiple discourses and subjectivities which are played out in each and every classroom.

Vivian Zamel (1995) argues that this confusion and ambivalence experienced by teachers in attempting to develop pedagogical strategies which disrupt the deficit/compensatory model are both essential and beneficial. Slowly university teachers are asking "[h]ow do we teach in ways that encourage rather than conceal difference?" (Rockhill, 1993, p. 359). They are questioning how their curriculum practices can reflect and enhance rather than ignore and erase the different subjectivities students bring to their learning processes. Furthermore they are critiquing what influences their own values, assumptions, attitudes and how this impacts on communication across and within cultural groups.

In such a reflexive mood, faculty staff may be encouraged to question "how what is taken for granted as natural and normal, as the way one must be, is socially inscribed and can be resisted (Zamel, 1995, p.359). In assessing the written assignments of NESB students, Zamel suggests examiners look for what is *in* the paper, rather than what has been left *out*. Many overseas students are inexperienced writers in the language and genre of their intended discourse and may use inappropriate organisation and style. In a recent survey of 170 international students at an academic orientation program at QUT, 25% responded that they had not written more than 500 words in English. The majority of these students were enrolled in MBA courses.

Difficulties can be alleviated by realising that the acquisition of any language is developmental in nature and necessarily slow, requiring time and patience on behalf of teachers and students. Students entering the institution with a minimum

language proficiency level of IELTS 6 to 6.5 (native proficiency is level 9) need to be given time and classroom opportunities to develop their macro skills of English and to adjust to the specific cultural and academic demands of the discourse. They can be encouraged through critical and supportive feedback to become active members of their academic community. By designing pedagogies which recognise that, as apprentice members, students need “multiple opportunities to use language and write-to learn course work which draws on and values what students already know, classroom exchanges and assignments that promote the acquisition of unfamiliar language, concepts, and approaches to inquiry, evaluation that allows students to demonstrate genuine understanding” (Zamel, 1995, pp.518-9) all students are benefited and ‘proper’ literacy is promoted for all.

## CONCLUSION

To reduce the debate on tertiary literacy to one of “helpless relativism” (Bridwell-Bowles, 1995, p.58) guarantees that issues of inclusive curriculum and evaluation at the institutional and local levels are left to go undertheorised. However one-off classroom practices, such as those designed to give NESB students “a voice”, will continue a deficit and compensatory model and will be ineffective in developing students who are capable of critical thought and action.

In areas of Australia's educational, economic and political life, the ideology of multiculturalism continues to be promoted and accepted, albeit unevenly at some sites. In this paper I have argued that until recently there has been little space for the acknowledgment of difference in debates surrounding tertiary literacy. Despite substantial increases in the cultural and linguistic diversity of students since the Jackson Committee Report (1984) and expanding numbers of NESB local students entering the academy, the ethnocentric focus of curriculum, teaching methodologies and assessment policies and procedures have remained almost untouched. Tokenistic gestures of response to diversity may be helpful in obtaining research grants and meeting quality assurance guidelines, but only a minority of teachers have had the knowledge or inclination to reflect these social and cultural changes in their pedagogy.

A conference such as this one is particularly important in encouraging dialogue between disparate groups. Tertiary literacy planners and educators need to urgently conduct critical analysis of the ideologies supporting the traditional literacy praxis of the academy, to question how our policies and procedures privilege some groups of students but exclude others. We need to come to a recognition that allowing space for difference in the classroom is not commensurate with disrupting goals of ‘excellence’ and ‘standards’ but a strengthening of such objectives for both marginalised and dominant cultural groups. Nor does it disrupt the vocational and community demands of the academy to produce graduates with high levels of communication skills:

For as future professionals, [students] need more than just the technical skills to produce effective bureaucratic documents; they need to be able

to unsettle the dominant ways of writing of bureaucratic and other institutions and contemplate alternative ways. As consumers and citizens, who are on the receiving side of such texts, they need to have the key to challenging the limits these put on their social positions and opportunities. (Kramer-Dahl, 1995, p.36)

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# Writing Expository Essays in Chinese. Chinese or Western Influences?

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Many universities in Mainland China have published textbooks on composition. These give students advice on various aspects of tertiary literacy with an emphasis on how to write expository and argumentative essays. Five topics are commonly treated in these textbooks. They are:

Beginning and ending compositions (*kaitou and shouwei*)

Co-ordination and coherence (*zhaoying*)

Methods of transition (*guodu*)

Paragraphing (*duanluo*)

The logical arrangement of ideas (*cengci*).

This paper will summarise the advice given in a number of these textbooks in the above areas and contrast this with advice provided in comparable Western texts on rhetoric and composition.

## 1. THE 8-LEGGED ESSAY AND CONTEMPORARY CHINESE WRITING

Western scholars have argued that traditional Chinese text structures still have a strong influence on contemporary Chinese writing, and, in particular, that the '8-legged essay' (*ba gu wen*) of the Chinese imperial civil service exams and the four part text structure of 'beginning-continuing-transition-summary' (*qi-cheng-zhuan-he*) can still be seen in the essays of Chinese students. For example, Kaplan (1972) suggested that the English essays of Chinese students followed the form of the *ba gu wen*. Scollon (1991) has stated that this 8-legged essay structure can be seen in the English essays of Taiwanese students. Cheng (1985) has claimed that the four part *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure can be identified in the English essays of Singaporean secondary school students.

While the contributions of these scholars have been of great value, their claims need to be questioned for a number of reasons. The first is that the claims are based on an analysis of the English essays of these Chinese students. More accurate and representative data would be obtained from an analysis of essays written in Chinese<sup>1</sup>. The second is that, with the exception of a minority of scholars (Mohan and Lo 1985), Chinese textbooks on composition have not been consulted. This paper represents an attempt to redress this and to argue that Western influence can be seen in the advice offered in these textbooks. The

third reason for questioning these claims is that, generally speaking, the history and rhetorical uses of these traditional structures have been overlooked. It is extremely important to take into account the historical context in which these traditional text structures developed. For example, of the three reasons why it is extremely unlikely that the *bā gǔ wén* essay structure currently influences the prose styles of contemporary Chinese students, especially those from Mainland China, two are historical. The three reasons are:

1 The *bā gǔ wén* was required for the imperial civil service exam for several centuries. It is therefore not associated with the imperial past in the minds of Chinese scholars. Far from being a model to be copied, the *ba gu wen* has been characterised as an imperial device for maintaining the status quo, as the comments of the Chinese scholars below testify.

Actually, the *bā gǔ*, as everyone knows, was a senseless thing, but the ruling classes used it to engage the intellectuals.....so called talent selection became so-called talent obliteration. (Zhu Zicui 1934:404)

There is no question that the 8-legged essay holds no place whatsoever in China's intellectual history except as a glaring example of demerit. (Chen Shou-yi 1961:509)

Tu (1974) has stated that a number of Chinese scholars refuse **even to discuss** the *bā gǔ wén* holding it beneath contempt, a point echoed by Wu below (1988).

2 By the beginning of this century the influence of Western ideas and styles was increasing dramatically. The May 4th movement of 1919 was a literary revolution whose leaders called for the removal of traditional Chinese styles such as the *bā gǔ wén* and, so, as Mohan and Lo (1985) have pointed out, the *bā gǔ wén* ceased to be an influential genre. At the same time, there was a call for a new vernacular literature that would use the language of the people (*báihùà*) rather than the literary language of the cultivated elite (*wényán*). This movement was given great impetus by the surge in translations of Western works (Russian, French, German and English) into Chinese. A new style was called for, to reflect the new China.

3 The structure of the *bā gǔ wén* is extremely complex and took Confucian scholars several years to master. It is not a style that can be picked up easily by any student. (Examples of a *bā gǔ wén* essay and one written following the *qǐ-chéng-zhuàn-hé* style are given in the appendix in order to show the reader how complex these styles are.)

These points cannot be ignored in any discussion about the extent classical Chinese literary traditions influence the writings of contemporary Chinese, especially Mainland Chinese. From the above, however, it is clear that the criticism of the Chinese scholars is more directed at the *bā gǔ wén* than at the *qǐ-chéng-zhuàn-hé*. While the focus of the remainder of this paper is on contemporary influences upon Chinese writing styles - in particular the prescriptive advice given in a number of Chinese university textbooks on composition - the current influence, or lack of it, of the *qǐ-chéng-zhuàn-hé* is considered first.

## 2. *Qǐ-Chéng-Zhuǎn-Hé* AS A CONTEMPORARY STYLE

Wu Yingtian (1988) provides support for the arguments presented above when he writes that contemporary Chinese linguists are wary of studying rules of text construction because they associate them with imperial textual models, such as the 8-legged essay. This is also the explanation, he says, of why so many contemporary Chinese books on composition fail to mention the *qǐ chéng zhuǎn hé* structure. On the other hand, Wu argues, Chinese linguists have been happy to accept the modern four part structure of *kāidūan-fāzhǎn-gāocháo-jíejù* (beginning, development, climax, conclusion) believing that these new terms came into Chinese via the translations of Russian literary theory in the 1950's. Wu's argument, however, is that these terms are not fancy foreign imports but are actually old 'home produce'. *Kāidūan* is merely another name for *qǐ*, *fāzhǎn* another name for *chéng*, *gāocháo* for *zhuǎn* and *jíejù* for *hé*. Wu attempts to demonstrate this by analysing a traditional text using these new labels (1988:202ff). However, Wu's attempt to apply these contemporary labels is not successful, as it is hard to reconcile the climax (*gāocháo*) of the contemporary **narrative** model with the transition (*zhuǎn*) of the traditional **poetic** or **expository** model.

While it is true that few contemporary Chinese textbooks on composition mention the *qǐ-chéng-zhuǎn-hé* structure, some do. For example,

No matter how complex the contents of a text, no matter how tortuous the ideas, the veins running through the text must be linked, and the *qǐ-chéng-zhuǎn-hé* of the text must centre on pushing the text forward; on no account are splits halfway through a text to be allowed, nor should any unnecessary separation occur. (Wang and Yang 1988:60)

Shen Kaimu (1985) also refers to the traditional terms, talking about *qǐjù*, *chéngjù*, *zhuǎnjù* and *héjù* (*jù* means 'sentence'). He defines these terms as follows:

*qǐjù* is the sentence that starts the narrative, the *chéngjù* is the sentence that gives an example of or elaborates on the *qǐjù*. The *zhuǎnjù* is the 'regulator' (*tiáojiézhè*) and plays the role of 'lubricator' (*rùnhúá*) between two ideas. The *héjù* is the logical summing up of the expressed thoughts; its aim is to be convincing.

The Western reader might be forgiven for wondering what some of these terms mean and Shen gives a short 'revolutionary' text that he analyses.

*Qǐjù*

Comrade Fang Zhimin is thinking and deeply worried.

*Chéngjù*

Bedbugs, mosquitoes and fleas are tormenting him; he is tossing and turning and has been unable to get any sleep for 24 hours. He must find a secret hiding place for the secret letters and manuscript.

Zhuanju

Then, like a flash of light in the dark night, he suddenly thinks of Lu Xun. Although he did not know Lu Xun personally, he had read Lu Xun and believed implicitly in his loyalty to the revolutionary cause. He decided to entrust the letters and manuscript that he had written in the last moments of his life to Lu Xun.

Heju

He had complete faith in Lu Xun's ability to undertake the most difficult and dangerous of tasks.

In whatever ways the traditional *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* terms may differ from the contemporary terms, there does seem to be consensus that a text should, normally, follow a four-part structure. It is, however, important to point out that these Chinese scholars are talking about **narrative** texts here, and the traditional structures were not narrative structures, but were used for expository writing, and, in the case of the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* originated in poetry (Chen Wangdao 1988).

In summary, therefore, it is argued that the *bā gǔ wén* currently has minimal influence on contemporary Chinese writing styles. A four part structure, however, still has some influence, especially on narrative texts, but the contemporary four-part narrative structure is different from the traditional *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure.

### 3. CONTEMPORARY CHINESE COMPOSITION STYLE

The aim of this section of the paper is to show, by reference to contemporary Chinese textbooks on composition, that the structure of expository texts and paragraphs in Chinese has, in contrast to Kaplan's claims quoted below, significant similarities with those of English. In a much quoted article, Kaplan (1966) has claimed that the thought patterns and paragraph orders differ across languages and cultures. He has suggested that in some Oriental writing, the expository paragraph develops by 'turning and turning in a widening gyre' and that such an organisation in a modern English paragraph 'would strike the English reader as awkward and unnecessarily indirect'. (1996:10)

Five techniques of composition are consistently treated in Chinese textbooks and articles about composition and they shall be discussed in turn below. These five techniques are:

- beginnings and endings (*kāitóu and shǒuwěi*)
- coordination and coherence (*zhàoyìng*)
- transition (*guòdù*)
- paragraphing (*duànluò*)
- staging and the arrangement of ideas (*céngcì*)

### 3.1 BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

Wang and Yang (1988:76ff) list 4 common ways of beginning an expository piece (*yìlùn*). They are:

(i) To open the door and see the mountain (*kāi mén jiàn shān*). One should use this direct beginning to draw attention to the main point of the article. This looks very like the 'English' use of a topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph. Wang and Yang's example of a *kāi mén jiàn shān* opening is the first sentence of Mao's article 'Reform our study' (*Gǎizào wǒmen-de xúéxí*) and, as the authors point out, the sentence clearly encapsulates the purpose of the article.

'I propose that we reform the whole party's method of studying and also reform our system of study'.

(ii) To show clearly the object and scope of the discussion to come. (*Zhīmíng lùnshù fānwéi hé duìxiàng*). The authors' example of such a beginning is taken from an article 'Talks in front of Marx's tomb' which reads:

'This man's death represents an inestimable loss to history, to science and to the struggle of the proletariat in Europe and America'

(iii) To explain the background and motivation for the piece. (*Jiāodài xiézuò běijīng huò dòngjì*.) Authors should explain their reasons or motivations for writing the text.

(iv) 'Procrastinatory writing involving a tortuous and winding approach to the subject' (*Dàngkāi bímò qūzhé rùtí*). The translation makes this appear more 'tortuous' than it actually is. This method requires beginning a piece with something that does not appear directly relevant to the piece as a whole, but which later is seen to be relevant. The example given is an article by Xie Yu that argues for the exposure of organisations that allow illegal activities, but which actually begins with a summary of a chapter from the popular Ming dynasty novel, 'Water Margin'.

It is important to note that three of these four 'Chinese' techniques encourage a direct or linear approach of some kind, with only the fourth advocating an indirect approach. This straightforward approach is also advocated by Wang and Wu (1990). While allowing that genre type can determine how a piece should begin, they quote several traditional authorities from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries in support of their advice that the beginning should be able to grasp the readers' attention and at the same time be relevant and clear. Dangers to avoid include being irrelevant and verbose, literally putting on a hat and talking idly (*jiǎ màozi shuō kōnghuà*) (1990:76).

Wang and Yang also describe three common methods for **ending** a piece

(1988:80ff). The first is by summarising or reiterating the main point of the text (*gūijie huò chóngshēn lùndián*). As an example, they give the final paragraph of Mao's article 'Oppose Liberalism' (*Fǎnduì zìyóuzhūyì*).

All loyal communists must unite to oppose the liberal tendencies displayed by some among us to set them on the right road. This is one of the tasks of the ideological front line.

The second recommended way of ending an expository piece is to issue an appeal or exhortation (*tíchū xīwàng hé fāchū hāozhào*). This final sentence of a Lu Xun essay serves as an example.

All in all I am very hopeful that 'Literature Monthly' will not publish such an article again.

The third way of ending, advised by Wang and Yang, is to end with a concrete or striking image (*xíngxiànghua-de jiēwéi*). Their example, a particular favourite of mine, is taken from the final sentences of Mao's famous article 'A single spark can start a prairie fire'.

It (the high tide of revolution) is a ship whose masthead has already come into view over the horizon, it is the morning sun in the east whose rays one can see standing on a mountain peak, it is the as yet unborn child moving restlessly in its mother's womb.

Advice given by other Chinese scholars about how to begin and end an expository essay also encourages directness. Xia and Ye (1983) simply state that there are only two ways of starting such a text. The first is to provide enough background to the topic to ensure the reader can understand the points you wish to make; and the second is to provide no background if you know that the reader already knows it. Dangers to avoid when ending a piece is to drag on unnecessarily, literally drawing a snake and adding legs (*huà shē tiān zú*) (Wang and Wu 1990).

What is interesting here, is that the great majority of techniques suggested by these experts on composition ask the writers to broach their subjects directly and end their pieces succinctly. These are not techniques that are likely to encourage the circular and indirect approach alluded to by Kaplan and others above.

### 3.2 COORDINATION AND COHERENCE

Wang and Yang (1988) describe three ways of giving a text coherence. The first is to link the beginning and the ending of a text (what Wang and Wu (1990) call *shǒuwěi zhāoyǐng* or head-tail coherence). This essentially requires repeating the main points at the end of a piece but it can also refer to getting the reader to recall an emotion or incident at the beginning. As an example of this, the Ye Shangtao essay 'In the violent rain of May 31' (*Wúyùe sānshíyī rì jìyǔ-zhōng*) is given. The essay begins (Wang and Yang 1988:72):

As I stepped off the bus, violent rain, like the arrows of demons,

immediately drenched my coat.

The piece ends:

The demon's arrows of violent rain still filled the streets.

The second method described by Wang and Yang is 'text and title coherence' where the title can act as a type of leitmotif running through the piece, and the third is to hint at what is to come later (what Wang and Wu call *qiánhòu zhāoyīng* or front back coherence). The Beijing University book on composition gives this example (1964:40ff) of 'front-back coherence', making the point that this is a technique that can be used in the middle of a long text as well as at the end of it. The Mao article, 'Communist party members', raises three problems for the Chinese communist party in paragraphs 9, 10 and 11 in turn. Paragraph 12 says:

Here, let us, in general terms discuss each of these...problems one at a time.

Paragraphs 13, 14 and 15 duly discuss each of these problems in turn. Paragraph 16 reads:

These, then, represent the major experiences and problems that our Party has faced over the last 18 years.

### 3.3 TRANSITION

Wang and Wu (1990) describe transition (*guòdù*) as the means of providing a link between one point or idea and the next. Transition can be accomplished by connectors, transition sentences or transition paragraphs. In addition to providing explicit links between ideas, transition devices are also important when moving from one genre type to another, or when inverting the natural sequence of events. The importance these authors give to the use of transition devices is interesting. It has been suggested that Chinese is a more paratactic language than English in that it has less use of connectors (Wang Li 1958, Cheng Zhenqiu 1980) but that the influence of Western languages upon Chinese has led to an increase in the use of connectors (Xie Yaoji 1989)<sup>2</sup>. I would like to consider this in some detail here as it provides a good example of how one language can induce linguistic change in another. As part of my claim in this paper is that the Western influence upon Chinese has been greater than is usually allowed, a demonstration of linguistic change due to Western influence may advance my claim.

Wang Li (1958) shows that, in general, word order in Chinese is fixed. In particular, in Chinese conditional, concessive and cause and effect sentences, the subordinate clause traditionally came before the main clause. This relatively fixed word order means that connectors are seldom necessary. In Chinese, when two sentences are juxtaposed, even though there are no connectors, "we still know that the first sentence includes meanings such as 'although', 'if', 'because', etc, because the subordinate component must come at the beginning." (Wang Li



1984:97).

In English, on the other hand, the so-called 'if' clauses, the 'because' clauses, the 'though' clauses and the 'when' clauses can go before or after the main clause. This means that connectors are necessary as English does not necessarily follow natural order. For example, without connectors of some sort, an English speaker does not know which sentence in 'He twisted his ankle. He fell down' is the cause and which is the effect sentence.

Wang Li also makes clear, however, that while Chinese is a more paratactic language than English, it has been influenced by English and other Western languages, especially since the Chinese literary revolution of the May 4th Movement in 1919. At this time, as we noted earlier, large numbers of Western works were being translated into Chinese and published in China. Not only did this produce large numbers of influential works written in a kind of Europeanised Chinese, but their influence was also seen in the styles of contemporary Chinese writers.

For example, since the May 4th movement, subordinate clauses appearing after their main clauses in the writings of Chinese authors have become frequent. Wang Li (1958:372) gives this example from the Chinese writer, Lao She, of a marked<sup>3</sup> subordinate clause order in a conditional sentence.

Kèshì wǒ děi shěng xiē qián, wànyī  
But I must save some money 10,000-1

māmā jiào wǒ qù, ... wǒ kěyǐ pǎo  
mum tell me go, I can run,  
jiǎorú wǒ shǒu-zhōng yǒu qián.  
if I hand-in have money.

But I must keep some money on the off chance that Mum tells me to go,  
...I can run if I have some money.

Here, the conditional clause introduced by *jiǎorú* (if) comes after the main clause. Note the use of the conjunction in the marked subordinate clause and the absence of one in the main clause. This use of a single conjunction in the subordinating clause in complex sentences that follow the marked clause sequence is representative of this 'new' phenomenon of Chinese hypotactic constructions.

Xie Yaoji (1989) also argues that it is Western linguistic influence, primarily caused by the translation into Chinese of Western works, that has increased the use of conjunctions in Chinese. This, in turn, has given rise to marked main to subordinate clause ordering and a concomitant increase in the use of conjunctions in Chinese.

### 3.4 PARAGRAPHS AND THE ARRANGEMENT OF IDEAS

The Beijing University book on composition (1964) makes clear that there can be no fixed method of organising and constructing a text. The arrangement of

ideas is, however, thought to be extremely important. For example, it should be clear to the reader which points and arguments have a coordinate relationship and which a subordinate relationship. The authors also stress that, while paragraphs and the arrangement of ideas have aspects in common, the terms *duānlùò* (paragraph) and *céngcǐ* (arrangement of ideas) are not synonymous. To demonstrate this, they analyse a Mao article as having eighteen paragraphs but only six 'ideas'. This point is also made by Wang and Yang (1988) who say that one 'idea' can comprise several paragraphs.

Wang and Wu (1990:67ff) describe four of the most common ways of arranging ideas. The first is *zòngshí jiégòu*, which literally means vertical structure and refers to texts being organised following a temporal sequence. The second is called *héngshí jiégòu* which literally means horizontal structure and refers to texts being organised according to spatial relations. For example, an author might describe a scene from its northern, southern, western and eastern aspects in turn. The third is a combination of the first two and the fourth they call '*luoji guānxi*', or logical relations. What does this fourth method of text construction based on logical relations mean?

The relatively fixed 'logical' clause order of Chinese mentioned by Wang Li above has led linguists to describe Chinese as an iconic language (Tai 1985) and to affirm that natural order is an important principle of sequencing in Chinese. Tai refers to a Principle of Temporal Sequence (PTS) as clause order in Chinese is constrained by the sequence of events. Importantly, Tai also shows that PTS holds in a number of other constructions in Chinese such as action - result patterns where no overt connectors are used. PTS seems to suggest that the essential strategy of Chinese grammar is to knit together syntactic units according to conceptual principles. Being iconic, Chinese presents a case where word order corresponds to thought flow in a genuinely natural way. More recently, Tai (1993) has listed five iconic motivations in Chinese grammar where 'the subordinated phrase carries the background, and the main phrase the foreground' (1993:165). This subordinate to main sequence has been called a modifier - modified sequence (Kirkpatrick 1996) and its scope extended to include pieces of discourse and text. (Kirkpatrick 1991,1993). It is argued here that the logical relations that Wang and Wu refer to above are encapsulated by Tai at sentence level and explored by Kirkpatrick at text level. In summary, the fundamental principle of sequencing in Chinese appears to be 'frame - main'. It is worth noting that this is a linear sequence but one that places subordinate information before the main point. It has therefore, an inductive tone rather than the deductive tone commonly associated with 'Western' rhetoric (Samovar and Porter 1991).

This brief discussion of the way these five key points are treated in Chinese textbooks shows that much of the advice given to Chinese students does not differ markedly from the advice given to English speaking students. Openings need to be to the point and be able to grab the readers' attention. They should be clear. Similarly, endings need to summarise the mains points of the piece. Texts should be constructed on linear principles. There is no mention of circularity or

indirectness as being principles of text construction. Being deliberately 'tortuous' is but one technique among several others, all of which encourage linearity. On the other hand, when the composition textbooks discuss the overall shape that a text can have, a Western reader may feel that something 'Chinese' is going on. These quotes on the overall shape of a text are taken from Wang and Wu (1990:79ff).

Reading a text should be like looking at a mountain. Text does not like being flat and level.

Life itself is full of countless tortuous twists and turns, and changes within a text, coming wave after wave, precisely reflect the complexities of objective reality.

Writing a text should be like a river flowing at speed, with huge gushing waves, undulating forwards in a fair and reasonable way.

These metaphors are, I think, puzzling to Western readers, but such terms as *qūzhè* (tortuous), *bōlán* (billows) and *xiān yáng hòu yì* (first up then down) are common in these descriptions of textual shape. And, in concluding their chapter on textual organisation, Wang and Wu urge 'So, when arranging and organising text, ....ensure its wave upon wavelike up and downness' (*bōlán qǐfú*) (1990:80).

When they discuss the overall shape of specifically expository texts, however, Wang and Wu sound far more familiar. They say that an expository text (*yilun*) should have three components which are the thesis, the grounds of the argument, and the proof or the evidence. They also say there are two basic types of reasoning in these texts - inductive which proceeds from example(s) to a conclusion and deductive, which proceeds from the 'truth' or conclusion to the examples. Both these forms of reasoning are linear. Wu Yingtian (1988) provides a full discussion on expository texts and basically agrees with Wang and Wu. As Wu points out, the basic structural form of inductive reasoning is separate arguments leading to a conclusion. The basic structural form of deductive reasoning, however, is conclusion and then the separate arguments. The Chinese tendency to prefer a subordinate to main or 'frame to main' sequence discussed above suggests that Chinese speakers prefer to use inductive reasoning rather than deductive, although deductive reasoning is quite possible<sup>4</sup>. There is no mention in these books of the four part *qǐ-chéng-zhuǎn-hé* structure being used for expository texts.

## SUMMARY

By quoting from a number of Chinese authorities on composition and text structure, my aim has been to show that the advice given to Chinese students has similarities to the advice given to Australian students. Chinese students are, generally speaking, encouraged to be direct and clear and to adopt linear sequencing in their compositions. Indirectness or 'circularity' are not encouraged. In addition, it has been argued that traditional Chinese text structures currently have little influence upon expository writing in Chinese. I end with two caveats.

The first is that I have only looked at what the textbooks have to say about one style of writing. The second is that, as fashions change and as the PRC regime resurrects Confucian traditions, traditional structures may begin to re-exert their influence.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Chinese essays written for the Mainland Chinese university entrance exam are discussed in Kirkpatrick 1995a

<sup>2</sup> Within English linguistics, there appears to be some disagreement over the meaning of the terms parataxis and hypotaxis, with some linguists seeing conjunction use as critical (Crystal 1985, for example) and others seeing coordination or subordination of ideas as critical (Lehmann 1988, for example). In addition to this, there is a problem when translating these terms into Chinese, as the Chinese terms for parataxis (*yihafa*) and hypotaxis (*xinghefa*) do not precisely parallel Western definitions of these terms. In this paper, parataxis will be taken to be the coordination of sentences without the use of conjunctions, and hypotaxis to mean the subordination of sentences, using conjunctions.

<sup>3</sup> Marked refers to the less widely occurring option of opposing structural entities and unmarked refers to the more widely occurring option.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on reasoning in Chinese see Kirkpatrick 1995.

## APPENDIX

A: EXAMPLE OF *BA GU WEN*

ESSAY TOPIC: 'THE MASTER ASKED ABOUT GONGSHU WENZI'.

*Written by Tao Wangling for the metropolitan exam in 1589, in which it won first prize.  
Translated by Andrew Lo. (Renditions 1990)*

*po ti* (breaking open the title)

His contemporaries all missed the mark when describing the counsellor, and the Sage ultimately could not believe them.

*cheng ti* (receiving the title)

The fact is, it is unnatural not to speak, to laugh, or to take; yet to make the claim that Gongming Jia did is again to miss the mark. How could the Master believe him?

*qi jiang* (preliminary discourse)

Moreover, in discussing a person in the Spring and Autumn period, one can perhaps say that he verges on purity and sobriety, but one cannot say that he does everything properly and at the right time; this person may invite false praises from mundane people, but he cannot elude the keen discernment of the Sage.

*Section 1* (the beginning legs)

Gongshu Wenzi was one of the notables of the State of Wei. Generally he can perhaps be summed up as a steadfast and sober, clean and honest gentleman. Why did the people of his time, seeing that he was steadfast and sober, deduce that he did not speak or laugh, and seeing that he was clean and honest, deduce that he did not take?

*Section 2* (the minor legs)

The Master thought it was an exaggeration and asked Gongming Jia about this. Gongming Jia also knew that the person who told the Master has exaggerated, but his own exaggeration was even greater.

The rumour was that Gongshu Wenzi did not speak, but Gongming Jia said his Master spoke only when it was time to speak, and so people never grew tired of his speaking. Yet this is even more difficult than not to speak.

The rumour was that Gongshu Wenzi did not laugh, but Gongming Jia said he would laugh only when he was feeling happy, and so people never grew tired of his laughing. Yet this is even more difficult than not to laugh.

The rumour was that Gongshu Wenzi did not take, but Gongming Jia said that he took only when it was right for him to take, so people never grew tired of his taking. This, compared to not taking, can be said to be the most difficult of all.

*Section 3* (the central legs - together with section 4)

The fact is, people cannot avoid making unintentional mistakes in speaking, laughing, declining or accepting. Was Gongshu Wenzi not a human being? I know for sure that he could not be free from this.

Unless you are a Sage, you cannot get the measure exactly right in speaking, laughing, declining or accepting. Was not Gongshu Wenzi yet a human being? So I know he could not get it right all the time.

*Section 4*

Those whose grasp of ritual and righteousness is insufficient find it difficult to adapt to the occasion. Therefore, to describe a gentleman who is careful in small matters as doing things properly and at the right time is a gross exaggeration.

Those who express themselves at the wrong moment will easily bore others. Therefore to say to a gentleman of immaculate cultivation (Confucius) that people did not get tired of his teacher Gongshu Wenzi is slanderous and lacking in truth.

*Section 5 (the latter legs)*

The Master knew of Gongming Jia's exaggeration. So he said, "Can that really be the right explanation for the way he was, I wonder?"

This was because he did not dare to instantly credit overblown praises, and in regard to Gongshi Wenzi who did good deeds, he did not dare to find fault without a basis or to voice his apprehension directly.

*shoujie / dajie (the conclusion)*

From this we can see that under heaven the most difficult thing is to act at the right moment. Those who discuss people should not commend lightly. Those who study the Way should not stop themselves because of the difficulty.

*Commentary:* (by Fang Bao, a Qing dynasty scholar)

The author's technique of getting to the essence of the topic and transforming it is most lively. There is also a majestic and tense energy flowing and reverberating between the lines.

*Comments* (by Andrew Lo)

Section 1 (containing two parallel legs) develops the first topic. Section 2 (containing three parallel legs) begins by developing line 2 of the topic in non-parallel lines, and then the three legs develop lines 3 and 4, 5 and 6, 7 and 8 of the topic respectively. Sections three and four (containing two parallel legs) argue that Gongming Jia was wrong. Section five (containing roughly two parallel legs) develops line 9 of the topic. The *shoujie* (conclusion) also contains two parallel lines. We may note again that because the topic is a narrative and is not a lecture by the sage, there is no shift of voice in the *qi jiang*.



**B: EXAMPLE OF *QI-CHENG-ZHUAN-HE*****'A SANITARIUM FOR SICK PLUM TREES'**

*Written by Gong Zizhen in 1839 after his dismissal from an official post. Translated by the author.*

*Qi.* Longpan Mountain in Jiangning, Dengwei Mountain in Suzhou and the Western banks of West Lake in Hangzhou all have an abundance of plum trees.

*Cheng.* It is said: the beauty of the branches of a plum tree lie in their crooked shape, there being no charm in ramrod straightness; their beauty lies in their jagged angles, as being upright and straight is not pleasing to the eye; their beauty lies in their sparseness, as dense abundance has no definition. This has long been so. Scholars and artists believe this in their hearts but do not openly shout aloud these criteria for the judgement of plum trees, nor can they tell those cultivators of the plum tree that, by hacking them into shape, by viciously cutting back their abundant foliage and by lopping off branches, they can turn prematurely dead or diseased plum trees into a profitable enterprise. The tortured crookedness and bare sparseness of the plum branches is not caused by those who, as soon as they sense profit, can use their skill to obtain it. But, someone has explained in clear terms this unsocial desire of the scholars and artists to the sellers of plum trees. These, then, to obtain a higher price for their trees, cut off the straight branches and tend the crooked ones, cut back dense foliage and destroy delicate buds and uproot and kill off any plum trees that grow straight. And so the plum trees of Jiangsu and Zhejiang have all become ill and deformed. What a serious disaster have these scholars and artists brought about!

*Zhuan.* I bought three hundred pots with plum trees in them and they were all sick; not a single pot contained a completely healthy plant. I grieved for them and wept for three days and then vowed that, to cure them, I should indulge them and let them grow freely. I destroyed the pots, planted all the plum trees in the ground and cut free their encompassing and binding twine. I still need five years to restore

the plum trees to their original state. I have never been a scholar or an artist and am happy to have scorn heaped upon me, but I want to build a sanitarium for sick plums where I can place these plum trees.

*He.* Ai!. How I wish I had the free time and the idle land so that I could gather in the sick plum trees of Jiangning, Hangzhou and Suzhou, and within my lifetime, cure them!

Following an analysis by Di Chen's (1984), the first paragraph is the *qi*. The second paragraph describes the underhand schemes of the scholars and artists and recounts how they have oppressed the growth of the plum trees. This is, of course, an analogy, with the scholars and artists representing the reactionary feudal classes. It lays bare the crimes of the Qing dynasty rulers in destroying men of talent. This is the *cheng* which continues and explains the topic, elaborating the opening sentence. The third paragraph recounts how the author opposes all this and this is the *zhuan* and represents a transition, the change from one view of the situation to another. The fourth paragraph describing the author's desire to cure the sick plum trees demonstrates the author's resolve to fight to change society. This is the *he*, the conclusion of the piece.

# The Development of Communication Skills In Undergraduate Health Professional Education: Using Standardised Patients and Peer Assessment.

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The development of communication skills in health professional students is central for success as a clinician. This project reports on a communication skills course for undergraduate physiotherapy students using experiential learning, standardised patients (SP) and peer assessment. The course covered verbal/non-verbal communication, patient interviewing, counselling, assertiveness and conflict resolution. Four tutorial sessions on communication principles, interviewing and counselling skills were presented by the students with the remaining 11 sessions structured by the unit co-ordinators. Following the 4 student tutorials on general communication principles, interviews with the Sps were undertaken. When all students had completed their interview, the videotapes were exchanged among their peers for evaluation. The students' mean average mark (mean = 80.26, sd 7.16) was significantly higher than the mean mark of the unit co-ordinators (mean = 68.37, sd 9.83) ( $Z = -3.2059$ ,  $N = 19$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). There was also less variation in the students' group. Students overwhelmingly commented in favour of the exercise (mean response = 4.38 out of 5). Issues (both positive and negative) cited in the literature regarding the use of Sps and peer assessment are supported by the findings of this study.

The teaching of communication skills is a challenging area for those charged with the instruction of this topic. In the case of health science disciplines, students may not value this type of course preferring instead to focus on their science and clinical practice subjects. Some students may welcome the opportunity to develop their communication skills further, while others feel that they already have adequate communication skills. A common perception among students as well is that you can't 'teach' communication skill. Acquisition of these skills is viewed as something you acquire by working in the field. How then do academics teach 'communication' when groups of learners come to the classroom with these attitudes and beliefs?

The development of communication skills in health professional students is

central for success as a clinician and requires considerable breadth and understanding of key principles. The development of interpersonal communication skills in health professionals is well described in the literature (Dickson et al, 1989; Dockrell, 1988; Gartland, 1984b; Alroy et al, 1984; Quirk & Letendre, 1986; Scheidt et. al, 1986; Schultz et al, 1988). Dockrell (1988), for example found that physiotherapy students had sufficient knowledge concerning interpersonal communication. She found, however, that they lacked the necessary skills in practice. Alroy et al (1984) described their evaluation of the short term effects of an interpersonal skills course on internal medicine clerks. They were able to measure improvements in supporting behaviour, confidence and caring behaviours with patients.

In terms of teaching communication skills, the strategies that one can use range from purely didactic approaches to ones which are more experiential in nature. Quirk & Letendre (1986) describe a communication skills course for first year medical students using videotape and simulated patients. Students rated role playing and the observation and analysis of the recorded interviews as significantly more valuable than readings or lectures. The students also rated the actors as more valuable than fellow students as simulated actors.

### STANDARDISED PATIENTS

A standardised patient (SP) is a person who has been trained to portray a uniform case presentation and who is able to repeat this presentation for a number of students (Gold et al, 1995; Nayer, 1993). The use of standardised patients has been proven to be quite an accurate means of reproducing clinical scenarios in health professional education (Barrows, 1993; Gold et al, 1995). Because of this presentation consistency, SPs have been used in a wide variety of situations to teach and evaluate health professionals. (Colliver & Williams, 1993; Gold et al, 1995; Hasle et al, 1994; Heaton et al, 1994; Kaiser & Bauer, 1995; Nayer, 1993; Colliver et al, 1991; Schultz et al, 1988).

With respect to communication skill training, the use of SPs has been applied quite effectively in health professional education (Barrows, 1993; Gold et al, 1995; Hasle et al, 1994; Heaton et al, 1994; Sanson-Fisher & Poole, 1980; Schultz et al, 1988). Barrows (1993) utilised SPs in conjunction with videotape recordings of the interaction. He found the videotape playbacks to be a very powerful tool for stimulating students' recall and reflection. Student comments about the use of SPs in their training is also very positive (Gold et al, 1995; Hasle et al, 1994; Kaiser & Bauer, 1995; Schultz et al, 1988).

Barrows (1993) describes the educational advantages of SPs. He states that specific problems can be chosen in advance to highlight parts of the curriculum and they can be manipulated in several different ways depending upon the desired educational outcome. Often, students may not encounter these types of problems in the clinical setting so the use of SPs ensures that all students have access to important clinical scenarios. Barrows (1993) goes on to state that students are able to get unique forms of objective and subjective feedback from videotape

reviews and SP comments. Difficult and emotionally charged interpersonal situations can also be modelled using SPs.

### **PEER EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT**

The use of peer evaluation as a source of feedback for students has received considerable attention in the literature. Traditional marking schemes are often criticised by students for their unreliability, inaccuracy and for their low learning value (Falchikov, 1986; Fry, 1990; Orpen, 1982; Rushton et al, 1993). Hence, there is some merit in exploring alternative methods of assessment that may overcome some of these criticisms. The advantages and disadvantages of peer assessment have been summarised by several authors (Fry, 1990; Orpen, 1982; Rushton et al, 1993; Boud, 1986; Williams, 1992; Falchikov, 1986). Advantages centre around reductions in the teacher's marking workload; students think more deeply about the exercise and get to view how others tackled the same problem; they learn how to constructively criticise the work of others; and the gap between teacher and student narrows with the instructor viewed more positively as a facilitator. Disadvantages are that students may not have the same level of understanding as the teacher, may not provide useful feedback, need clearer guidance in terms of what they should look for, may show bias towards their friends, and be reluctant to award low marks for poor work because of fear of offending peers.

### **TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN PHYSIOTHERAPY**

The unit which provided the framework for this project is called "Health and Social Behaviour in Physiotherapy (HSBIP)". The unit is for year 3 students in a 4 year B.Sc. degree program at the School of Physiotherapy, Curtin University of Technology. The unit is comprised of both a lecture and tutorial stream. In the lecture stream, students explore issues related to health and physiotherapy from a psycho-social perspective. The tutorial stream focuses on interpersonal skills necessary for effective performance as a health professional. Both components of the unit are closely interrelated. Skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication, patient interviewing, counselling, assertiveness, conflict resolution and cross cultural interaction are covered in the unit. Teaching approaches utilise a combination of group discussion, group exercises, student presentations, role plays, videotape, standardised patient simulations and interactive improvisation with actors.

### **METHODS**

Four actors were trained by one of the unit coordinators using scripts that had been developed by four of the academic staff in the School of Physiotherapy. These 4 SP scenarios were further developed by one of the Unit Coordinators to stimulate a variety of communication behaviours in the students. An emphasis was placed on the psychosocial elements of each clients' history as this was the prime focus of the unit.

Four tutorial sessions on general communication principles, interviewing and counselling skills were presented by the students. Dickson & Maxwell's (1985) model of sensitisation and feedback were used by the unit coordinators to structure the tutorials. At the end of the 4 tutorials, students undertook their interview with the SP under videotape. When all students had completed their interview, the videotapes were exchanged amongst the student peers randomly. Each student was required to review one videotape of a peer and to make comments on a marking sheet that had been developed by the unit coordinators.

### **PEER EVALUATION RESULTS**

Seventy-three students were involved in the unit. The unit coordinators randomly selected 19 videotapes to evaluate (approximately 5 for each SP case). The mean average mark awarded by the students for these 19 videotapes was (mean = 80.26, sd 7.16). This was significantly higher than the mean mark given by the unit coordinators (mean = 68.37, sd 9.83) ( $Z = -3.2059$ ,  $N = 19$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). There was also less variation or spread in the students' marking distribution when compared to the mark distribution of the unit coordinators.

### **LEARNING EXPERIENCE EVALUATION**

Of the 73 students enrolled in the unit, 56 completed the learning experience evaluation (77 per cent response rate). One of the questions on the unit evaluation asked them, "In general, was the complete simulated patient interview exercise (interview, videotape, peer review) a useful learning experience?" Students overwhelmingly commented in favour of the exercise (mean response = 4.38 out of 5). Students suggested that there was room for improvement in the overall exercise, but found the entire process a useful learning experience both from their own self-evaluation perspective but also from the perspective of learning from and observing the performance of others. The mean scores from the learning experience evaluation are described in table 1.

### **REVIEW OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

The concepts raised by Dockrell (1988), which pointed out that students do possess sufficient knowledge about communication skills but lack adequate practice and self-awareness, were central to the design of the unit. Making the assumption that students do not have much to contribute to the program ignores one of the cornerstones of adult education theory. That is, that all individuals have a rich personal experiential history which should be valued and incorporated into the learning strategy.

The experiential nature of the unit and the focus on issues of immediate relevance to the students—another tenet of adult learning theory—was central to eliciting the student's interest and support for the program. The SPs were very effective in drawing out the desired behaviour in students which added depth to the concepts covered in the course. Greater self-awareness about one's own communication skills was also a direct product of the exercise. Many students

**TABLE 1: LEARNING EXPERIENCE EVALUATION N=56**

QUESTION	ANSWERING SCALE AND MEAN RESPONSE
Q1: How realistic was your simulated patient?	Very Realistic (5)...Not Realistic (1) 4.31
Q2: How comfortable did you feel during the interview?	Very Comfortable (5)...Very Anxious (1) 3.07
Q3: How much did you learn about yourself from reviewing the videotape?	I learned a lot (5)...I learned little (1) 3.85
Q4: Did the simulated patient interview increase your confidence with respect to your interviewing skill?	Increased conf. (5)...Decreased conf. (1) 3.48
Q5: How helpful was it seeing another student conduct an interview?	Very helpful (5)...Not helpful (1) 3.96
Q6: How helpful was peer feedback from other student(s)?	Very helpful (5)...Not helpful (1) 3.53
Q7: Was the peer review process fair and equitable?	Very fair (5)...Not fair (1) 2.98
Q8: Did the presentations on communication skills (provided by your peers earlier in the course) help you improve your own awareness about interviewing skills?	Improve aware. (5)...Decreased aware. (1) 4.02
Q9: In general, was the complete simulated patient interview exercise (interview, videotape, peer review) a useful learning experience?	Very useful (5)...Not useful (1) 4.38

became aware of behaviours or mannerisms in their communication style which they did not expect or necessarily like. This 'awareness' is consistent with the findings cited by Barrows (1993) and Dockrell (1988) and further reinforces the positive effects of SPs in communication skill training.

The peer assessment process produced some interesting results. The students themselves were excellent at suggesting how the process could have been improved. Some of the strategies that will be included in future programming are: increasing the specificity of the marking guidelines, review of a couple of student-SP interactions on videotape to prepare students for the experience and

the marking exercise that follows, and the incorporation of the SP's mark into the overall grading strategy.

In terms of disadvantages, some students did not provide useful written feedback to their peers. The group was also very generous in their allocation of marks. Marks were significantly higher in the student group sample as compared to the grades awarded by the unit coordinators for this same sample. There was also less variation in the students' marks - clustering around a high average grade. This tendency to award peers high marks was consistent with findings cited by Williams (1992), Falchikov (1986) and Orpen (1982).

The suggestion from some of the students that the peer assessment be a group (n=4) process may prove to be effective in minimising the mark discrepancy that occurred in this particular instance. The presence of other colleagues during the videotape review process will hopefully produce more objectivity in marking as well as pressure to provide responsible and useful feedback.

## CONCLUSION

The experience of using SPs and peer assessment to develop greater communication skill self-awareness was quite successful. An interactive, experiential course of study which valued the students previous life experience and which focussed on issues of direct and immediate relevance to students was effective in raising their commitment to the unit. To this end, any course of study which focuses on communication skill development should consider the role of actors and the use of drama. It is hoped that our experience will assist others who are responsible for the teaching and development of professional interpersonal communication skills.

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# An Applied Linguist Reads Engineering

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The paper will present a case study of the researcher's experience of editing a PhD research paper and conference presentation written by a Japanese student of Engineering. Issues of contrastive rhetoric and discipline specific discourse are relevant, as well as more general discourse issues ranging from textual coherence to semantic and grammatical accuracy. It became apparent that the input from a language specialist was valuable to the student, as judged by his rewriting of portions of text. There are, however, distinct limits to the Applied Linguist's input, where only specialised knowledge can resolve particular issues of language use.

This paper addresses one of the questions posed in the original list of concerns of this conference on Tertiary Literacy: that is, "Is an Applied Linguist able to analyse discipline specific discourse? To look at this question, I will present a case study in editing a text written by a Japanese PhD student of Engineering. With no specialized content knowledge, I was able to make a number of corrections, and suggestions for alterations with some confidence. However, there were distinct limitations with regard to aspects of textual coherence that relied on shared knowledge.

The author of the text to be analysed is a Japanese student, enrolled for a PhD in the Engineering Dept of the University of WA. At the time of writing, he had returned to Tokyo after 3 years' residence in Australia, and was engaged in writing the final draft of his thesis. The text to be discussed is the draft of a conference presentation written by the student whilst in Japan, in preparation for his attendance at a conference at the University of WA. The draft had not been shown to his supervisor, and was therefore entirely his own work. Communication between myself and the student was by email and fax, so that discussion on the content of the text was minimal. The student later sent me a copy of the revised text, taking note of most of my suggestions. At the outset, the task of editing was done as a favour to the student, and as my interest in the analysis grew, he gave permission for the text to be used as a basis for this presentation. In order to amplify the discussion of limitations of analysis, reference will also be made to a chapter of the student's thesis, which treats the same topic in much greater detail.

To present this case study, I shall outline the nature of the task, and give a general background concerning the nature of textual coherence. Next I shall present four units of the text to illustrate the contributions and corrections that could be made, and finally present a discussion of the limitations of analysis by

a non-specialist reader.

## BACKGROUND

In analysing any text, it is a basic understanding that a text is a message; it is a communicative event in which the writer intends to communicate certain information and ideas to a particular audience. The writer's task therefore, is to encode these ideas into written language with regard to appropriate genre; that is, to the particular audience expectations of suitable text structure, presentation of information, language register and vocabulary. The reader's task is to process the written language to reconstruct the writer's message. In order to do this, the reader must be able to comprehend the individual sentences, and through this, be able to arrive at higher order message structures at the episodic or paragraph level, and at the discourse level. The text as message is understood at the discourse level when the text is coherent.

In this case, the writer prepared the text for a conference audience, in which participants could be expected to have some knowledge of the field of Water Research in Engineering. The writer could assume that the audience shared his knowledge of the basic concepts and vocabulary in this field, whilst also assuming that the particulars of this piece of research must be presented as new information. The task for the non-specialist reader is magnified to the extent that there is little shared knowledge in the content of the text, and a coherent message would therefore be more difficult to construct.

The concept of coherence is central to the problem, and the linguistic features of coherence have been examined by a number of researchers (eg. Wikborg, 1990; Evensen, 1990; Halliday, 1985; van Dijk, 1985; Givon, 1993; Witte & Faigley 1981). Two definitions are useful, indicating different approaches to the study of coherence in writing.

1. "The natural effort of hearers and readers alike is to attribute relevance and coherence to the text they encounter until they are forced not to" (Brown and Yule, 1983, p66). In this definition, it is therefore suggested that coherence does not rely upon overt textual features, but rather, that there may be 'barriers' (Lawe Davies forthcoming) that prevent the reader from constructing a coherent message.

2. "A text is coherent when a reader understands the function of each succeeding unit of text in the development of its overall or global meaning" (Wikborg, 1990). This definition stresses the function of textual units such as clause, sentence, paragraph, chapter as units of meaning.

With these two definitions in mind, the task of the Applied Linguist in analysing a text becomes more apparent. If it is assumed that the text is maximally coherent, then the Applied Linguist should be able to follow the logic of the argument and presentation, whilst accepting the truth value of the information. If the text is not coherent, then the Applied Linguist can attempt to locate the sources of the failure, without necessarily comprehending the full import of the meanings

expressed.

The above approach applies to texts written by a Native Speaker (NS) or highly fluent Non-Native Speaker (NNS). However a text written by a second language learner is likely to contain errors of a lexico-semantic and syntactic nature that may prevent the reader from understanding the sentence level meanings. These errors can create a barrier that masks higher order levels of meaning. It should be noted that not all syntactic or lexical errors severely impede comprehension, and the correction of relatively minor errors is a simple matter.

In a NNS text, if the writing is grammatically comprehensible, it is assumed that the Applied Linguist might locate problems in the coherence of a text, whilst recognising the limitations of a lack of shared content knowledge.

### THE NATURE OF COHERENCE

It is useful to distinguish 3 levels of coherence: local (clause, sentence) meso-level (episodes, conceptual paragraph) and global. (van Dijk, 1985; Givon, 1993). At each of these levels, language devices may function to link successive units of the text. Givon (1993) refers to the global level as thematic coherence, which has many sub-components or coherence strands that may function at each of the three levels, and may embed one within another.

Coherence strands are created by a variety of language forms and functions including topic organisation, referential continuity, and connectors:

1. Topic organisation. At global, meso- and local levels, topics are a function of noun phrases (Givon, 1993). Through a variety of language means, topics may be introduced cataphorically (forward reference) or referred to anaphorically (backward reference) within the text.

eg. global level: In this paper I shall....

meso-level: There are three factors x, y and z. X is.....Y is... Z is....

local level: On one hand there is...On the other....

2. Referential continuity. This is again a property of noun phrases, and may be created by a chain of referring expressions within the text.

I was introduced to *someone called Margaret*.

*She* said that we went to school together, but I don't remember *her*.

*The silly woman* must have been mistaken.

3. Connectors. Both inter- and intra-sentential connectors mark relationships between local, or larger units of text.

logical because, so, as, therefore, hence, thus

temporal first, then, next, in the morning

additive furthermore, also, moreover

adversative however, but.

Most connectors function at the local level, linking clauses or sentences, but others may operate across larger units of text.

eg. Therefore it may be concluded that....

In the above example, 'therefore' refers to an entire argument, not to the immediately preceding proposition.

This outline of coherence is necessarily oversimplified, but should serve to introduce the areas in which an Applied Linguist might assist a writer.

## ANALYSIS

When sending the text prepared for a conference presentation, the student had asked that the text be 'corrected' so that he could present it in 'good' English, no doubt presuming that formal grammatical errors would be the target for amendments. However it soon became apparent that more serious problems would need to be addressed. In undertaking this editing task, the approach of Brown and Yule (1983) was used, that is, that a text is presumed to be coherent until particular difficulties prevent a coherent construction of meaning. It was therefore assumed that 'barriers' to coherence could be identified and corrections or suggestions made to improve the text.

This section presents the first four sections of the text, demonstrating the gradual breakdown of the coherence of the text, and the kinds of solutions that could be offered to the student to improve his presentation.

### 1. The opening passage of the text functions as an introduction.

I am very pleased to present my research work for PhD entitled 'A three dimensional composite parametric numerical model for lake hydrodynamics'. First of all I would like to present special thanks to my supervisors.....

I proceed my talk in the following sequence (order): First, I explain [1] The motivation and aim of this research, Next, I briefly review [2] The background and phenomena typically observed in a stratified lake. Then I explain [3] The concept and structure of the hybrid model. After that, I will show that the model reproduces two real cases well. The one is [4] Verification of the model by laboratory Experiment conducted by Stevens (1991) and the other is [5] Application of the model to Lake Biwa. However, due to time limitation, today I mainly talk about application of the model to Lake Biwa. Lastly, I conclude together the results and refer to recommendation for further study. [6] Conclusion and recommendation for further study.

This introduction is reassuring, for it suggests that the genre of the conference presentation is similar across disciplines. This episode clearly presents a cataphoric organisational statement which gives a framework for the ordering

of topics in the main body of the text. The topics have been numbered, and raise the cataphoric expectation of numbered headings as signposts to the reader. This is the foundation for a very clear discourse level strand of coherence. Within the episode, strands of coherence are created by two clear devices. One is the serial ordering of points introduced by a cataphoric organiser.

I proceed my talk in the *following sequence*

First....Next....Then....After that....Lastly.

The other is embedded in the superordinate structure:

I will show that the model reproduces *two real cases* well. The *one is...* and *the other is...*

Both these devices of local coherence function well to guide the reader in understanding the text.

There are a number of grammatical and lexico-semantic errors or 'infelicities', but none of such severity as to form a 'barrier' to meaning. At this point it is a simple matter to make corrections at the sentence level. For example:

(a) vocabulary

I *proceed* my talk

I *will present* my talk

Lastly, I *conclude together* the results

Lastly, I *will summarise* the results

(b) verb form

First I *explain*

First I *will explain*

(c) plural marker

and refer to *recommendation* for

*recommendations* for further study

further study

(d) deletions

*The one is...*

One is....

Overall, this section gives a clear introductory statement that functions well to offer the reader a framework and structure of the information which is to follow.

2. The second section is as follows:

Motivation and Aim We largely depend on lakes, reservoirs, man-made lake, dum, (hereafter lakes) as water resources not only for drinking but also for agricultural and industrial purposes. Recently, people frequently face to severe deterioration (pollution) of water quality and the environment due to extent nutrients discharge from domestic, agricultural and industrial fields in the catchment area. Once the ecosystem is polluted, it takes considerable time, cost and manpower to recover to the original state. People have begun to recognise the indispensable value of the water resources and how fragile they are. The awareness is leading to a potential movement to clean up the pollution and keep the water quality in good condition for our

fundamental health and hygiene at a safe (comfortable) level. Water quality of a lake is resultant of sophisticate and sensitive ecological system which is balanced among, at least, physical, biological and chemical factors (Mortimer 1975). With this point in mind, this research puts focus on physical processes in a stratified lake which govern and provide the background field conditions for biological activities and chemical processes. And the aim is to construct a fundamental frame of a three dimensional composite numerical model for lake hydrodynamics. Especially, role of internal wave on transferring energy from the basin scale to turbulent mixing scale is explicitly represented.

Again, the function of this section meets the expectations raised by the genre of the presentation, and the organisation given in the introduction. It is clearly a background and rationale for the study, and at this stage the content is at a general level, so that lack of specialized knowledge is not a problem.

With reference to the global strand of coherence, it should be noted that although the heading matches that offered as no.1 in the organising statement, the heading is not numbered, an omission that leads to difficulties later in the discourse. Within the episode there are no devices for local coherence strands, but some use of local devices such as "The awareness", "With this point in mind", "Especially", which function as links between juxtaposed propositions.

Compared to the first section, sentence-level corrections were a little more difficult to make in a sentence such as the following, in which there are a number of vocabulary and syntactic errors.

<p>Recently, people frequently face to severe deterioration (pollution) of water quality and the environment due to extent nutrients discharge</p>	<p>In recent times, people often face () severe deterioration (pollution) of water quality and the environment due to () nutrient discharge..</p>
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Other corrections involved the important area of determiners, in particular the articles *the* and *a*, and demonstratives such as *this*, *that*. The Japanese language has no equivalent of the English article system, and appropriate use of articles is often a problem even for advanced learners.

For example:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>(i) The awareness is leading to .....</p>   | <p><i>This awareness.....</i></p>   |
| <p>(ii) Water quality of a lake is resultant of sophisticate and sensitive ecological system</p> | <p><i>The water quality of a lake is the result of a sophisticated and sensitive ecological system.</i></p> |

In example (i), the change from *the* to *this* serves to create a more transparent anaphoric link with the previous sentence "People...recognise the indispensable value of water resources". "*This awareness*" refers back to create a clear link between the separate assertions, and thereby increases textual coherence.

Example (ii) involves the insertion of articles to three noun phrases. The selection of the *a* involves intuitions as to whether it is 'a result' (one of a number of results) or 'the result' (unique reference), and the choice of the indefinite article in 'a sophisticated and sensitive ecological system' is governed by the introduction of a new referent to the discourse (first mention). These few examples give an indication of the complexity and nature of the problem faced by a Japanese NNS writer.

It is notable that the difficulty of choice became greater when the topic became more discipline specific:

<p>Especially, role of internal wave on transferring energy</p>	<p>In particular, the role of i <math>\emptyset</math> internal waves ii <i>an</i> internal wave iii <i>the</i> internal wave on transferring energy</p>
---	--

The choice of  $\emptyset$ , *a/an*, or *the* depends on assumptions made about number and specificity of reference. The suggested change was ' $\emptyset$  internal waves', a form that the student accepted in his redraft.

The first apparent limitation to the editing appeared in the first sentence of this section. Lack of shared knowledge produced a hesitation with regard to treatment of the word "dum":

We largely depend on lakes, reservoirs, man-made lake, *dum*, (hereafter lakes) as water resources....

My comment was "I don't know this term, but it sounds like it should be "dums". It was assumed that this might be a specialist term for some body of water, and could possibly be used in a discourse specific manner. The choice of alteration was passed to the student. It was amusing to see the corrected draft showing the word "dams", a familiar term that had been misspelled!

### 3. The third section created greater difficulties:

Background in a stratified lake and Model structure. Before starting construction of a model, there are two important steps.

Firstly, it is very important to understand the background physical processes typically observed in a stratified lake. Here, I point put (sic) at least 7 characteristic features to be considered in the modelling.

Point (i) The field is not isotropic. Lakes experiencing moderate climates develop some degree of thermal stratification. This stratification is traditionally partitioned into three characteristic horizontal layers: epilimnion, metalimnion and hypolimnion. The stratification or stability to the water column which prevents turbulence from forming without strong forcing either shear or convection.



Point (ii) Four kinds of major external forces: wind, heating/cooling due to solar radiation, inflow and outflow. The first two are thought to be dominant.

Point (iii) Distribution of turbulent region isn't uniform in the domain. The fully turbulent region is confined only limited parts such as SML, BBL and internal turbulent bursts. Turbulence within and below thermocline is patchy and sporadic in space and time.

Point (iv) Various length and time scales phenomena coexist. Various phenomena exist in wide range of length and time scales. The length and time scales span from the basin scale to turbulent mixing scale.

.....Points (v) (vi) (vii) (viii) (ix).

At the global level, it should be noted that this section was not numbered, and the heading "Background in a stratified lake and Model structure" did not accord with that listed in the introduction, ie. "The background and phenomena typically observed in a stratified lake". This raised the potential for misunderstanding, and breakdown of the central strand of coherence.

At the meso-level, a clear barrier to coherence occurs in this section with the breakdown of the organising pattern introduced in the first sentence:

'....there are two important steps. Firstly...'

Throughout the passage the reader is anticipating another 'important step' marked by 'secondly', and this expectation is not realised.

The passage becomes more specialised in content and consequently more difficult for the non-specialist reader to comprehend and correct at sentence level. It was possible to confidently make a number of changes such as:

Point ii Four kinds of major external forces	<i>There are four kinds....</i>
Point iii Distribution of turbulent region...	<i>The distribution of the turbulent region...</i>
Various phenomena exist in wide range	<i>A number of phenomena exist in a wide range</i>

It was not possible to confidently make amendments to the following incomplete sentence, without the risk of changing the meaning:

"The stratification or stability to the water column which prevents turbulence from forming without strong forcing either shear or convection."

The error was pointed out to the student, and a suggestion made to either add a

predicate, or make 'prevent' the main verb of the sentence. The student chose the second option, so that ultimately the sentence read "The stratification or stability to the water column prevents turbulence...."

Further difficulties from lack of knowledge arose with the omission of articles in the sentences shown below:

- a) Turbulence within and below (*the/a*) thermocline is patchy and sporadic...
- b) Internal waves play an important role to transfer energy from the basin scale to turbulent mixing scale via (*an/the*) internal wave field.

In each case, if the referent is unique and is assumed known to the reader, then the choice is 'the'. If it is treated as a new referent introduced to the reader, then the choice is 'a'.

The omissions were noted in the edited text, and the choice passed to the student. In example (i) he chose "a" and in example (ii) the choice was avoided, and appeared with  $\emptyset$  article in the amended text.

4. The fourth section of the text presented real problems for coherent interpretation.

3] MODEL STRUCTURE Secondly, it is required to decide the principle of the model structure. At the same time, numerical simulation is desired to satisfy three factors: (i) The results is accurate within the tolerable error, (ii) It is fast to obtain the results and (iii) it is cheap to run. One of the central issues in numerical simulation is how to parameterise turbulence.

For this purpose, and with help of computer resources improvement, numerical simulation has been developed by different methods, ie In my presentation I categorise numerical simulation into two groups. The one is numerical experiment. And the other is numerical modelling (Imberger, 1995). One approach is by numerical experiments

ie (i) Second order closure technique (Donaldson, 1973) to solve the Reynolds equations which represent ensemble-averages statistics of turbulent motions.

(ii) Large Eddy Simulation (LES) (Deardoroff, 1973) the numerical solution of the equations for grid volume-averaged flow (Wyngaard, 1990)

(iii) direct numerical simulation (DNS) is the simplest form of turbulence modelling. This means the numerical solution of the Navier-Stokes equations. It requires the entire computational domain must be covered by the length scale of the dissipation range with the order of 0.001m. These methods require large, efficient and fast machine to

simulate. ....However, if we apply numerical experiments methods to a real flow field such as a large lake, it is inconsistent with reality to use massive parallel computer resources for the simulation.....

On the other hand, Numerical modelling uses modest computer power when ensure to evaluate the preset equations for conservative quantities.

A major barrier to coherence is apparent at this point. The central strand of coherence introduced in the first section has not been realized in the text, and the problems at episode and sentence levels become insurmountable, not only to the naive reader, but quite probably to the knowledgeable reader as well.

At a global coherence level, the heading, "(3) Model Structure" is not clear. Does it accord with the anticipated "(3) The concept and structure of the hybrid model" mentioned in the opening section? Or is it the 'Model Structure' referred to in the previous heading "Background in a stratified lake and Model structure"? The relevance of the information as to whether it is background to the study, or the new model being proposed is a grave problem.

Confusion is multiplied by the opening sentence: " Secondly, it is required..." This must be the second of the 'two important steps' in the previous section, for which the reader had been waiting. Yet an organising principle that should operate locally, across propositions in close proximity, has crossed sectional boundaries. There is too great a section of intervening text for the device to serve its function.

If it is assumed that the numbering is incorrect, and the passage belongs properly to the preceding section, then it must be treated as background to the study. Without specialist knowledge, only textual clues such as 'secondly' may be used. However, even this reassignment of global textual function is not sufficient to make the text coherent.

Further barriers are created at meso- and local-levels. A major barrier, at least to the uninformed reader, is created by the unclear use of the terms 'numerical simulation', 'numerical modelling' and 'numerical experiment'. The terms 'simulation' and 'experiment' seem to be used interchangeably, and the expectation of topic sequence raised by "categorise numerical simulation into two groups" is not clearly realised.

The passage is very confusing in the referential chain or chains. An organising device has not been fulfilled, in that two topics have been introduced as members of the umbrella term 'numerical simulation'; 'numerical experiments' and 'numerical modelling'. Numerical experiments appear to be listed, but there is no following section discussing the topic of numerical modelling. To add to the confusion, the term 'numerical simulation' is used in item (iii), when it was introduced earlier as the generic term. When 'numerical modelling' is eventually clearly referred to at the end of the quoted passage, it is evaluated as if it had already been defined or described, that is, the pattern of information is not parallel.

Inappropriate use of connectors contributes to the confusion. In the last two sentences, the connectors 'However', and 'On the other hand' are misleading. In each case there is an inappropriate implication of contrast to the previous proposition, which serves to confuse the reader.

Due to these problems of global relevance, meso and local levels of organisation, and chains of reference, comprehension of the text became impossible. In consequence, it became irrelevant to correct obvious minor problems of syntax. The entire passage was referred back to the student with a broad explanation of the problem, and the following suggestions:

1. that he strictly follow his numbered headings to hold the global strand of coherence.
2. that in this section he clearly separate his topics in the text and adhere to his own organising principles.
3. that he clearly separate referential terms and topics. A rhetorical organisation was suggested:

Para numerical simulation - numerical experiment and numerical modelling

Para numerical experiment - define, give advantages and disadvantages in terms of his 3 criteria.

Para numerical modelling - define, give advantages and disadvantages in the same terms.

Para explain how these two approaches relate to the model to be presented.

In the final draft, the student followed these suggestions, and the difficulties were resolved.

### LIMITATIONS OF ANALYSIS

The above analysis charts a course of coherence breakdown in which several barriers to coherence could be confidently identified. At the global level, it was necessary for the student to clearly hold to the central coherence strand by marking each section numerically, and with headings that matched the initial plan. At the level of local information organisation, the student could reorganise the text to maintain local strands of organising devices and topic flow. At sentence level, some corrections could be made with confidence, and others had to be left to the student to amend.

The limitations of the analysis are more difficult to define, and lie squarely in the problem of a lack of shared knowledge. Some limitations have already been mentioned, in the lexical treatment of 'dum', and in the semantic choice of articles. Other limitations are more elusive, in the formal properties of the

language, referential chains and use of connectors.

Formal properties: The appropriate use of prepositions was difficult to assess.

- 1 The stratification or stability *to (of?)* the water column which prevents...
- 2 It requires the entire computational domain must be covered by the length scale of the dissipation range *with (in?)* the order of 0.001m.
- 3 ..it is important to represent the role of internal waves *on (in?)* transferring the energy..
- 4 Such individual processes are closely related *with (to?)* turbulent mixing...

In each of the above examples the prepositions were be considered to be infelicitous, and the preferred option is shown in brackets. However, recommendations for change could not be made confidently, as the possibility had to be considered that there could be discipline specific uses of language in which the student's chosen form could be correct.

A greater limitation lay in judging the meaningful relationships between sentences. Where writer and reader share a specialized body of knowledge, the writer can confidently assume that the reader is able to infer certain meaningful relationships. A non-specialized example is:

Dr Stanley was awarded a large grant. Child health is rapidly improving in this State.

These two sentences have totally different sentence topics. Meaningful interpretation involves the knowledge that Dr Stanley is at the forefront of child health research. The reader who shares that knowledge will have no difficulty in building a bridge between the sentences.

In the engineering text prepared for the conference presentation, there are cases in which the non-specialist reader may find it difficult if not impossible to judge whether adjoining sentences are adequately linked.

Point (i) The field is not isotropic. Lakes experiencing moderate climates develop some degree of thermal stratification.

With no understanding of the term 'isotropic', it is not possible to establish the function and relevance of the second sentence. It might serve as 'in other words', 'for example', 'this is because'. Without shared knowledge it is not possible to make the necessary, and possibly not unreasonable inferences required to link the two sentences. This limitation impacts on the ability to suggest the appropriate use of connectors.

Other examples of a non-specialist reader's limitations come from the student's thesis, in which the same topic is explained in much greater detail. It became apparent that this in-depth treatment of the subject posed even greater challenges to linguistic analysis. In each of the following, the second sentence appears to offer a complete change of topic:

- 1 By this assumption, it is possible to treat the vertical variables independent of the horizontal variation. *The Coriolis parameter* is taken into account since the lake domain is large enough to be influenced by the earth rotation.
- 2 The (Eulerian Langrangian Method) uses Langrangian concept in the Eulerian computational grid system to represent desirable features of the fluid motions. *Upwind finite differences* is used for discretizing the convective terms.....

The new sentence topics (in italics) are referents totally new to the discourse. They can only be presumed to have a reasonable and relevant association with the preceding text, and would be coherent to a knowledgeable reader.

It is also difficult to judge if the use of a particular connector is appropriate:

- 1 The energy density E is calculated based on the given parameters and stored in the corresponding bin located at the centroid of the control volume in Submodel-1. *Thus*, the directional internal waves energy spectra is explicitly stored.
2. In Part 1, the model simulated a laboratory experiment conducted in a cavity, *therefore* internal waves reflected on the horizontal bottom or the vertical walls.

The logic and truth value of these statements must be taken at face value by the non-specialist reader, for whom the second sentence does not logically follow the first.

Another limitation lies in the establishment of referential chains of coherence, which may be difficult to follow where synonymous referring expressions are used. In the thesis, for example, a sentence beginning "Since *this code.....*", follows two paragraphs headed "Energy Transfer Scale by Internal Waves" in which certain assumptions are introduced in mathematical terms. The deictic "this code" may be inappropriate, and certainly has no referent for the reader who has no understanding of the previous passage.

At a lexico-semantic and syntactic level, the text of the thesis is also more difficult to evaluate and correct because of lack of knowledge and a lack of shared vocabulary:

1. The plausible generating *region have* been focused on at the base of the SML....
2. The isotherms indicate the existence of oscillating motions with period of the order of 60 hours. The oscillations *are phased out* after several periods due to no external forces after 48 hours.

In example 1, without appropriate knowledge, it is impossible to know whether this should be 'region has', or 'regions have'. Similarly, in example 2, these sentences follow a rather narrative section written in the past tense. The present

tense seems wrong in that context, but the reader needed specialized knowledge to know whether it should read “the oscillations phased out”, or “were phased out”. The different choices involve an important difference of meaning, depending on whether oscillations ‘phase out’ on their own, or require an agent.

Limitations of analysis therefore seem to be greatest where the text treats this specialized subject in detail. In the thesis, at sentence level, only the most obvious errors of syntax and semantics could be corrected. Local coherence between sentences was difficult to judge, for topic flow or logical connection.

## CONCLUSION

From this study of an text in the discipline of Engineering, it has been possible to locate and define some of the areas in which an Applied Linguist can contribute to the analysis of coherence. Regardless of the specialized content, it is possible to identify barriers to coherence that lie in the areas of global, meso- and local levels of topic organisation. It is also possible to identify formal, lexico-semantic and syntactic errors that may impede the reader’s comprehension of the text.

Limitations to the Applied Linguist’s analysis lie in the lack of shared knowledge between the writer and the non-specialist reader. This lack of knowledge impacts on features of lexical choice, reference (a/an, the), and of syntax (prepositions, subject/verb agreement) It also affects the establishment of referential chains of coherence, and judgements concerning the appropriate use of connectors.

It was apparent that as the topic became more detailed and specialized, the difficulties of analysis increased, and the lack of shared knowledge more gravely affected judgements on the coherence of the text.

For the conference presentation, the final judgement, however, rested with the student. He acknowledged all the corrections offered to him, and with the exception of decisions on article use, incorporated all the suggested amendments in the final draft of his presentation. The revised text was considerably more coherent than when first written.

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# Language Characteristics of the Examination Essays by Dental Students

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Students in the Faculty of Dentistry include native speakers of English, Australian residents for whom English is a second language, and Malay (ESL) students on government scholarships. Examination essays written by first and second year students have been rated on the basis of coherence, by two dentists and two applied linguists. The high and low rated essays were then compared to elucidate the characteristics of language use in the two groups. In addition, the low-rated essays were further analysed to discover whether all low-rated writers shared the same problems, or whether some were peculiar to the Malay ESL students. Analysis of the essays is both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis addresses the frequency of use of anaphoric language items (eg. articles), logical connectors, initial sentence elements and the creation of local and global strands of coherence. Qualitative analysis looks at the particular use of these items and their use by students with different language backgrounds.

This paper presents a study designed to define language features of coherence that are valued in the writing of examination essay answers. It is a central concern of the Conference, and of this study, to define the problems of literacy which are unique to second language learners, and those that are shared by all tertiary level students. The study to be reported examines particular language characteristics of essays written in answer to examination questions by students in the Faculty of Dentistry. The aims are two-fold: first to define some of the differences in language use between high- and low-rated essay answers, and second to examine the low-rated essays to establish whether Native Speakers (NS), Non-native speakers (NNS) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students display the same, or different problems.

Essay answers to five examination questions given to first and second year dental students have been rated with respect to their coherence. A selected group of essays of high and low rating have been studied closely to establish the features that characterise each group. Quantitative analysis of specific features has been followed by more qualitative analysis of the low rated essays.

## BACKGROUND

A text is coherent when “a reader understands the function of each succeeding unit of text in the development of its overall or global meaning.” (Wikborg, 1990, p133). This definition makes it clear that the writing of a text is a communicative act, and it must be processed and comprehended by the reader. The reader brings to the task a set of expectations concerning the genre, form and structure of text that will guide and assist the reconstruction of meaning (Swales, 1990). It follows, therefore, that there will be a number of features in the text that will assist the reader. Some characteristics of good writing have been identified, and it has been suggested that the greater or lesser frequency of occurrence of certain language items will affect the quality of the text (Evensen, 1990, Neuner, 1987; Witte & Faigley, 1981, 1983).

An alternative point of view has been presented by Brown and Yule (1983), who suggest that textual coherence is not a product of specific language features. They maintain that it is the reader’s normal assumption that a text will be coherent. The natural effort of hearers and readers alike is to attribute relevance and coherence to the text they encounter until they are forced not to (Brown and Yule, 1983, p66). They therefore suggested that coherence does not rely upon overt textual features, but rather, that there may be features which prevent the reader from constructing a coherent message.

At a sentence level of text, the first quantified studies of textual coherence were those based on the study of cohesion devices, proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). They identified features such as lexical reiteration and collocation, co-reference, and conjunction as formal lexico-grammatical means of creating cohesive ties within a written text. Whilst cohesion does not in itself create coherence, it may be considered to make an essential contribution to it (Carrell, 1984). Witte and Faigley (1981) studied the frequency of cohesive ties in a small number of high- and low-rated essays and found that high-rated essays had a greater number of cohesive ties than low-rated essays. High-rated essays contained a greater number of conjunctions, lexical collocations and referential ties, whilst low-rated essays tended to rely upon lexical reiteration. On the other hand, Neuner (1987) examined a number of studies of cohesion and concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that counts of individual cohesive ties give a valid indication of textual coherence. Also at the inter- and intra-sentential level, Evensen (1990) suggested that of the different types of conjunction, a greater number of logical connectors was characteristic of higher quality essays.

At the syntactic level, Lautamatti (1987) examined features of writing, which she maintained contributed to textual coherence. Analysing one text, she studied properties of Initial Sentence Elements (ISEs) and topic flow. ISEs referred to “the initially placed discourse material in sentences, whatever its form or type” (p91). The ISE could take a number of forms, and serve a number of functions. Lautamatti distinguished five sentence types according to whether the ISE, ‘mood’ (or grammatical) subject and topical subject coincided or not, noting that when the ISE was separate from the grammatical subject of the sentence, it

could serve a number of functions such as discourse connective, logical connector, modality marker or commentary. As such, the ISE could function as what she termed 'non-topic' material which served to organise the information bearing or 'topic' material of the text.

Givon (1993) is also concerned with the grammatical forms and choices that a speaker/writer makes in order to create coherent communication. He has characterised syntactic alternatives according to their function in the discourse. From this point of view, initially placed adverbial and prepositional phrases, and subordinate adverbial or conditional clauses serve discourse functions in the discourse, relating to interclausal coherence. Givon suggests that fronting devices of grammar serve to attract the reader's attention, and that information placed early in the sentence is more readily memorized, stored and retrieved. Both scholars therefore suggest that initial sentence elements are an important constituent of coherent texts.

Topic management and topic flow is also an important element of discourse coherence. Early studies of Functional Sentence Perspective (Danes, 1974; Firbas, 1982) were concerned with the sentence as message, that is, with the placement of old and new information in the sentence. Old information was considered to be that which the hearer/reader could identify from the preceding text, or could reasonably be identified from shared knowledge. Thus, the topic of a sentence, 'what the sentence is about', was considered to be information that was readily identified by the reader, i.e. 'old'. The new information was that which was predicated about the topic. It was considered that for successful communication, the topic (identifiable/old information) would precede the comment, or new information. It follows, therefore, that when an unidentifiable referent encoding new information occurs at the beginning of the sentence, the reader will have greater difficulty in processing that sentence and making it coherent in the context of the discourse.

To examine the properties of topic flow in essays, Witte (1983) examined text revisions rated for coherence. He found that the low-rated texts had a higher number of sentence topics than high-rated texts, and suggested that the writers had greater difficulty in controlling topic structures. The higher number of sentence topics indicates a greater number of topic changes, and therefore a lesser topic depth than that found in high-rated essays.

With regard to global coherence, as distinct from local coherence, the concern is to identify features of the text that signal discourse organisation. At this level, Givon (1993) is concerned with the ways in which discourse, or thematic coherence, is created. He considers thematic coherence to be comprised of a number of coherence strands. Such strands may be of referential, temporal, spatial or action continuity, marked overtly in the discourse. Organising devices may function locally, between adjacent clauses, or globally across larger text structures, and may refer either cataphorically or anaphorically, or both. A global strand of coherence functions to establish meaningful links across the entire text, by such means as co-reference, 'pointers' to superstructure (Evensen, 1990), temporal sequence, overt or covert cataphoric and anaphoric reference. In

recognising global or local coherence strands, it is the function of the language features rather than any particular syntactic or lexical choice that is paramount.

Linguistic features of discourse coherence may therefore be considered to operate at different levels: from a functional perspective there may global or local signals of discourse or thematic coherence, in syntax there may be grammatical choices that serve to 'front' material that may guide the reader in creating a coherent message, and at sentence level there may be cohesive ties of lexical repetition, collocation, co-reference or conjunction.

This study examines a number of characteristics of coherence in essays written under test conditions.

## METHOD

### SUBJECTS

The subjects of the study were 68 students of dentistry in their first and second year of study in the Dental School. Ages ranged from 18 to 32 years.

TABLE 1: SUBJECTS

	Malay ESL	Non-Native Speakers	Native Speakers
First year students	3	17	11
Second year students	5	19	13
Total	N = 68	36	24

Malay ESL students were those on Malay Government scholarships. They had completed secondary school in Malaysia and had attended a 6 month ELICOS course in Adelaide, prior to successful completion of one year of study in the Faculty of Science as a prerequisite to Dentistry.

Non-Native Speakers (NNS) were defined as those whose first language was a language other than English, and who were resident in Australia. All but one had completed at least two years of secondary schooling in Australia, and had been resident for at least three years. One first-year student had been in Australia for only one year and had limited knowledge of English. The NNS students came from a variety of language backgrounds:

Vietnamese	10	Japanese	1
Chinese	10	Malay	1
German	3	Polish	1

Farsi	3	Portuguese	1
Arabic	1	Russian	1
Hindi	1	Tagalog	1
Japanese	1	Tamil	1
Malay	1	Urdu	1

N = 36

Native Speakers were predominantly Australian-born monolingual speakers of English, but included in this category were Singaporean, Sri Lankan and Australian born students who learned English together with another language in a bilingual family situation.

Dental students were selected for research for a number of reasons:

- i) All students are high-achievers; only 35 are selected for the course each year, on the basis of high grades in first year Science at University.
- ii) Students are inexperienced writers; their previous studies have been dominated by Science subjects such as Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics in which there are limited requirements for extended written texts.
- iii) Almost all assessment of the students is made under examination conditions which afford limited opportunity to plan and edit text.
- iii) Unity of assessment; all students study the same subjects and write answers to the same essay prompts, as there is no choice of question offered in examinations.
- iv) There is profound concern amongst the staff of the Dental School about the writing abilities of the students.

#### PROCEDURE

Three essays were obtained from the second year students, and two from the first years. The essay prompts were as follows:

1. Describe the effects on the oral cavity of an absence of saliva.  
(2nd years, Nov 1994) Exam N = 34
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages to an organism in being able to mount an inflammatory response?  
(2nd years, April 1995) In class test N = 13
3. Discuss how the dental tissues enable teeth to perform their function  
(1st years, April, 1995) In class test N = 31
4. How does saliva contribute to the maintenance and health of the teeth and oral tissues?  
(1st years, June 1995) Exam N = 32

5. What do you understand by the term Resolution when used with reference to acute inflammation?

Describe the vascular and cellular processes that precede resolution of an acute inflammatory reaction of the skin.

(2nd years, June 1995) Exam N = 34

The distribution of the essays according to the classification of ESL, NNS and NS groups is shown in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF ESSAYS**

	Malay ESL	NNS	NS	Total
Essay 1	4	17	13	34
Essay 2	4	7	2	13
Essay 3	3	16	12	31
Essay 4	3	17	12	32
Essay 5	4	17	13	34
	18	74	52	144

All essays were typed and given to four raters. Raters were asked to rank the essays on a scale of 1-5, making a judgement as to whether the essay was a "readable, well-structured, logically argued and coherent answer to the question". Two of the raters were members of the Dental staff and two were applied linguists. Raters were not trained, but asked to use their own judgement. This lack of training was deliberate, in order to establish what the dental staff intuitively felt was a 'good' piece of writing. Dental staff were asked to base their judgement on the qualities of writing, rather than on the accuracy or completeness of the subject matter.

Inter-rater reliability was assessed using the Spearman rank order correlation, and the results are shown in Table 3. All correlations are significant.

It is notable, in Table 3, that although significant at the .02 level and better, the correlations are not high. Of particular concern is the low correlation between the two dentists, which appeared to be due to one dentist being unable to separate textual from content issues. Therefore, in order to select the high- and low-rated texts for comparison, essays were chosen only when the average rank of the essay was in the top or bottom 25%, and three of the four raters also ranked the essay in the top or bottom 25% of the whole group. In all, twenty essays fell into the high-rated group, and twenty-three essays were in the low-rated group. The distribution of high- and low-rated essays according to language group is shown below.

**TABLE 3: INTER-RATER RELIABILITY: SPEARMAN RANK ORDER CORRELATION**

Rater	Dentist 1	Dentist 2	Linguist 1	Linguist 2
Dentist 1	-	R = .19 p = .0253	R = .53 p = .0001	R = .28 p = .0008
Dentist 2		-	R = .36 p = .0001	R = .50 p = .0001
Linguist 1			-	R = .51 p = .0001
Linguist 2				-

**TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF HIGH- AND LOW- RATED ESSAYS**

	HIGH	LOW	MID
ESL	0	10	8
NNS	9	8	57
NS	11	5	36
TOTAL	20	23	101

It can be seen that approximately 50% of the low-rated essays are by the ESL students, with NNS and NS making up the remainder. In the high-rated group, there are no ESL essays, and NS and NNS writers are of almost even distribution.

**ANALYSIS**

Analysis of the essays was in two stages. First, high- and low-rated essays were compared quantitatively in an attempt to establish defining language characteristics of the two groups. Next, the low-rated essays were examined qualitatively to identify particular textual problems and relate them to the language background of the students.

The variables for the quantitative comparison were derived from language characteristics of coherence proposed by earlier researchers.

**1. INTER-AND INTRA-SENTENCE VARIABLES:**

*Variable 1* co-referential cohesive ties. Any item that relies on a previously mentioned referent for its interpretation. eg definite article, demonstrative, pronoun, comparative. It should be noted that generic and unique referent uses of the definite article were to be

omitted from the analysis.

*Variable 2* logical connectors. Inter- or intra-sentence connectors that indicate causality, eg. thus, therefore, because, for this reason, so, as.

Witte and Faigley (1981) suggested that high-rated essays displayed a greater number of all forms of cohesive ties. Evensen (1990) suggested that a greater number of logical connectors were likely to be found in high-rated essays. These variables are examined to establish whether in this particular genre of writing, the frequency of particular language items is a distinguishing feature.

## 2. SYNTAX:

*Variable 3* Initial Sentence Elements (ISEs). The operative definition of ISE differs from that offered by Lautamatti. She defined an ISE as “the initially placed sentence material, whatever its form or type” ( p91). To focus more particularly on the attention orienting function of the fronted material (Givon, 1993), the definition was altered to: ‘any initially placed sentence material which precedes the main information-bearing clause’.

Examples from the essays are:

e.g. Without saliva, there would be no lubrication.....

In the case of chronic inflammation, the host is subjected to....

During inflammation, there is formation of exudate....

The disadvantage is that the injured area becomes red.

Following Lautamatti’s suggestion, it would be expected that high-rated essays have a greater number of ISEs.

## 3. INFORMATION FLOW:

*Variable 4* new topics. The operational definition of ‘new topic’ is that it represents new information in the grammatical subject slot of the sentence. New information is a referent with zero discourse anaphora. The frequency of new sentence topics is understood to be a measure of topic depth, whereby a greater number of new topics indicates a lesser topic depth. Witte and Faigley (1983) predicted that low-rated essays had a higher number of new topics.

## 4. DISCOURSE ORGANISATION:

The functional approach of Givon (1993) is of relevance, as his notion of ‘strands of coherence’ allows for the organisation of cataphoric and anaphoric language items to form a pattern and sequence within the discourse.

eg. Cataphoric establishment of topics:

Para 2 The dental tissues which make up a tooth include *dentine which*



*makes up the bulk of the tooth, enamel - the outer calcified layer covering the crown portion of the tooth, the dental pulp - which contains the blood vessels and nerve supply to the tooth, and, finally, the gingiva or gum tissue, into which the tooth is anchored.*

Para 3 *The outer enamel layer is almost as hard as bone.*

Para 4. *The dentine is what forms the bulk or body of the tooth.*

Para 5 The tooth is a living tissue ... that are housed in the very centre of the tooth, in the dental pulp.

Para 6. *Finally, the gum tissue serves as the anchoring point for the tooth.*

Para 7. *Thus it can be seen that each of the dental tissues, the enamel, dentine, dental pulp and gingiva all have vital roles in enabling teeth to perform their function.* (NNS59)

In the above example, pointers and chained referents are marked in italics. The cataphoric organising statement introduces a number of potential topics which the experienced reader will expect to arise in the ensuing discussion. The paragraph topics 'enamel' and 'dentine' in both paragraph and sentence initial position operate anaphorically with a lexical tie to the earlier organising statement, and cataphorically to form a topic framework for the following information, that in this case spans four sentences. The expectation and pattern established in paragraphs 2 - 4 is violated in paragraph 5, where there is a delayed establishment of the next topic, the 'pulp'. Paragraph 6 establishes a closing pointer and the next paragraph topic, and Para 7 signals the conclusion. The opening logical 'thus' indicates the difference between what Evensen (1990) terms a logical connector and a discourse pointer. A logical connector functions between successive propositions and a discourse pointer refers to a broader discourse scope.

The above example illustrates Givon's notion of a discourse level strand of coherence that operates globally to create a unified text. Other strands of coherence operate locally. For example:

- Para 1: S1 There are *two types* of inflammation reactions.  
 2 There are *acute inflammation and chronic inflammation*.  
 3 *Acute inflammation* is.....  
 4 Basically, *chronic inflammation* is .... (ESL5)

The italicised items operate in the same manner as the before, except that the topic ends at the paragraph boundary. Neither of the two topics are taken further into the discourse. Paragraph 2 begins "There are many causes of inflammation response" and the same pattern is continued. In this particular essay, in successive paragraphs, there are two chains of coherence operating locally.

This lengthy explanation serves to introduce the final variable for quantitative

analysis, the local and global strands of cohesion.

*Variable 5* a) local strands of cohesion. Those strands of cohesion that serve to organise information within a discrete unit of the text, and independent of any other organising principle.

b) global strands of cohesion. Those strands of cohesion that serve to organise the entire text, including the essential component of an initial statement that functions cataphorically to introduce succeeding discourse pointers.

To summarise, the five variables for analysis are as follows:

- 1 Coreferential ties
- 2 Logical connectors
- 3 Initial Sentence Elements
- 4 New sentence topics
- 5 a) local coherence strands
- b) global discourse strands.

The number of all variables was counted, after close analysis of the high- and low-rated texts. For the purposes of comparison, and to compensate for different essay length, the raw counts of co-referential ties, logical connectors, ISEs and new topics were standardised for occurrence per 200 words. The strands of coherence remained as raw scores, as the establishment of such strands was independent of essay length. The frequency of occurrence in both groups of essays was compared using a t-test. The results are shown in Table 5.

Of the sentence level linguistic variables, there was no significant difference between the two groups of essays with regard to the frequency of co-referential ties and of logical connectors. This finding supports that of Neuner (1987), who found that it was not the frequency of cohesive ties that was important, but the establishment of cohesive strands and the scope over which they operated.

Initial Sentence Elements proved significant in defining the differences between the essay groups, but not in the predicted direction. The results show that low-rated essays had a significantly greater number of this particular category of syntactic form. This surprising result requires further examination of the functions served by the ISEs, and the appropriateness of their use.

The results show strongly that the defining quantitative differences lie in the number of new topics and the number of local and global strands of coherence. The low-rated essays contained a greater number of new topics, as predicted, and, surprisingly, a greater number of local strands of coherence.

High-rated essays exhibited a greater incidence of establishment and maintenance of global coherence strands. The maximum number of such strands was 2, yet all high-rated essays contained at least one global strand of coherence. Only 4 of the 23 low-rated essays contained the minimal 1 global coherence strand.

TABLE 5: COMPARISON OF HIGH AND LOW RATED ESSAYS

t-test				
	t =	significance p (2-tailed)	significance p (1-tailed)	
		H > L	H < L	H < L
no words	-4.68	.0001**		
co-referential ties	.38	.7		
logic connectors	.45	.66		
ISEs	1.24		.22	.1116*
new topics	3.48		.0012**	.0006**
local coherence strands	1.29		.2045	.1023*
global coherence strands	-6.9	.0001**		

It is apparent from these results that high-rated essays are distinguished from low-rated essays, not by the frequency of use of particular linguistic forms or syntactic structures, but by the establishment and maintenance of coherent topic structures throughout the discourse, that is, a global coherence strand and a low incidence of unpredictable sentence topics. On the other hand, low-rated essays tend to have no global strand of coherence, a higher number of new sentence topics, a higher number of initial sentence elements, and an over reliance on local discourse coherence strands. These findings indicate a support for the approach to coherence given by Brown and Yule (1983). Rather than focus on particular language features that quantitatively enhance coherence, they maintain that the reader seeks to attribute coherence and relevance to each ensuing item in the text, and that coherence only breaks down when there are features that prevent the reader from constructing a coherent message.

In the second stage of analysis, the low-rated essays were closely examined to identify what might be termed 'barriers' to the establishment of coherence by the reader. Six such barriers were identified, and served to distinguish problems which were displayed only by the Malay ESL students, and those which they shared with the NNS and NS low-rated writers. The barriers were as follows:

#### SENTENCE LEVEL BARRIERS

##### 1. *Lexico-semantic and grammatical problems*

Of the low rated essays, 80% of the ESL essays exhibited a level of grammatical error that would make processing by the reader more difficult:

eg. Following vaso-constriction, is the long-live vasodilation of artery and arteriolar which sequence is opening capillaries sphincter to

cause the dilation of capillaries and venules. (ESL4)

Of the low-rated NNS essays, 45% also displayed some consistent level of syntactic or lexico-semantic problems that could cause difficulty for the reader at sentence level. However, severe problems of comprehensibility were exhibited by only one NNS writer. The problems were such that it was difficult to interpret each sentence, distracting the reader from the task of creating a more global meaning.

eg. Enamel is a bother between outside word and other dental tissues, such a dentin is more gentle and sensitive (NNS.50)

This student had spent only one year in Australia and had never taken formal instruction in English as a Foreign Language. Her writing problems at sentence level distracted from what was actually quite a well organised essay. She had been admitted because of prior medical training, but withdrew during the first Semester.

## 2. *Unpredictable sentence topics*

This barrier is reflected in the significantly higher number of new topics revealed in the quantitative analysis. New or unpredictable information as sentence subject disturbs the maintenance of topic focus, and distracts the reader's attention. Problems of this nature were evident in 50% of ESL, 12% of NNS and 60% of NS essays, suggesting that it is a problem shared by inexperienced writers regardless of language background.

eg. S3 *The outer most layer we can easily see is enemal which is hard and white or translucent in colour depends on the thickness of enemal.*  
 S4 *Hydroyapiptite crystal make up the calcified part of the enemal and gives a key-hole shape like apperance under light microscope.* S5  
*Enemal contats the food and oral cavity when eating.* S6 *The cusps in molar and sarp shapes in canine enable teeth to cut and grind food.*  
 S7 *Also it protect the underlaying tissue dentin and pulp from temperature and contact sensitivity.* (NNS52)

It is apparent that the writer of this passage intended the paragraph topic to be 'enamel'. However the sentence topic of S4 is totally unpredictable and new to the discourse. S5 returns to the topic 'enamel' but S6 again changes the topic to refer to 'shape'. S7 returns to 'enamel', through the use of the pronoun 'it'. This co-referential tie refers back to S5 after an apparent change of topic.

The above example is from a NNS writer who had attended the final two years of secondary schooling in Australia, but whose earlier schooling had been in Chinese. As with the first 'barrier', these problems tended to distract the reader from forming a coherent message in what was otherwise a well formed discourse, with an organised global strand of coherence.

## DISCOURSE LEVEL BARRIERS

'Barriers' at this level interact with the broader finding that low-rated essays mostly fail to establish or maintain a global discourse strand of coherence.

3. *Failure to employ the essay genre*

A number of writers made no attempt to use the essay genre of introduction, development and conclusion. Their answers, particularly in response to Essay 1, tended to be in a list format.

- eg. Absence of saliva production
  - i. lack of amylase (an enzyme for starch digestion)
    - > starch cannot be broken down and can only be done primarily in small intestine.
    - > not efficient enough for digestion of starch.
  - ii lack of lubricant (due to its fluid characteristic)
    - > difficult to swallow hard and dry food (need to be soften and moisture first)
    - > difficult to speak. (hydration). (ESL3)

Whilst this example is from an ESL writer, the problem was more characteristic of low-rated essays by NNS (25 % of the low-rated essays) and NS writers (45% of the low-rated essays). In each case there was no organising statement to introduce the discourse topic or establish a relationship between the listed sub-topics. This problem was shown only in 10% of the low-rated ESL essays, indicating that most students had learned the need for an essay format.

4. *Failure to create a coherent link between the title and the essay*

In this 'barrier' there may be an organising statement that is not consistent with the essay title of the examination question. This failure may be either total or partial.

a) total failure

- eg. What are the adv. & disadv. to an org. in being able to mount an inflammatory response

Inflammatory response is one of the body reactions in response to injury. Generally the causative agents of inflammation are non-living and living organisms. *During inflammation*, there are a few changes happening to the damaged tissue. These changes include the vascular response, formation of inflammatory exudate and local sequelance of the inflammation. *Following tissue injury*, there is initially constriction of blood vessels. *Later* vasodilatation of the arterioles takes place and the

area of the inflamed tissue becomes warmer because of an increase in blood flow. The organisms that invades the body via the injury are contained in the area for the action of white blood cells on them the white blood cells number will increase in inflammatory response (ESL1)

At no point in the essay do the words 'advantage', or 'disadvantage' occur, so that the essay is entirely on the topic of the 'inflammatory response', and does not address the question. In this example, the reliance on ISEs to mark a local sequence of time can be noted.

b) partial failure

In this case there is an organising statement or introduction that refers to the title, but the development fails to fulfil the anticipated topic.

eg. Inflammation is a process whereby as a result of injury to tissue it is able to heal itself. This is important after surgery (sic) & trauma to the body.

Acute inflammation is an Immune response of the body to injury.  
The advantages in an organism to mount an immune response include:

1) As mentioned it is a healing mechanism of the body characterised by 5 signs & symptoms.

- a) redness
- b) pain
- c) swelling
- d) heat
- e) loss of function.

2) the irritating substance causing inflammation is removed from the body that leads to the healing process.

3) In mounting inflammation the presence of the signs & symptoms mentioned above are indicative of inflammation.

4) during the swelling process fluid leaves the blood vessel to enter to extravascular (NS27)

Of the list that follows the organising statement about 'advantages', only the information given in 2) looks like an advantage. The first point looks distinctly like a disadvantage, and the latter points simply describe the sequence of events that charts the development of inflammation. Although the introduction looked promising, the body of the essay did not realise the anticipated global pattern.

Problems in this category were exhibited by 50% of the low-rated ESL, 25% of the low-rated NNS and 60% of the low-rated NS essays. This again indicates that it is a characteristic shared by inexperienced writers, rather than a particular problem for second-language learners.

5. *Failure of the introduction to establish the pattern or relevance of sub-topics*

In these cases, the essay genre was employed, and a link made to the essay prompt. However, the introduction was minimal and of such a general nature that no potential sub-topics were introduced. That is, the cataphoric predictive function of the introduction was lacking. The following examples compare introductions from a low- and a high-rated essay on the same topic.

Low-rated:

Dental tissues all connect with each other and work together as a one system that helps to perform the teeth function. (NNS.50)

cf

High-rated:

In humans, the main function of the teeth is to enable food to be reduced to a consistency that can then be broken down by the digestive system.

This function is performed, not by the teeth alone, but by the cooperation of a whole host of other tissues *such as the bones which support the teeth (ie alveolar bone, bones of the maxilla, mandible & cranium), the mucosa, the muscles, and the connective tissues.* (NNS.67)

The low-rated example fails to perform the cataphoric function that will clearly establish a discourse level strand of coherence. The high-rated example introduces a series of noun phrases that become paragraph topics in the body of the essay. The low-rated example is by an NNS writer, however, the same problem is exhibited by the ESL writer who used the introduction to establish only a local coherence strand, which terminated at the end of the first paragraph:

S1 There are *two types* of inflammation reactions. 2 There are *acute inflammation and chronic inflammation.* Acute inflammation is..... ..3 Basically, *chronic inflammation* is .... (ESL.5)

In this case, the cataphoric function of noun phrases in the introduction was fulfilled at local level rather than global level.

Problems of this nature were displayed by 50% of the low-rated ESL, 50% of the low-rated NNS, and 60% of the low-rated NS essays. Again this indicates a problem shared by inexperienced writers.

#### 6. *Pseudo-organisers*

This is a term coined to refer to sentences with an apparent cataphoric function which is not realised in the ensuing discourse. This final barrier appears to be the one most characteristic of the ESL low-rated writers. It was not a problem manifest in NNS or NS low-rated essays. Of the low-rated ESL essays, 50% had an introduction in which noun phrases served to open up potential sub-topics which did not occur in the ensuing text. Two examples show how this

distracts the reader who has unrealised expectations of what will follow in the text.

eg. 1.

There are various kind of dental tissues such as the *enamel, dentin, pulp and tongue*. Each of them has their importance to enable teeth to perform their function. Teeth functions are to *cut, shear and crush food*. There are *2 parts in the dental tissue: the supporting part and the functioning part*.

The supporting tissues lies in the *gingiva, cementum, periodontal ligament and connective tissue around the root of the teeth*. The connective tissue .....Cementum, and periodontal ligament.... (ESL36)

Potential topics are shown in italics. In the first paragraph there are three potential topic introductions, and only the last of them is fulfilled. The reader is forced to abandon the preceding two sets of anticipated topics. The opening statement of paragraph 2 gives a cataphoric expectation for a coherence strand at the local level. This is violated by the following sentence which treats the last sub-topic first, and eventually the paragraph fails to refer to the 'gingiva' at all.

eg. 2

An organism has *the advantages in being able to mount an inflammatory reactions*. When there is any harmful stimulus which causes tissue injuries such as cutting, local mediatory within the body will cause the blood vessels to dilate. As the blood vessels dilated, the blood flow thru the arterioles....In response to that...

(ESL5)

The text following the statement about 'advantages' fails to make any further reference to these advantages, and only treats the temporal sequence of inflammation.

Of the twenty-three low-rated essays, only the ESL writers exhibit these 'pseudo-organisers' which appear to create a barrier to coherence. Other low-rated ESL essays either did not use the essay format, or relied on local organisation only. Pseudo-organisers would appear to be a particular problem displayed by these ESL students, who have been taught the characteristics of the essay format, but who have failed to appreciate the function Of the introductory statements so that the body of the text does not conform to the apparent discourse theme and sub-topic structure.

## CONCLUSION

The study sought to discover the linguistic features that distinguish between high -and low-rated essays written under examination conditions by first and second year students in the School of Dentistry. Further, by examining low-



rated essays, it was intended to differentiate problems that were shared by all students, or were characteristic of a particular language background group.

Quantitative analysis indicated that there were no differences between the high- and low-rated essays with regard to the frequency of co-referential coherence ties or logical connectors. Syntactically, the low-rated essays had a significantly higher frequency of Initial Sentence Elements, in which the initial discourse material was distinct from the main information bearing clause. They also had a significantly higher number of unexpected (new to the discourse) topics and local coherence strands. The higher frequency of new topics reflects a diversion of attention from the principal topic of a paragraph or episode. The higher frequency of local coherence strands indicates that poorer writers have a greater reliance on local organisation of information than on global coherence. It is also a feature which may interact with the higher number of ISEs which tend to signal temporal sequence or sentence orientation.

High-rated essays were distinguished not by particular lexical or syntactic forms, but only by the establishment of clear strands of coherence at the discourse level. It would appear that this is the primary basis of judgement for both dental and linguist rater-readers, contributing to their capacity to construct a coherent message from a text.

Analysis of the low-rated essays sought to identify features of writing that created barriers to the creation of coherence. Six types of barrier were discerned. Of these, lexico-semantic problems appeared to be fundamental, for the NNS student with the greatest of these problems, in fact exhibited a good command of discourse structure, if only the reader were able to easily comprehend the text at sentence level. Other barriers were shared, with NS, NNS and ESL writers failing to employ the essay genre, to create a coherent link with the essay title, to establish a pattern of relevance of sub-topics, or to create a predictable flow of sentence topics. The feature that distinguished the ESL writers was the presence of what has been termed 'pseudo-organisers', in which potential sub-topics are introduced to the reader, but where the following discourse does not refer anaphorically to the anticipatory statement, and thus fails to create a discourse level strand of coherence. It would appear that ESL tuition has been successful in encouraging use of the essay genre, and in the necessity to have an introduction with a general organising statement. However, the writers of low-rated essays have failed to fully understand the function of such statements, which, if unfulfilled, can serve to confuse or distract the reader.

The analysis of examination essays of Dental students has clearly demonstrated that coherence in writing cannot be defined by the greater or lesser frequency of the particular linguistic forms of cohesion or syntax that were studied. Rather, it can be defined by the establishment of clear global strands of coherence and clear topic organisation at discourse and sentence levels. These properties were exhibited in high-rated essays written by both NS and NNS writers. Of the six 'barriers' to coherence that were identified, four were shared by all writers of low-rated essays. Grammatical and lexico-semantic errors were displayed by

ESL and some NNS writers, and 'pseudo-organisers' were a feature of ESL writing only; possibly an unanticipated product of ESL instruction. When it is recalled that 101 essays in the mid-rated group are not maximally coherent, it is clear that many of the problems are common to all students, and could be addressed by instruction, practice and feedback to clearly define the parameters of effective writing in this discipline.

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# Cross-Disciplinary and Discipline-Specific Discourse Features in Student Academic Writing

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This paper addresses one of the conference themes, viz. "Is an Applied Linguist able to analyse discipline specific discourse?" The focus will be on tertiary student writing. It will be argued that applied linguists can, indeed, successfully analyse discipline specific discourse up to a point. They can focus on discourse properties such as macrostructure, discourse structure signalling, genre requirements, cohesion, logical/rhetorical structure, content structure and the contribution of these properties to readability and comprehensibility. Such analysis can lead to valuable insights concerning the classification of both discipline specific and cross-disciplinary discourse features and thus inform further research on academic writing by both native and non-native speakers of English. However, it must be recognised that there are limitations on the extent to which applied linguists are able to assess the writer's skill in fulfilling the discipline specialist reader's expectations concerning content.

This paper is aimed at addressing one of the conference themes, viz. "Is an Applied Linguist able to analyse discipline specific discourse?" To be more precise, it will be assumed that the question can be answered in the affirmative in general terms and what will be discussed are some further questions which arise out of such affirmation. These are: (1) **Why** do it? For what purposes and with what motivations? (2) **How** can it be done? What are some of the analytical approaches that may be used? (3) What are the **limitations** of such analysis? and, finally, (4) **How to overcome** or minimise such limitations?

Before considering these questions, two qualifications need to be made: (1) "applied linguist" in this paper will refer to "applied discourse analyst/ text linguist" since we are not concerned with strictly linguistic features of student writing in the usual sense and (2) we shall address the above questions exclusively from the point of view of student writing. That is, we will not consider the writings of academics for their peers: such as research articles and other published papers or papers in preparation.

Our arguments, theoretical framework, tentative conclusions and examples all arise from our research which is part of a major ongoing ARC funded collaborative research project entitled: "Framing Student Literacy- cross-cultural aspects of English communication skills in Australian University Settings". The universities participating are UWA, Curtin, Edith Cowan in Perth and Macquarie University in Sydney. The UWA team's task is to develop frameworks and diagnostic procedures which can be put to practical pedagogical use in pinpointing areas that may present problems to both Native Speaker (NS) and Non-Native Speaker (NNS) writers at various stages of their academic studies.

We will now turn to the questions posed:

(1) **Why** do it? For what purpose and with what motivations does the applied linguist analyse discipline specific discourse?

The motivations may be many and varied, but can perhaps be summarised as being on the whole either exploratory/ theoretical or pedagogical. The exploratory/ theoretical motivation may lead to 'discovering' features which are specific to particular disciplines, genres and tasks within those disciplines and to general taxonomies of components or features. The pedagogical motivation may lead to discovering problem areas, developing diagnostic measures and helping student writers improve the quality of their writing. In this paper we shall focus on analysis motivated by pedagogical considerations.

When using terms such as "diagnostic measures" and "improving the quality of student writing", one immediately comes up against a major theoretical problem, namely how to separate 'good student writing' from 'not-so-good student writing'. It has been a generally accepted view in the recent literature that value judgements relevant to academic/ scientific writing are affected by cultural, social, and institutional forces and can by no means be seen as 'universally valid' considerations (Freedman & Medway 1994). However, for the purposes of our research project - a pedagogically motivated study - we thought it necessary to find a set of criteria which were comparatively valid at least for **expository tertiary student writing in English**. After much deliberation we decided to base our judgements on the concept of **readability** which can perhaps be best described in Horning's words from her volume The Psycholinguistics of Readable Writing (1993:2):

...readers and writers meet in readable writing when the text itself incorporates the psycholinguistic features of **cohesion** and **redundancy**, the major characteristics that make possible **the connection of reader expectation and writer intention**.

However, such definition of readability raises many further questions, such as: Who is the reader? What does the reader expect? and What degrees of cohesion and redundancy are required of student writers? We shall return to these questions later in this paper, under the heading of **limitations**. For the moment, we shall bypass them and examine what may be readable or non-readable text for **any reader** - in other words we shall look at the properties of text that **obstruct**

**readability** and cause **coherence breaks** (Wikborg 1990) in poor student writing. This brings us to our second question:

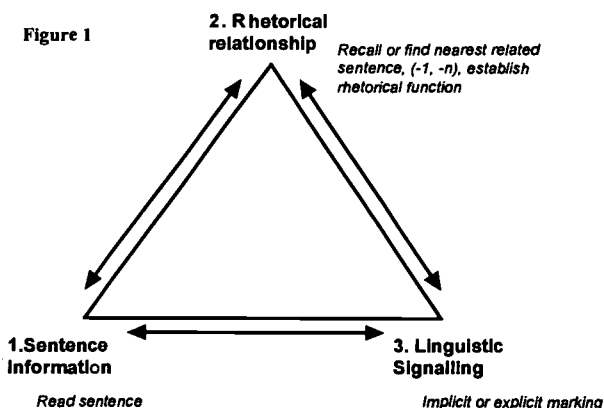
(2) **How** can it be done? What are the analytical approaches that may be used?

The textlinguistic literature of recent times offers the student writing analyst a wealth of ideas, concepts and analytical tools. These are too numerous to outline here in detail, though many of them have, of course, already been extensively discussed and reviewed at this conference. Perhaps it will suffice to remind ourselves of some of the major categories of contributions, those to the theory of cohesion (Halliday & Hasan 1976); to the theory of English texts in general (Martin 1992), to the theory of scientific writing (Halliday & Martin 1993); to rhetorical /relational structure theory in general (Mann & Thompson 1986 & 1988, Matthiessen & Thompson 1988, Mann & Matthiessen 1991); to academic genre theory (Swales 1990 ); to the theory of the process of writing (Witte & Cherry 1986); to information structuring (Gopen & Swan 1990 ); to topic theory (Givon 1983), to mention only some of the main trends. There have also been a number of teaching manuals aimed at improving student writing mainly for NNS writers (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley 1987, Trimble 1985, Swales & Feak 1994). However, as O'Brien (1995) has recently pointed out, tertiary student writing has rarely been studied in any detail by textlinguists. We hope that our research may make a modest contribution in this field by developing and adapting where necessary various textlinguistic approaches to the analysis of tertiary student writings in four disciplines (Anthropology, Zoology, Engineering and Accounting).

Our motivation in the research was to identify and locate problems areas in both NS and NNS student writing at different stages of undergraduate and graduate studies. As the project is still in progress, we cannot report definitive results, but we can briefly indicate some of the approaches which show promise.

Over the past two years we have been looking at texts from the point of view of macrostructure, paragraph structure, content distribution and intersentential relations. The procedure we have so far developed to the most advanced degree of elaboration is rhetorical/ relational mapping at intersentential level. Such mapping involves the identification of rhetorical acts actually found in the texts. Each sentence is examined to see what rhetorical function (if any) it fulfils in the text and how it relates to other sentences in the text.

Figure 1 shows the analytical procedure used is to read each sentence in the order the writer presents it, consider the information contained in the sentence, and look for connections between that sentence and the nearest sentence with which a relationship can be established. On the basis of this relationship the sentence is given a tentative rhetorical function label such as INTRODUCE, QUALIFY, EXEMPLIFY, DEFINE, EXPAND, SUPPORT or JUSTIFY (printed in upper case in the examples). The third step is to determine whether the linguistic signalling is consistent with the rhetorical function allocated. It needs to be noted here that we refer not only to explicit signals such as conjunctions but also to all other ways of signalling. Appropriate signalling



may, of course, take a number of other manifestations (cf. taxonomy by Evensen 1990). It may be lexically expressed, expressed by cohesive ties or grammatical choices, or indicated only by linear sequencing as in the following excerpt from an Anthropology essay:

In both Bindibu [sic] and Yintjingga society, hunting methods were developed to capitalise on the habits of the animals hunted (Lawrence 1969:52). (STATE) Thomson (1975:86) describes as almost uncanny, a Bindibu man's sudden examination of sand and digging out of a colony of dragon lizards. (EXEMPLIFY)

If the signalling is inconsistent with the information contained, or if relationships with earlier sentences cannot be established, or if a related sentence is too distant, then it is likely that a coherence break has occurred. Figure 2, an analysis from a Zoology lab. report, illustrates such a problem.

Zoology Lab Report, NS 1st yr 31102 Casein digestion in the mouse gut

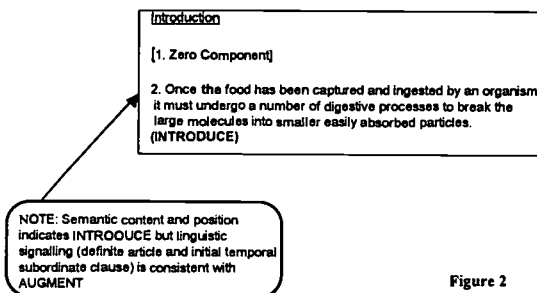


Figure 2

This example shows an anomalous relationship between sentence information, rhetorical function and linguistic signalling. Here the information contained in the first sentence is relevant to the nature of digestion in living organisms. This information, together with the position of the sentence, indicates that the rhetorical function of the sentence is to INTRODUCE. However, the signalling, viz. the use of the definite article and the initial subordinate temporal clause, is consistent more with the rhetorical function of AUGMENTING information already introduced. The structure which the writer has created is AUGMENTING a non-existing (zero) earlier sentence.

By allocating rhetorical function labels and tracing the relationship of each successive sentence to at least one earlier sentence, we can draw up rhetorical structure maps of larger sections of text. Such maps provide visual representation of the network of relationships which make up the text. They also enable us to locate particular areas where signalling problems occur as in Figure 3:

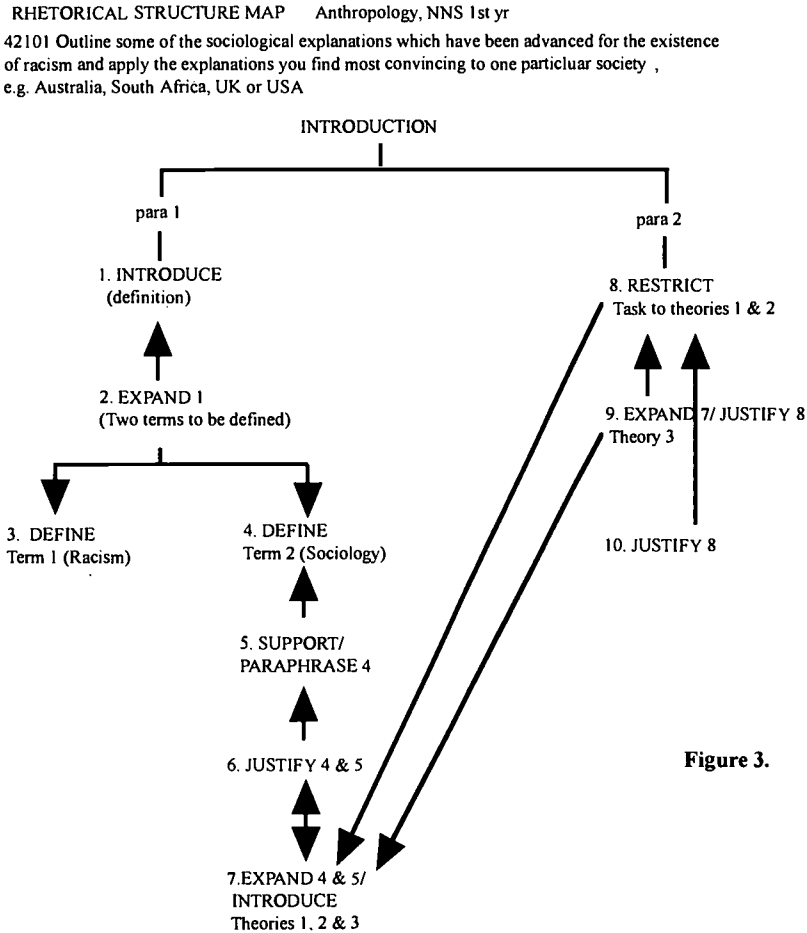


Figure 3.



The above figure presents a rhetorical structure map of the introduction to an Anthropology essay (see text excerpt in Appendix). The progression of the information in this text seems comparatively unproblematic to the reader, until sentences 8 - 10. The rhetorical function of the last sentence seems best labelled as a JUSTIFICATION of the argument in sentence 8, but its linguistic form (nevertheless) signals CONTRAST with sentence 9, which, in turn, is an EXPANSION of sentence 7. A phrase such as "At any rate" or "In any case" would enable the reader to perceive the rhetorical function of sentence 10 more clearly. A further improvement would be for sentence 9 and 10 to precede sentence 8, with sentence 8 being introduced by "therefore":

9. The Interactionalist approach of Weber is, regarding capitalism, very close to Marxism (Rex 1980:118) as he is in other ways close to Durkheim (Lecourt 1980:277).
10. At any rate, in contrast to Durkheim and Marx, Weber did not write extensively about racism and when he did only in an indirect way (1980:277).
8. Therefore, due to the length of the essay, I will concentrate mainly on a functionalist explanation and a Marxist explanation of racism because of their distinctiveness.

It should be noted that at times the discourse analyst does not know enough of the field to be certain whether his/her judgment of rhetorical function is valid. On such occasions the discourse analyst has to refer to the discipline specialist for clarification. This represents one of the limitations of the scope of the discourse analyst's inquiry. We shall return to a more extensive description of limitations later.

In addition to rhetorical structure mapping we have also carried out Content Distribution analysis. This has enabled us to see whether content information occurred in clusters or was distributed randomly throughout the text. It should be noted that we are using the term **content** for component categories that are abstracted from their lexical semantic meaning.

Thus **Case studies** can refer to any type of case study in any discipline. **Main concept** can be "marriage" or "racism" in an Anthropology essay or "digestion" in a Zoology lab. report.

The example in Figure 4 shows some anomalies in Content Distribution in an Anthropology essay.

The writer of this essay introduces the central topic of the essay, "marriage" (para.1). This is immediately followed by one case history (para. 2). The next seven paragraphs discuss general features, aspects, criteria and principles relevant to the concept of marriage. Then three paragraphs (10-12) provide further case studies, followed by a concluding paragraph (13), and, finally another case study.

A further facet of our research has been macrostructure analysis. Briefly, we investigate the overall organisational structure of a piece of writing, for example, the existence of an adequate introduction, conclusion, arguments for and against

Anthropology, NS, 1st yr

41102 Marriage is not about love, it is about economic relations, kinship obligations and political alliances

**CONTENT DISTRIBUTION**

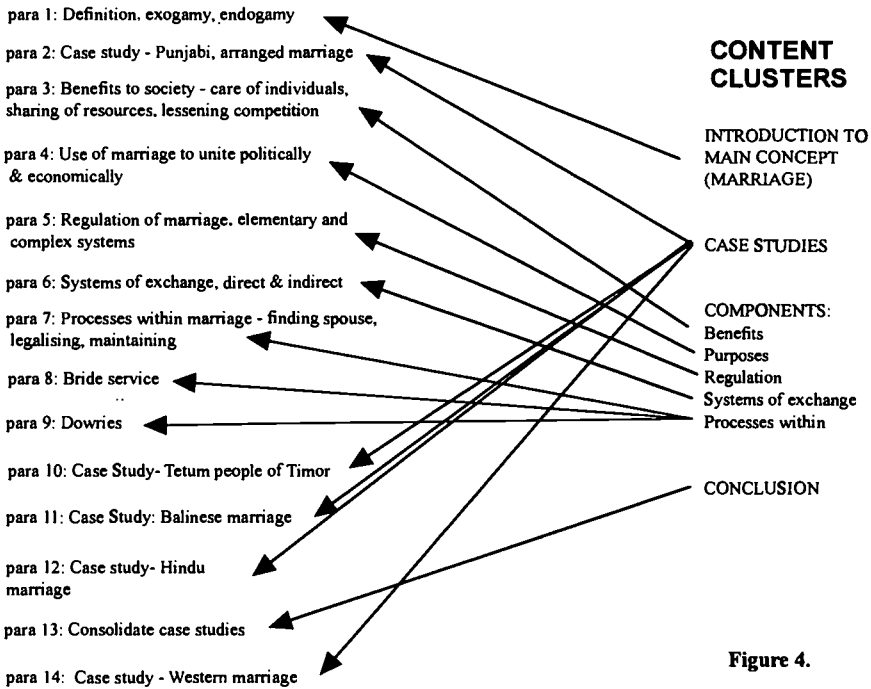


Figure 4.

and the occurrence of particular discourse properties in the various major sections of a text.

Through the approaches illustrated above we hope to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the most adequate ways of signalling the relationships between one rhetorical act and another within a text? When is explicit signalling appropriate and when is implicit signalling appropriate?
- (2) What are the rhetorical acts operating between sentences and between paragraphs which are most relevant to expository student writing at various stages of tertiary study?
- (3) Which rhetorical acts are general (can occur in any distribution in any task in any genre and discipline) and which ones have limited distribution?
- (4) What are the main problem areas for NS and NNS writers in signalling such relationships?

The foregoing examples and issues from our research have been provided as illustration of some of the ways in which the applied discourse analyst can analyse discipline specific student writing. We now move on to the third main question

that we undertook to address:

(3) What are the **limitations**?

For addressing this question we need to return to the questions arising out of Horning's definition of readability that we have foreshadowed earlier. These were: "Who is the reader?" "What does the reader expect?" and "What degree of cohesion and redundancy is expected in student writing?"

It is in attempting to answer these questions that the discourse analyst runs into difficulties and limitations. We have already acknowledged the fact that even in deciding rhetorical function the discourse analyst may need to refer to the discipline specialist. However, it is in the process of determining what might be the **appropriate degree of cohesion and redundancy** in student writing, where the discourse analyst needs to lean most heavily on the discipline specialist. After all, it is the discipline specialist who is the principal reader of student writing.

In order to examine this question, we need to consider the role of reader's background knowledge (BK) as it is the "second guessing" of the reader's BK that is one of the most important attributes of competent writers. (Swales 1990:62). How can a student writer second guess the expert reader's BK?

Giltrow (1994:155) maintains that BK "is a resource shared by the producers and receivers of utterances." If there is a very large territory of BK shared, then there is no need for a large amount of redundancy or very minute signalling to achieve coherence. Successful communication may proceed through 'island hopping' along what Swales (1990:168) in another context called 'islands' [of information].

The problem for the student writer is that the discipline specialist readers have a vastly greater amount of BK than the student and yet s/he has to pretend that s/he is informing the reader. Thus student writing is, in many ways, an **unnatural communicative process**, one that often represents **knowledge display** (Swales & Feak 1994:8) more than **knowledge transmission**. In fact, as students progress through their undergraduate studies, they have to move along a continuum between 'mainly display' to 'mainly transmission', treading a fine line at each stage. Student writing is never exclusively knowledge transmission; even in a Ph.D. thesis the writer has to present a judicious balance between display and transmission. This is reflected in the fact that when a thesis is rewritten for publication, publishers usually request the deletion of parts that are specifically included as proof of the writer's scholarliness.

The required degree of cohesion and redundancy might well be different when the writer is motivated by knowledge display from when s/he engages in a genuine process of knowledge transmission. The discourse analyst can observe the outcome, but it is only the discipline specialist who is the final arbiter and who can determine how much display and how much genuine transmission is required for each task.

(4) Finally, to turn to our last question: **How to overcome or minimise limitations**

(of analysis by the discourse analyst)?

Our provisional answer to this last question is that the discourse analyst can proceed beyond the limitations outlined earlier by close collaboration with the discipline specialist. Such collaboration, however, has to include serious contribution and involvement from both sides. The discipline specialist should not be treated simply as a 'rater' or 'informant'. There are many discipline specialists currently teaching at Australian universities who are already involved or may become interested in participating in combined research. In the course of such collaborative research the discourse analyst may alert the specialist to aspects of discourse while the discipline specialist may determine the required level of cohesion and redundancy and help the student writer acquire skills in finding the right balance between knowledge display and knowledge transmission.

Some interesting further questions are suggested by this paper. To what extent, for example, can it be expected that the discipline specialist becomes familiar with discourse analytical concepts? How far should the discourse analyst be prepared to go in learning the disciplinary concepts of the field of study (e.g. a knowledge of taxonomies)? How can the two experts collaborate to attempt an intervention in the writing process? At what stage of study might such intervention be most effective?

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**APPENDIX**

1st yr Anthropology Non-Native Speaker

42101 - Outline some of the sociological explanations which have been advanced for the existence of racism and apply the explanations you find most convincing to one particular society, e.g. Australia, South Africa, UK or USA

**INTRODUCTION**

para 1

1. I would like to start off with the definition of the question. **INTRODUCE (definition)**
2. To answer the question adequately it is necessary to understand the terms of racism and sociology. **EXPAND 1 (Two terms to be defined)**
3. According to Willis (1993:49), Racism is 'the belief that one's own race or ethnic group is superior to others [and] is the most common expression of ethnocentrism'. **DEFINE Term 1 (Racism)**
4. He (1993:19) defines Sociology as 'the study of human social behaviour at the individual level, and human societies at the group level. **DEFINE Term 2 (Sociology)**
5. In other words, 'sociology is concerned with the relationship between the individual and society' (Willis 1993:60). **SUPPORT/PARAPHRASE 4**
6. Today, in a time of rapid changes in economy, politics and many other areas, it is essential to find a way to explain social phenomena, and sociology provides such a way. **JUSTIFY 4 & 5**
7. There are three main theories about sociological explanation: the functionalist approach of Emile Durkheim (Willis 1993:93), the conflict theory of Karl Marx (p95) and the Interactionalism of Max Weber (p.99). **EXPAND 4 & 5/ INTRODUCE (Theories 1, 2, 3)**

para 2

8. Due to the length of the essay, I will concentrate mainly on a functionalist explanation and a Marxist explanation of racism because of their distinctiveness. **RESTRICT (Task to theories 1 & 2)**
9. The Interactionalist approach of Weber is, regarding capitalism, very close to Marxism (Rex 1980:118) as he is in other ways close to Durkheim (Lecourt 1980:277). **EXPAND 7/JUSTIFY 8**
10. Nevertheless, in contrast to Durkheim and Marx, Weber did not write extensively about racism and when he did only in an indirect way (1980:277). **JUSTIFY 8**

# “You only have to humiliate yourself”: Discursive Practices in a First-Year ‘Practical Legal Skills’ Course

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This paper aims to show how practical legal skills students assume multiple positions and voices in order to meet the requirements of their course. It examines in detail spoken and written texts produced by a group of first-year law students preparing for a moot court. Methodology is derived from systemic-functional linguistics and from discourse analysis. The paper describes the often contradictory ways students are positioned through these texts: as students they are positioned as outsiders to the law, opportunistically “poaching” ideas which might be helpful from the resources available; as “professionals” (within the simulated case) they are multiply positioned as advocates (before a judge or magistrate), as advisers (to a client), as analysts of the “correct” parts of the law to apply to the “facts” of the case; and as members of the small discourse community of their tutorial group or “firm” they occupy positions, often gendered, more or less central, more or less authoritative, that have evolved over six months of participation. It is concluded that many of the difficulties these students face in coming to terms with the disciplinary literacy of the law have to do with the novel, complex and contradictory nature of the discursive positions constructed by their course.

In this paper I shall examine some of the writing and talk that occurs within the context of a first year ‘practical legal skills’ workshop in which groups of law students work as a ‘firm’ throughout the year and, in particular, examine a section of my transcription of the proceedings of the moot court. This writing is of interest because it occurs in the university context, but is quite different from the standard ‘essayist’ style of academic literacy.

## **WRITING AND IDENTITY**

I shall take as given the view put forward by writers as diverse as Bartholomae (1985), Ivanic (1994, 1995), Freedman et al. (1994) and Kamler (forthcoming) that learning academic writing is the formation of new identities within the context of a range of academic discourse communities. As a consequence, problems students have in learning to write specialised ‘academic’ English frequently are expressions of their lack of investment or interest in becoming members of the community: ‘getting by’ in Bazerman’s (1994) words. These problems may also be an expression of conflicts between values and points of

view implicit in the conventions of academic writing and the students' own primary affiliations and loyalties.

The talk and writing I have looked at, however, raise quite different issues about identity from standard essay writing. Students writing in this practical subject are required to construct themselves in ways that are at odds with their other subjects; the selves constructed by the simulation are more varied and complex than the selves constructed by conventional essay writing.

Students in the simulation (Freedman et al. 1994) are speaking and writing both as part of a subject which is assessed by members of academic staff, and within the roles assumed as part of the simulation: as 'senior partner', as 'senior and junior counsel', as 'instructing solicitor', for example.

As Ivanic (1994) has pointed out, a useful way to think about student identities in academic writing is to use Goffman's analysis (1973, 1974) of the different aspects of the self present in face-to-face spoken interaction. Goffman divides the speaker into three parts: the *animator*, the body which talks, the *author*, the producer of the words spoken, and the *principal*, the person whose position and beliefs are represented. In a student essay lecturers normally insist (sometimes in vain) that all these roles coincide in the one person. In a legal simulation, however, these roles are distinct, as they often are in the legal workplace. The 'animators', the people who speak or perform the words, are the senior and junior counsel who present the case in court. The authors are multiple; they include the counsel themselves, who have prepared a written submission to present in court and the instructing solicitor who with the aid of members of her firm produced a brief for the counsel. Words may also come from other sources such as expert witnesses. The principal is the client whose interests or position is being presented. This dissolution of the various facets of self into a number of roles may cause problems for students who are unused to this style of writing.

## STUDENT PRACTICAL WRITING IN LAW

Writing produced by the 'firm' in preparation for the moot has many other characteristics associated with workplace writing. It is marked by 'document cycling' (Paradis et al. 1985, Spilka 1993), in which a number of overlapping and interrelated documents are produced by the parties at various stages of the case. These documents constitute an intricate intertextual web (Devitt 1991) in which contracts, letters, opinions, narratives of events, submissions, internal memoranda, etc. crossrefer and interrelate in complex ways. There is no premium on originality; documents are based as closely as possible on models and repetition and predictability is valued. There is no scope for the 'self' to be expressed by linguistic creativity, originality or through critique. Texts have collective rather than individual authorship, and all traces of individual origin or authorship are removed.

Another difference lies in the role of language. In a conventional essay language



has a reflective and synoptic role, that is, it reflects on, reconstructs and interprets a set of facts, a field of study. The writer of the essay is not involved in the field being described or the events being discussed, but is looking at them from a remote position. Authority depends on the expression of a point of view appearing as impersonal as possible. Each piece of writing is relatively autonomous and complete in itself, there is little sense of exchange apart from the exchange of performance for grades.

In law, however, documents are social actions, tools in the cut and thrust of an adversarial system in which one side's intention is to get an advantage over the other. Thus each document is designed to achieve a specific result; it responds to and is in turn responded to by other documents in an orchestrated and ritualised process.

In this process the written word is an example of what Smith (1990) calls textually mediated social organisation. Lawyers mediate between local events in real historical time and the world of the law which has its own discursive time, logic and form of organisation. In the simulated case students are asked to consider the law not only as an interpretive practice, but also as a regulative practice through which the textual world of the law controls people's actions in their local worlds. This means that the language used, even in written documents, has a more dynamic, interactive quality as it anticipates and reflects its position in the cut and thrust of a textually mediated exchange.

In the 'firm's' preparation for the moot court the textually mediated exchange is a prelude to the verbal exchange of court proceedings. An area of special interest is the interaction between the written and the spoken as students in the context of the simulation move from written document to spoken court proceedings. In my analysis of a spoken moot court interaction as Text 1 below, I will be asking how written texts are used and represented in this context.

But in looking at the text it is important to bear in mind that moots are an ordeal for students, closely tied to their view of themselves as capable students, and they constitute a threat to their psychological security. As Giddens (1991) suggests, this threat to the self is associated with feelings of shame. Students talk about humiliating themselves, about their fear of answering questions in court, of the importance of 'knowing what they're talking about':

- (Beverley)      What are you stressed about? (laughs) (2 sec pause) You worried  
[about  
(Marilyn)      [You only have to humiliate yourself.  
(laughter)  
(Marilyn)      Humiliate yourself Beverley, OK.  
(Steve)        We'll be watching.  
(Marilyn)      Oh sure.  
(Steve)        We'll be watching.  
(Marilyn)      All right for you.  
(laughter)

**'CLOSE ENCOUNTERS'**

The moot proceedings concern a sculptor (Susan) whose sculpture (Close Encounters of the Worst Kind) had collapsed after being suspended from the ceiling of a lobby of a new building, thus delaying the opening of the building and causing loss to all involved. The question at issue in this extract is whether the fall was the fault of the sculptor (the defendant), who made the work, or the plaintiff (the Victorian Development Corporation or VDC) who attached cables to and suspended the sculpture. Both plaintiff and defendant have letters of opinion from firms of engineers which are equivocal and to an extent contradictory. The extract presented here is from the defence submission by a female student acting as 'senior counsel'. The "judge" is a practicing solicitor (rather than a legal academic). I have chosen a section of proceedings which deals the facts in dispute, rather than more technical legal issues.

In Text 1 'counsel' is concerned with the relative credibility of the expert reports submitted by both sides. She assumes that if she can throw doubt on the results, the onus of proof is on the plaintiff, not the defence. In the discussion leading up to the moot her focus has been on two things: the onus of proof, and the credibility and authority of the expert testimony.

In examining Text 1 I will focus particularly in the contrast between those sections of counsel's submission which are read aloud (highlighted in bold) and those sections which occur in interaction in response to the judge's question (plain text). I am also interested in the contrast between counsel's language and the judge's language.

**TEXT 1: MOOT COURT**

(Sections read aloud by counsel from prepared written submission are bold face)

- 1 (Judge) Why did the thing fall down?
- 2 (Senior Your Honour, no-one has been able to ascertain exactly the cause of  
3 Counsel) the falling down. There have been two expert reports submitted, one  
4 report from F Turnbull & Associates, Structural Engineers,  
5 employed by the plaintiff, and they **acknowledge that no-one can**  
6 **say for certain what caused the sculpture to fall. However they**  
7 **did conclude that in all probability the accident could not have**  
8 **resulted from a lack of structural integrity and they went further**  
9 **to say that the plaintiff's engineers job in organising and**  
10 **directing suspension would have included checking and providing**  
11 **specifications for all suspension points.**
- 12 (Judge) But I mean, as far as I understand the evidence, the guys and the  
13 hooks were still in place after the unfortunate demise of Close  
14 Encounters. It would seem to suggest, doesn't it, that they'd done  
15 their part, and you say there's no evidence of structural failure, but

16 it's either got to be, doesn't it, that the guys and ropes that held it up,  
 18 it's got to be some weakness in the thing itself. It can't be anything  
 19 else can it, apart from an act of God. In that scenario it must have  
 20 been structural. Aren't you fixed with that?

21 (Senior Your Honour I don't have experience in engineering ...  
 Counsel)

22 (Judge) Structural engineers do.

23 (Senior Yes, that's right, and they have not been able to come to a  
 24 Counsel) conclusion. The engineers employed for the plaintiffs were also  
 25 unable to come to a conclusion, they concluded that it was probably  
 26 due to structural integrity but acknowledged that they couldn't really  
 27 tell. As with our engineers. We believe that engineers should be  
 28 given more weight because they **specialise in structural**  
 29 **engineering** and they weren't able to ...

30 (Judge) Wasn't your report incomplete or wasn't there some problem with the  
 31 partner?

32 (Senior The report was not necessarily incomplete, it was not completed by  
 33 Counsel) the person who initially set out on it due to a heart attack, but it was  
 34 still an expert who reported on it.

35 (Judge) The problem is... I don't think you've done tort yet, something goes  
 36 dreadfully wrong and you can't explain the part... there's only one  
 37 possible explanation of what went wrong but you haven't got the  
 38 evidence, then that's sufficient to get you over the line in relation to  
 39 tort. It seems to me that if the guys are intact, the things is on the  
 40 floor smashed into thousands of pieces, then the person who created  
 41 that sculpture, is fixed. There is no way but that you're impaled on  
 42 the evidence, the facts, the thing's lying smashed on the floor.

43 (Senior Your Honour, it could possibly be due to where suspension of the  
 44 Counsel) cables were hooked on the sculpture, perhaps that was ... the  
 45 plaintiff's engineers were directed to organise that aspect of it, and  
 46 perhaps they weren't (inaudible).

47 (Judge) But doesn't the evidence say that all those things were intact. The  
 48 guys, the pulleys, the whole things was intact after it fell.

49 (Senior They were intact, but they weren't necessarily connected where they  
 50 Counsel) should have been connected to enable the sculpture to remaining  
 51 hanging.

52 (Judge) I'm not completely convinced, but lets hear how your learned junior  
 53 is going to talk about the Goods Act.

**TEXTUAL PRACTICE**

The first aspect of Text 1 I want to examine is the extent to which counsel's submission relies on paraphrases of the expert evidence. In order to examine issues of textual representation I have found it helpful to analyse court proceedings as textual practices, in Fairclough's (1992) sense of the word. A great deal of what goes on in court proceedings is concerned with the presentation, interpretation, comparison, representation of other texts and this case provides a good example of the way in which textual practice, in the form of readings of documents, is central to the exercise of the law. In Text 1 we see counsel and judge constructing competing representations and interpretations of the expert evidence of the two engineering firms.

**TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF EXPERT LETTER AND SENIOR COUNSEL SUBMISSION**

*(overlap highlighted in bold)*

Expert letter from 'Turnbull and Associates'	Senior Counsel submission read aloud
<p>We are not lawyers, but it seems to us that <b>the accident could not be said - in all probability - to have resulted from a lack of structural integrity.</b></p> <p>In the engineering profession a breakage of hanging points is usually called an engineering design or handling failure. Structural integrity, in contrast, is usually taken to mean inner, corporal strength.</p>	<p>acknowledge that no-one can say for certain what caused the sculpture to fall. However they did conclude that <b>in all probability the accident could not have resulted from a lack of structural integrity</b></p>
<p>We also think that if VDC's engineers were required to <b>'organise and direct' the suspension, this would have to include responsibility for checking and providing specifications for all suspension points.</b></p>	<p>and they went further to say that the plaintiff's engineers job in <b>organising and directing suspension would have included checking and providing specifications for all suspension points.</b></p>

In Table 1 counsel introduces a representation of the expert authoritative opinion into her evidence. But the engineers' letter from Turnbull and Associates is a carefully crafted document which says a great deal more by implication than it is prepared to say in outright. This can be seen linguistically in the inferencing and cohesion gap between the last and second last paragraph. But this gap widens even further between the two halves of the sentence counsel uses to present the contents of the letter. In the counsel's representation there is no overlap of theme of rheme and no common reference or cross reference between the first and the second part of the sentence.

Counsel's textual practice is to provide a paraphrase, a discourse representation

which reproduces only the words without tracing through their implications or filling the gaps. This is common practice in student writing, but in Text 1 the consequences are a loss of authority and credibility as her perspective is brushed aside by the judge. He focuses on working out what happened, why the sculpture fell (1). He imposes his own interpretation or reading of the expert opinion and focuses on what he sees as the most salient or relevant feature of the evidence, the intactness of the hooks and guys (as we will see below in theme analysis). Counsel has no way of countering him, no interpretation of her own or alternative explanation to oppose to his.

The fact that she has nothing to offer when challenged by the judge at 20 (*Aren't you fixed with that*) and at 41 and 42 (*you're impaled on the evidence, the facts*) is serious threat to her ability to present a 'front' to the world (Goffman 1973), a threat to her identity in the simulated role of senior counsel. She has no resources to fall back on because she has not anticipated this turn of events, sentences are left incomplete or their endings are inaudible (43-46), the syntax starts to fall apart *suspension of cables were hooked* reflecting the collapse of the legal self that is being presented to the court.

Counsel's difficulty is typical of a problem nearly all students have in projecting a self that can move seamlessly from prepared notes or speeches to oral interaction with the judge, to prepare a written word for oral presentation. It is not just a question of being sufficiently articulate or confident or prepared, but of finding a position and language from which to speak. Students have to present a performing self constructed by the ease and fluency, the authority, with which it holds up its end in the cut and thrust of action.

## WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE

In my next section I show how it is possible to gauge some of the problems in establishing this legal courtroom self by examining the contrast between those sections of counsel's submission which are written and spoken, and compare both with the language of the judge.

In the written section of Text 1 counsel's testimony we see complex phrases such as:

the plaintiff's engineer's job in organising and directing suspension checking and providing specifications for all suspension points.

These are more complex than may be found in any of the sections which are spontaneously spoken, and show that counsel is having trouble adapting the written word to the demands of the spoken situation. She is trying to do what is familiar from academic writing: to produce a representation of the expert testimony from the engineers which abstracts away from the specificity of events and actions, treating processes as objects and turning verbs into abstract nouns in a process of nominalisation (Halliday 1985a): *accident, the cause of the falling down, structural integrity, organising suspension*. But the nature of the subject matter,

which deals with the cause of specific events in time and space, resist this process of abstraction. This resistance can be seen in the clumsiness of the constructions which result. Agency can't be eliminated, leading to nested possessives: *plaintiff's engineers'*; verbs often can't be completely turned into nouns, leading to a proliferation of participial constructions such as *organising and directing suspension, checking and providing specifications* (van Leeuwen 1996). In a similar process of abstraction counsel's writing also suppresses the logical connections (ifs and buts) between sentences and clauses in an attempt to make her language seem authoritative and factual, and to suppress the process by which conclusions are arrived at.

But in dialogue the devices used to construct authority in written language do not work. This is partly because of the inherently dynamic nature of the situation, but also I think because of the judge's pedagogical intention to disrupt the academic forms of discourse to which the students are accustomed. In the judge's language events are more likely to be represented through verbs rather than nouns, and the judge uses connectives such as *if* and *but* which make his reasoning processes explicit.

Another factor leading to the complexity of student language is the heavily intertextual nature of the textual practices, the fact that counsel is dealing with talk that refers to and is based on a great many texts that are shared in common between the main parties. Counsel's language is heavily influenced by the grammar of discourse representation and contains a great deal of talk about the expert testimony. In contrast, the judge simplifies his discourse by treating the written evidence as if it were quite transparent, and talks about events as if they were unmediated by textual forms.

In Table 2, for example, analysis of topical themes illustrates the very different focus and preoccupation of the judge and the counsel. Theme is the point of departure for the message (Halliday 1985b); it is that which is in focus in the clause's representation. Examining the themes of clauses in a passage of writing is therefore an excellent tool for determining what the writer sees as central elements of the message.

Counsel tends to thematise the engineers and their report many times; reference to the events is in more abstracted terms such as 'the accident' 'suspension of cables'. On the other hand the judge thematises the sculpture and the hooks and guys many times, but thematises the evidence and the engineers and their report only once each. He focuses on events, but deemphasises the mediated and textual way in which the evidence is presented.

The judge's other thematisation focus is *I* and *You*. The use of *you* is a device through which the judge authoritatively constructs for counsel a identity as a lawyer through expressions such as *if you can't explain* (35) *if you haven't got the evidence* (36-7) positioning her, and representing her, as an agent within the courtroom interaction. The use of *you* is supplemented by the use of tag questions at 14, 16 the related construction *aren't you* at 19. These questions work to coopt counsel to his point of view, to presuppose her agreement. In these questions, in

TABLE 2: TOPICAL THEMES

Counsel: Written	Counsel: spoken	Judge
no-one they the accident they the plaintiff's engineers job in organising and directing suspension	no-one they it (unclear reference: to the fact that they guys are intact) I they suspension of the cables The engineers employed for the plaintiffs they engineers they We that (unclear reference) The report it the plaintiff's engineers they they they they	I I the guys and the hooks It (the fact that the guys and the hooks were in place) they you the guys and ropes that held it up In that scenario Structural engineers you The problem your report I you you that (the fact that there's only one possible explanation) the guys
		the thing the person who created that sculpture you the thing the evidence all those things The guys, the pulleys, the whole thing

the use of *you*, as well as more explicitly in the sentence *I don't think you've done tort* we see a blurring between the authority of his role as judge and his educational role of trying to give cues to a beginning student, without causing her to lose face by moving out of the framework of the simulation. (Interestingly the 'judge' is a solicitor who was a schoolteacher before entering the law.)

**AUTHORITY AND MODALITY**

We can glean more about the relationship between judge and counsel by examining the stance or point of view both take to events which are represented. These are shown in Table 3 which isolates expressions of modality and attitude and projection, which are words that express degrees of likelihood, or attitudes to or representations of the events or facts of the case.

The relationship and relative authority of judge and counsel is clearly reflected in their use of modality. The judge's modality is strongly polarised: *got to be, can't be anything else, must have been, only one possible*. Counsel's is more qualified: *perhaps, in all probability, not been able, possibly, not necessarily*. This language constructs the judge as decisive, as putting forward conclusive arguments, whereas counsel's language depicts her as tentative and indecisive.

TABLE 3: MODALITY AND ATTITUDE

Counsel: Written	Counsel: Spoken	Judge
they acknowledge that noone can say for certain	noone had been able to ascertain exactly	as far as I understand the evidence
they did conclude that in all probability (the accident) could not have (resulted)	not been able to come to a conclusion	It would seem to suggest, doesn't it
would have included	unable to come to a conclusion	you say (there's no evidence) it's either got to be, doesn't it
	probably due to	it's got to be some weakness
	acknowledged that they couldn't really tell	It can't be anything else
	we believe...should be given more weight	it must have been (structural)
		I don't think you've done tort
	not necessarily incomplete	you can't explain
	it could possibly be due to	only one possible explanation
	perhaps	It seems to me that if the guys
	perhaps	But doesn't the evidence say
	weren't necessarily connected to where they should have been	

Table 3 confirms the point made above that counsel spends a lot of time representing what other people said. She talks about the experts *concluding* or *acknowledging* or *ascertaining*. On the other hand the judge talks about what 'the evidence' suggests. His representation of the evidence is more abstracted from the textual detail, and he only presents his own opinions: *It seems to me, as far as I understand the evidence*. He makes the evidence into a thing, there's less attention to the detail of who said what about what topic. This avoidance of makes him



appear to address the issues in a more direct way, but this seeming directness is an artefact. A close look shows that his understanding is based on a superficial reading of a number of documents, and an oversimplification of the expert evidence.

This emphasis on the concrete is reinforced by the judge's metaphors which make the facts into something thinglike: 'impaled on the facts'. The use of metaphor reinforces the judge's concrete, practical persona and echoes the advice given to students in their workbook:

... in a majority of cases the real battle is mastering the facts, and the facts are established very often the case will solve itself. Facts of the matter rather than the law (Young 1986).

It seems to me that the judge is modelling for students a self which is constructed as common sense, seizing on the salient points and brushing aside irrelevance, as effortlessly mastering detail, of being able to argue on his feet, of not relying on the written word. It expresses a selfhood based not on learning or knowledge, but on being practical, on mastering a particular sort of practice with ease and fluency. For most students this is a very alien world and remote from their experience with academic education.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, counsel presentation in a moot court requires students to address very complex issues about the relation of talk and writing to identity. Students have to move between an in-role lawyer persona and an out of role student persona; they have to separate themselves as presenters of the words from the authorship of the text, and to separate both from the interests of the simulated client. In their performance as counsel they have to present a self which has ease, authority, which remains effortlessly in role, which never hesitates or is lost for words; but at the same time they need to be appropriately submissive to the authority of the in-role judge and of the out of role university assessors. They need to control complex linguistic devices for representing the voices of the many parties to the case while at the same time retaining a firm hold of their own voice and position. Finally, they have to negotiate the transition from spoken to written register as they move from prepared text to extempore presentation, and as they move from the presentation of self through written text to the bodily presentation of self through spoken performance.

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# Learning to Manage? Managing to Learn? Reading Frames in Business Education

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In the education of would-be managers it is an accepted general principle - some might even say a tired truism - that communication skills should play an especially important role. But what exactly does "communication" signify in this context? What expectations do management students and teachers have about learning the particular communication skills needed to acquire, evaluate and convey information in their discipline? And what relative emphasis is usually given in this field of education to different kinds of reading compared with different kinds of writing, or indeed to both those aspects of literacy compared with oral language use?

The research project from which this paper has emerged is an inquiry by four universities into two larger interrelated issues: that of current literacy practices in Australian universities, variously inflected within different disciplinary areas; and that of specific cross-cultural difficulties in language-based situations. This report is based on interim findings from one disciplinary area, business studies, the focal question being: What counts as literate behaviour, particularly "reading", within the framework of undergraduate courses in a business school?

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Everyone believes in the values of literacy. But not much is known about the details of current literacy practices in Australian universities, and how they are inflected by different disciplinary areas and by cross-cultural factors. The research project from which the present report has emerged is an inquiry into those issues. Four universities are partners in the project, each looking at different aspects of literate behaviour in academic settings<sup>1</sup>. The team to which we belong at Curtin University is concentrating on reading skills across various courses in several disciplines. The paper that we have drastically abridged for presentation here is based on interim findings from just one disciplinary area, business studies, the focal question being this: What counts as "reading" within the framework of undergraduate courses in a business school?

The method we used to answer this question combined ethnographic procedures

with textual analysis. The data were gathered from a first-level unit of a Management program that attracts a large number of students, many of whom are non-native speakers, mainly from overseas. The range of data sources included classroom observations, interviews with students and teaching staff, and analysis of unit-related materials such as textbooks, unit outlines, study guides and exam papers. Our findings, partly summarised here, are the result of inductive procedures that draw on “frame analysis”.

## 2. THEORY

The project as a whole is shaped by a theory of framing. This provides a conceptual reference point, a common vocabulary and an analytical method. Frame analysis has increasingly been recognised as useful in a number of disciplines including linguistics and education. Recent book titles such as *Framing in Discourse* (Tannen 1993) and *Framing and Interpretation* (MacLachlan & Reid 1994) indicate its general currency.

A basic principle of this approach to the pragmatics of discourse is that appropriate interpretation presupposes an ability to make sense of the framing devices (linguistic and paralinguistic) which convey metamessages. Differences of socio-cultural and educational background among both native speakers of English and non-native speakers (referred to in this paper as NS and NNS respectively) can complicate recognition of such cues, or result in a mismatch of frames. The framing expectations that students themselves bring to the texts they read or write in academic settings may be an impediment in some cases. Since it often happens (as Tannen remarks) that “framing, by its very nature, is signalled indirectly” (1992:65), what seems to be poor literacy performance may in fact indicate that metacommunicative frames in a particular situation have not been well signalled or well recognised.

Drawing particularly on the work of MacLachlan and Reid, we have used the following schematic outline of four kinds of interpretive framing in an attempt to discover how students make meaning from what they read — or, in some cases, fail to do so. Relevant reading matter may be a textbook, journal article, course handout, overhead transparency or anything else in written form that is intended to form a part of what is studied.

Each reader brings a whole world of external information, experiences and assumptions to any text, thereby framing it *extratextually* (“extra” — outside). The conventions of different academic disciplines amount largely to habits of extratextual framing. All sorts of culture-specific attitudes can also come in here, often unconsciously. This may be obvious in explicitly culture-laden disciplinary areas such as the social sciences and humanities, but cannot be avoided in supposedly less subjective disciplines such as engineering or science. It is a reasonable hypothesis that although native speakers of Australian English do not share identical extratextual frames, they will still generally be able to bring to bear on what they read some sorts of knowledge that are less likely to be available to many non-native speakers, whose second-language “literacy” may

be impaired by interpretive gaps.

Readers can also frame a piece of text *circumtextually* (“circum” — around), to the extent that they interpret it in relation to what immediately surrounds it — for instance the title of a book or chapter or essay, other adjuncts such as an abstract accompanying a journal article, footnotes, etc. Of course, these could be regarded theoretically as part of the text rather than external to it, but in practice it seems that readers often tend to separate some bits of textual information from what they perceive as the main body of reading matter. It is a reasonable hypothesis that certain academic habits, which may vary across disciplines and cultures, can make a student aware of the importance of those apparently peripheral elements, while other habits may obscure their importance.

Furthermore, because the appropriate interpretation of a text depends in complex ways on one’s ability to assign it to an appropriate text type (genre) — an ability which involves knowing how to recognise specific affiliations with and allusions to other texts — to read something is therefore in part to frame it *intertextually* (“inter” — between). It is a reasonable hypothesis that recognising intertextual aspects of what they read may be particularly difficult for some NNS students in some academic settings.

While reading a text, especially one of considerable length and complexity, experienced readers get their bearings as well through *intratextual* framing (“intra” — within) of the whole in terms of particular parts: that is, they take due notice of various subdivisional and transitional markers or signposting devices (paragraphs, subheadings, chapters, use of italics and other typographical variations, even certain syntactical markers, and so forth). It is a reasonable hypothesis that lack of attention to these cues, or lack of familiarity with the conventions they imply, may obstruct communication for some students.

What is regarded as acceptably literate behaviour will obviously vary from one situation to another, but by definition it always involves the construction of semantically appropriate text through reading and/or writing. And the construction of meaning always involves framing. This is not quite a matter of “using frames”, as if a frame were simply given and actual, and therefore invariable for all readers. Rather, to quote MacLachlan & Reid, “framing is an act which necessarily involves an agent and therefore implies something more provisional, more negotiable than the substantive term ‘frame’” (1994:17). Hence the seemingly paradoxical poststructuralist axiom enunciated by Derrida: “Framing occurs, but there is no frame” (1978:83, translation)

### 3. FINDINGS

#### UNIT WORKBOOK

It’s convenient to start with comments on how the Unit Workbook for this course tends to encourage certain attitudes to the study of management in general and to communication skills in particular, including reading. The Unit Workbook provides a summary of the examinable learning objectives for each week, drawn

from the textbook; a set of one-page learning exercises to be completed in groups; and general information about how these Learning Set groups will operate and be assessed. As the following comments show, it is not difficult to identify the main extratextual assumptions that underlie the Unit Workbook, which are partly mediated through other framing features.

In general, our aim with regard to extratextual factors is to reveal “structures of expectation” (Tannen 1979), operating outside the text and reflected in it, that seem relevant to competence in literacy. So in looking at any aspect of reading behaviour or at any ideas that may influence reading, the most useful question for analysis is “What is being taken for granted here, explicitly or not, about communication and related aspects of learning?” In particular, we are interested in three kinds of evidence:

*(i) Evidence of a student reader being directly encouraged to adduce, give priority to, or apply experiential knowledge.*

The opening paragraph of the Unit Workbook promises that this course's approach, using “learning sets” (i.e. real-world cases), “will add value to ... your experiences.” The next paragraph makes it clear that the emphasis will be on group participation rather than intellectual content, because “management functions” are seen primarily in interpersonal terms. The assertion is that “To be successful in your work and personal life, you need to be successful with people. Interpersonal skills and how you relate to others is the most valuable learning you can acquire.” This assertion is not offered as a proposition open to critical analysis anywhere in the course materials, despite the fact that it is actually a contested topic in management literature, and some writers emphatically reject the ideology of management-by-personality (eg., Spillane 1994).

*(ii) Evidence of reliance on points of view that depend on a particular cultural frame, whether consciously or not.*

On the cover of the Unit Workbook, there is a sketch of a pair of eyes with an accompanying caption: “It's strange, but wherever I take my eyes they always see things from my point of view.” Ironically, that statement on “point of view” is not matched within the text of the workbook itself by any disciplinary or cultural reflexivity. Actually, the “Learning Set” material is highly culture-specific, yet not acknowledged as such. It is deeply American in some of its linguistic and social references. So too is the set of protocols given for group discussion, which prescribe a conversational style that may well seem cloying and condescending to Australian or Asian students.

*(iii) Evidence about the level of importance implicitly attached to literacy skills relative to other communication skills.*

The Unit Workbook contains misspellings, mispunctuations and errors in internal referencing, conveying to students who notice them a somewhat lackadaisical attitude towards the written language. The exhortations about the paramount value of interpersonal skills also imply tacitly that mastering literacy skills is of secondary importance.

Some of the evidence from the Unit Workbook seems to reflect extratextual framing of the Management field, by those who teach in it, as one in which particular forms of oral communication (notably group discussion based on personal experience) are valued considerably more than critical reading. And although the evidence from other documents such as the Unit Outline and from classroom observations indicated a concern that students should read widely and apply their reading to their writing tasks, assessment methods gave students little opportunity or motivation to achieve this ideal. To complete the two Learning Set reports, for instance, students needed “to incorporate your ideas and research from your text and at least two journals and two other text books”, but were also expected to describe their own research activities, the processes of group discussions and the input of other students to the exercise – in a maximum 600-800 words.

#### TEXTBOOK

The other main item of course material for this introductory unit in management is the set textbook. Looking at this in terms of our analytical model of framing, we can observe most immediately that it is replete with *intratextual* devices designed as learning aids — margin definitions, tables, graphs, italic and bold lettering of key terms, learning objectives and chapter summaries, photographs and vignettes of prominent figures in the American business world. In addition, the text is *circumtextually* framed by a preface with certain features — no doubt characteristic of its discipline — that stand out distinctively when compared with those of a textbook from another discipline area studied as part of this project. Setting the preface to the Management textbook alongside the preface to a textbook used for a first-level Sociology unit at the same university, we notice several contrasts.

1. *The Management text introduces itself with a declarative emphasis on material issues in the “real world” whereas the Sociology text introduces itself with an interrogative emphasis on theoretical considerations.*
2. *The Management text preface presents concepts and observations in a matter-of-fact, cut-and-dried fashion, whereas the Sociology text represents interpretation in its field as fundamental and problematic.*
3. *The Management text takes disciplinary conventions as a given, whereas the Sociology text emphasises its subject’s interdisciplinary scope so that boundaries and protocols cannot be taken for granted.*
4. *Distinctive disciplinary conventions of writing style — conversational in management, more discursive in sociology — are reflected, and even directly discussed, in each of the prefaces.*
5. *While the preface to the Management text generalises and globalises information as if it were internationally applicable without much variation, the preface to the Sociology text tries to focus the reader’s attention on specifically Australian cultural frames.*
6. *The Management text represents itself as arbiter of what is and is not relevant or*

*important in the study of management, whereas the Sociology text encourages the student to take on that role.*

While these contrasts are all observable in the prefaces that frame each textbook *circumtextually*, their general cumulative effect is to impress on their respective readerships (teachers and students alike) certain habits of *extratextual* framing.

#### STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Certain themes recurred conspicuously in the interviews with students. There was wide agreement that the reading required for this Management unit was very limited in extent, that it was governed by set exercises and exam needs (“If you are getting the same marks for not reading the extra bits, why bother?”), that it was “simple stuff”, was intended to be reproduced “parrot fashion” rather than evaluated critically, did not emphasise cultural relativity, and encouraged “rote learning”. NS students in particular saw their reading matter as superficial; the textbook, for instance, was generally regarded as communicating at a high-school level: “It’s all spelt out.... It saves you time but you don’t really learn, it’s not a good learning tool.” This comment was particularly directed at a few circumtextual and intratextual framing devices (“learning aids”), which were appreciated by some but seen by others as spoonfeeding.

One student taking both Social Science and Management courses was in a position to make this comparison: “Sociology is more analytical and you have to read widely and understand a lot of concepts, it’s not a matter of learning the meaning of one word.” On the style of presentation in Management course materials, she commented: “I guess it’s aimed at first years, easing them into university books and how to grasp concepts, but I think it’s all given to you on a plate and you don’t really have to read it.”

A few cross-cultural differences were observable. NNS students from overseas seemed more inclined than local NS students to rate reading as particularly important for knowledge of the subject. Apart from the difficulties they may have had with a few culturally ambiguous concepts (e.g. “drive” and “motivation”), reading as such apparently did not pose significant difficulties for a number of overseas students we interviewed. They were also more inclined to read closely, and cover more than was specified in the Unit Workbook — whether because they had a desire for deeper learning or because they lacked the extratextual experience to make appropriate discriminations — and hence spent longer on reading. This seemed in some cases to be a laborious process, and consequently the total reading load could become burdensome. Whereas NS students often saw the content of their reading as superficial, and therefore read as little as they could, most NNS students felt they needed to read it all.

The interviews revealed a good deal about the use that students make of various framing factors when reading texts. Most of them said they relied on the obvious *circumtextual and intratextual aids* such as headings and chapter objectives to guide their selective reading of the textbook. Some tended to see figures, graphs, and particularly boxed “current issues” as distracting and irritatingly disjunctive;



others found them useful. One Singaporean student expressed a preference for not having her concentration broken in this way, especially when the purpose was to highlight what she regarded as “subjective” issues such as women in leadership. She attributed her exam-focused way of reading to “the system in Singapore”. Similar sentiments were expressed informally to one of the researchers in the classroom by a student of Chinese background, who said that she found the text difficult to read and that the inserts were particularly distracting, breaking up the main text as they did and therefore breaking her concentration. The local student who was also studying Sociology regarded margin definitions in the Management textbook as “a real escape route ... [which] makes you lazy; lots of people don’t read the whole thing.”

The significance of *intertextual framing* was, in general, not well grasped. Student readers simply did not notice references in the textbook. This was partly because they assumed that references were provided merely as an obligatory acknowledgement of sources: “I’ve never looked one up — why read what the authors have got their information from?” The attitude expressed by one student was that evaluating the research was up to the author, not himself. There seemed to be no understanding that references serve also to indicate what particular “conversations” different texts are having with one another as part of the ongoing dialogue of evaluating and extending knowledge within the field. In fact, students showed little interest in the economic, social and discursive forces that shape the discipline.

*Extratextual framing* always occurs as one reads, since it is impossible for any individual readers to avoid drawing on their accumulated knowledge of the world, their attitudes, their interests and their assumptions whenever they look at any text. Students with work experience, NS and NNS alike, tended to criticise the relevance of much of what they read. Many students regarded some of the theories and examples provided as unrealistic — “A lot of it doesn’t work that way.” The problem for many NNS students from overseas is that they may never have been in paid employment, either in their home country or in Australia, and therefore have limited understanding of the economic and social environments of the “real life” businesses featured in American management textbooks.

Of course students are not always aware that extratextual factors frame whatever they read. Many of the students we interviewed did not, for example, have issues of culturally variable ideology in the forefront of their consciousness, though they began to recognise such issues when specifically asked to reflect on the possible bias of what they read for the course. In response to questions about the view of management and the workplace presented in the textbook, one student described it as “very Americanised” and said “I don’t think you can relate a lot of our marketing or management strategies to Japan.” Students from overseas agreed, in general terms: “Different countries might come up with different ways of doing things, different values.” The basic concepts, however, would be much the same, they thought.

## LECTURER INTERVIEWS

Like much else that we must omit here, comments from the interviews with lecturers are given at length in the full version of this paper. Generally they reinforce most of the points made by students.

For instance one of the lecturers, referring to problems of cultural bias, mentioned that Maslow's "hierarchy of needs", a staple of many Western management courses, is alien to Chinese students. This specific point was borne out in an interview with a Chinese Malaysian student, who told us that she found those concepts difficult to grasp and spent hours repeatedly rereading the relevant chapter. If more use of cross-cultural perspectives were to be made in this course, all students might develop a salutary scepticism about such concepts, whose validity has in fact been called into question in recent management literature.

"I think the contradiction or dilemma we have", said one of the lecturers, is that we are presenting an American text as what is used in the Western world and we are trying to relate it to Asia-Pacific people." Another lecturer said she recognised the need for students to acquaint themselves with alternative cultural perspectives — but did not see these as coming from additional readings. "It's a very Americanised textbook, [so] ... it is necessary to give other relevant examples as well, especially encouraging students to relate it to their own lives." Again, the experiential emphasis is paramount.

## CLASS OBSERVATIONS

The opening lectures of this unit introduced students not only to the expectations of tertiary study in general, but also to the prevailing academic culture of the business school and this unit in particular. They introduced the concept of experiential learning as the predominant approach to be used, encouraged students to reflect on their own learning styles, and described core skills that the course valued highly and aimed to develop: interpersonal skills, library research skills, referencing and writing skills. Later, in seminar sessions and the Unit Outline, lecturers specified the textbook reading that students were expected to do as an integral part of their work.

From the host of things observed in classes, there is time here only to pick out one matter, which highlights a key literacy skill that tertiary students need acquire very quickly: note-taking in lectures. In an introductory session by a guest lecturer, several detailed overhead transparencies were displayed at such a rapid rate that many students — NS and NNS alike — had trouble taking notes from them. As more and more of the transparencies were removed "too soon", the level of audible disaffection grew, until one student asked that they be left a little longer. The lecturer was not sympathetic: "Let me give you some advice — if you have not been able to keep up with me, your writing is too slow for university.... You will not survive."

Worth emphasising here is the importance of OHTs in some fields of instruction at tertiary level. Teachers may underestimate the fact that the OHT is a distinctly framed kind of text with its own forms of grammar and syntax. For some

students, it is the principal reading material. In all Management classes we observed, the lecturers made frequent use of OHTs and students appeared to be totally focussed on these, in spite of regular assurances from the lecturers that it was all in the textbook. Very few students bothered to make even brief notes during general discussions, whereas the appearance of OHTs was taken to signal the “serious stuff” and met with furious copying of the exact content.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Any prescription for improving literacy practices among university students, particularly management students, needs to consider three factors, which emerge clearly from our analysis.

First, critical reading has a low priority in introductory-level business education.

In a phrase that no longer enjoys much currency, someone undertaking university studies used to be said to be “reading for a degree.” To judge from the investigation reported in the present paper, that phrase would hardly be appropriate to describe the main teaching-learning method favoured today in at least some introductory-level business education. Instead of well developed literacy skills, including the skill of critical interpretation of complex written texts, the emphasis falls on experiential knowledge, group talk, and a pragmatic and utilitarian attitude to learning. Most of the reading is confined to the textbook and is often cursory.

Second, links between reading and writing skills are generally not cultivated.

There does not seem to be an appreciation of the dependence of writing skills on reading skills. When writing tasks are set for introductory business courses, the primary emphasis tends to be on general injunctions about mechanical matters such as the importance of referencing, or about prohibited behaviour (notably plagiarism — without any consideration of the different cultural values that may be involved), rather than instilling an appreciation of the way in which writing, especially genre-specific writing, can be enriched by genre-conscious reading. In any case, the opportunities for writing anything which might require wide and critical reading were very limited in this unit.

Finally, such courses give little encouragement to reflect on cultural assumptions of the discipline.

Information referred to in this paper gives some support for the view that if courses do not put a spotlight on their own framing assumptions there will tend to be two consequences: (1) students are likely to overlook or underestimate cross-cultural variations in the shaping of knowledge, and (2) they are unlikely to develop a reflexive awareness of their own reading practices.

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# Another Country: Non-Aboriginal Tertiary Students' Perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

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The paper will discuss the responses of prospective primary school teachers to a course component which aimed to develop in them an understanding of the specific educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students. Prescribed reading, lecture material, a tutorial presentation and discussion were used to inform students about issues and research findings relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and education. Responses from students (recorded in examination answers) showed little evidence of students making sense of the ideas and information to which they had been exposed during the unit. Instead they seemed to reproduce received ideas, often negatively stereotypical ones, about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The research highlighted the need for greater effort to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in tertiary courses so that prejudiced ideas are not perpetuated. When the students are prospective teachers the need seems even more significant.

The impetus to write this paper came with the shock of reading my second and third year education students' exam papers and finding I was not communicating effectively about the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I needed to look much more closely at what was happening in this aspect of my teaching. I realised I could not simply pour ideas into my students' heads and expect these ideas to remain unchanged by the process. More complicated interactions take place and in this paper I would like to investigate what occurred in the teaching/learning exchange with a view to greater understanding of some important issues:

1. What has been the impact on my tertiary students of my teaching about indigenous peoples?
2. What can we learn from the experience about tertiary teaching in general?
3. How, given our history, can we communicate effectively about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? How can I, a non-indigenous

Australian, begin to define the needs of people I know from the outside, and then speak about my understandings to students whose interest in and commitment to exploring indigenous peoples may not have been awakened?

In order to find some answers to these questions I looked closely at the writing of the thirty out of seventy students in my unit who chose to write in response to the following exam question:

Teachers need to understand the language and cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Discuss some of the language and cultural experiences these students bring to school. What are some ways teachers can begin to meet these students' needs?

Of course I'm blushing to confess that such an issue was tackled in a thirty minute exam answer. However, I'll reflect on the teaching process later in this paper. The comments I'll make about the students' ideas are based on close reading of their exam responses with the assumption that their writing is revelatory of both their consciously held views and some of their less obvious attitudes and values. I have not been able to crosscheck my analysis of their ideas with their own views of themselves by interviewing or surveying them. As I think you'll agree this would have been useful.

In the unit, called Language Education I, there was one lecture and a two hour tutorial per week. I was preparing undergraduate Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Teaching students to be teachers of reading and writing in primary schools. As part of this concern, issues of cultural diversity were addressed; in particular, how to make primary classrooms inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. To this end there was a lecture speaking about indigenous cultures and Aboriginal English. I talked about the idea of difference rather than deficiency in relation to culture and the possibility of a mismatch between the culture of school and that of home. The example of "Elsy", a Torres Strait Islander child, discussed in an article by Kale and Luke (1991), "Doing Things With Words" was raised. According to the article, this child spoke a mixture of TSI Creole and English and code switched according to context. The authors suggest that Elsey's highly developed language skills will not necessarily be valued in the mainstream school. Students also read an article from Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education (Conference Proceedings, National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, 1993). Here Noreen Trouw wrote about Aboriginal children in a school in Darwin whom she saw as experiencing English as "a second culture" (p. 21). She operated a withdrawal group where she attempted to use teaching practices more congruent with those in Aboriginal culture. In choosing this material I was seeing Aboriginal students as culturally distinctive and trying to provide my students with some knowledge of these cultural patterns.

I found in reading my students' exam responses that there were distinctive non-Aboriginal cultural patterns in their ideas. What were the patterns?

The initial most striking pattern was the tendency to see Aboriginal culture as foreign - from 'another country'. In response to the examination question one student wrote:

Not all students in the education system are of Australian nationality and this is important for teachers to understand so they can make adjustments to the teaching program to cater for the needs of the students.

Some of the language and cultural experiences these children bring to school are rather different to us but important to them.

The language spoken is what they have been raised with. Elsey [a Torres Strait Islander child living in Cairns] lived with her grandmother who spoke torres strait creole [sic] but Elsey had some understanding of our language ... .

This student's use of "us" and "our" reveals much about her vision of Australia. She along with other students does not see Australia's indigenous people as fitting her definition of what an Australian is. Another student wrote:

Even though Aboriginal people are from Australia it does not mean they speak the English language. Every tribe within Australia has their own language. What we English speaking people call a 'door' may be called something else in a tribal language. The whole language structure of speaking and writing may be different to what many of us have learnt.

Again we have the revealing use of "we" and "us". What this student seems to have done is extrapolate from the discussion of Torres Strait Creole and Aboriginal English which went on in class to imagine a people who do things very differently indeed. The student's use of the term "tribe" labels indigenous people as very remote. I also am tempted to speculate that the use of the example of the word "door" was not arbitrary and the student suspects that doors may not be used at all among the 'tri'es'. This student was not alone in speaking about Aboriginal culture from a very removed position. At times this distance allowed them to make rather breathtakingly unreflective generalisations. For example, one student wrote: "The aboriginal language [sic] and culture has very little two way interaction." (This comment arose out of discussion about Aboriginal learning styles tending to rely more on imitation than verbal instruction.) Another said:

Children grow up in their family environment which becomes second nature to them. In many cases for Aboriginal children this also means speaking a language which is not 'English'. They learn their native tongue. There are a very few who learn the english [sic] language in their culture so those who do are considered to be very lucky.

Here, as well as this ignorance about Aboriginal people, we see another striking feature of students' ideas. Implicit in the last comment about the "lucky" Aboriginal children who learn English (and the many 'unlucky' ones who don't)

is a deficit view of Australia's indigenous cultures:

When a child first enters school they bring along 'baggage' which they have learnt from parents, relatives - people around them and for [the] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander such baggage continues to affect their learning. Many of these children do not have the luxuries of their parents listening to them read at an early age. You may find that such children learn to hunt for food, learn tribal rituals, dances as the parents may see that as more beneficial and more important.

In these comments stereotypes about indigenous people are rife. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are Stone Age people who need help to live in the twentieth century. While these prospective teachers might see it as desirable to take account of Aboriginal culture, they tend to see this as making allowances for a culture that will probably be an impediment at school. In the following comment the student sees teachers as needing "patience" to deal with the Aboriginal children's difficulties:

Teachers can meet the needs of these children by firstly showing patience and understanding towards a child, showing that you understand and are there to help. You could allow the classroom to be less threatening through the display of Aboriginal artifacts, you could organise an Aboriginal studies program which included an Aboriginal Day - with guest speakers. The teacher could invite the children to talk about their 'home' [sic] lives. You could invite the Aboriginal Parents [sic] into the classroom and show them what goes on.

Also notice the strange use of quotation marks around the word " 'home' ", thereby seeming to suggest that the writer wonders whether the Aboriginal children have anything resembling what she would call a 'home' life. Students worry about how Aboriginal students are going to adapt to the dominant culture:

Even though it is essential that a teacher needs to be understanding it is important for the teacher to teach rules to the Aboriginal children so that they become aware of what is expected of them at school. The teacher may need to stress that the rules 'at home' are different to the rules 'at school'. e.g. - the wearing of shoes.

The implication is that the Aboriginal child is unaccustomed to wearing shoes. The process of learning for the Aboriginal child becomes one of assimilation to mainstream ways of acting:

As a teacher one must ensure that learning is able to be achieved by the students. ... Over time with encouragement the students will begin to act in a classroom like that of a child from a European background.

All the onus to change must lie with the indigenous children. Even more disturbingly, some students are concerned about the impact of too much accommodation to indigenous needs:



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can bring an exciting new way of learning into our classroom . . . . Although we should adapt our curriculum to the "new" students' needs we cannot forget our general learning techniques. If this is done we put the "white Australians" in danger.

I am reminded of the research about Aboriginal children in South Australia done by Merridy Malin (1994), which is discussed in her article " Why is it so Hard for Aboriginal Children in Urban Classrooms?" Malin used videotaping to record the interactions between the Aboriginal children and their teachers and found that Aboriginal cultural norms such as always supporting peers were consistently discouraged, even punished. In the end the Aboriginal children withdrew from participation in the classroom. It appears that my students might well do the same when in charge of a class.

However, as in that last student's comment about the excitement potentially provided by Aboriginal children, in some cases we see students who do attempt to grapple with the idea that the relationships between the cultures should be one of difference rather than deficit:

The teacher may use this child as a positive rather than negative aspect in his/her class. The teacher may introduce Aboriginal Studies to his/her class, letting the Aboriginal child talk about their culture and to teach the class about their different customs. It is important to let the child know that being different or of another culture is something wonderful and they should be proud of it.

The limitation in this refreshing approach tends to be ignorance of what Aboriginal culture is like, making it difficult for them to be specific about what aspects need to be explored. Often it is relatively superficial or stereotypical aspects which are emphasised. For instance, Aboriginal artifacts or use of individual Aboriginal words are discussed, rather than students seeing that there might be indigenous ways of living which are different from the mainstream patterns.

Vicki Crowley (1993) in her article "Teaching Aboriginal Studies: Some Problems of Culturalism in an Inner City School" calls this limited view of indigenous culture "culturalism" (p. 35). It is evidence of not really confronting Aboriginal culture as it is, but relegating it to the "remote and exotic" (p.36). Her article is instructive as it appears to describe the kinds of teaching practice some of my students might develop given their ideas. Like the teacher in her study my students view "racism as individual prejudice and discrimination," and the solutions as " 'understanding', 'tolerance' and 'respecting others customs'" (p.42).

In some cases my students grappled with the idea of there being a distinctive Aboriginal way of learning, but again the comments imply a Stone Age picture of indigenous peoples. Here one student reflects:

Aboriginal people teach their children by participating and imitating. One to one interaction is not very common to the people. They show

their children what they want them to learn and the children watch and participate. .... Aboriginal people teach their children objectives which they need for every day life such as how to hunt or make a fire.

Because there is very little interaction when Aboriginals are taught by the family, the children find it difficult to talk at school.

The literalness of the understanding of Aboriginal cultural patterns ( "One to one interaction is not very common to the people.") embodies what Crowley would describe as Aboriginal people constructed as "different Others" (p.40). The present reality is not explored.

Why were the attempts made by me to familiarise students with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture so remarkably unsuccessful? For instance, why did many of the students hear discussion of Aboriginal English as meaning that it was different language? Their confusion about this seems to me to be a reflection of the distance most students feel from Aboriginal culture. Is dealing with this just a matter of being clearer and more insistent about the facts next year? Certainly the provision of correct information is important but the students' responses indicate that accurate information tends to become distorted if it is filtered through unconscious prejudices.

Hence, it is crucial to encourage students to be aware of their own preconceptions and prejudices in this area. An examination of racism must be part of any course in Aboriginal Studies. Many of the courses currently being developed by universities in consultation with indigenous people begin with this element. For example, the document Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies for Primary Pre-Service Teacher Education (University of New South Wales, 1995) has a model which has a "present, past and futures perspectives" (p. 16) pattern. It suggests that students need to "Critically analyse any stereotype views or misconceptions they may hold about Indigenous societies ... " (p.16).

Clearly teachers must be self-aware to handle these issues. In Victoria the teaching of Aboriginal Studies in schools has by no means been widespread and my anecdotal experience would suggest that most children have received only piecemeal information through individual units of work on Aborigines. As Groome (1994) in his book Teaching Aboriginal Studies Effectively states, "one off and short term courses ... Too often they are not related to other learning ... support the perception of Aboriginal people as being a marginal group" (p.64). This is the background that many of our tertiary students have come from in terms of knowledge of Australia's indigenous peoples.

Immersion in the culture is essential. Keefe (1992) in his book From the Centre to the City is instructive about how we need to view indigenous culture. He describes the pervasive tendency to see Aboriginal culture as a static phenomenon, the way of life that the indigenous people lived pre-invasion. It is seen as a 'traditional' culture which has not adapted or changed since the time of white settlement. He prefers to speak of Aboriginal culture as persisting and resisting instead of this "illusion of purity in isolation" (p.97). The learning of the 'true' history is obviously important. While it is not feasible to provide this in an

already crowded curriculum subject such as my unit was, the pre-invasion history and what follows needs to be part of an Indigenous Studies unit within a teacher education program.

The other factor which certainly influenced how students perceived what I taught was that the information/ideas about indigenous peoples was delivered by a non-indigenous person. I was speaking about a culture I was not part of. It would be interesting to see a videotape of my lecture to see how I betrayed unconscious racism, like the students, despite my 'good' intentions. For instance, I can now see that the article by Trouw describing a successful 'remedial' program for Aboriginal students probably did tend to reinforce the idea that the only way for Aboriginal children is gradual assimilation. The article certainly did not entertain the idea of Two Way Aboriginal Schooling as Stephen Harris (1990) describes it. More important than the content of the subject, it has long been a premise of the teaching of Aboriginal Studies that the indigenous peoples should speak for and about themselves. "The bottom line is that an Indigenous Australian Studies subject will only be appropriate or effective if there is Indigenous involvement." (The University of New South Wales Steering Committee, 1995, p.9). We all know the difficulties involved in accomplishing this involvement. Universities lack indigenous people on their staffs who can provide this expertise, nor are they interested in paying indigenous people from outside the university system to assist. Hence, the job is inadequately done by non-indigenous people.

My study also suggests that there is a pattern among many of the students of seeing teaching as a kind of inculcation of certain immutable skills and ideas ("... we should not forget our general learning techniques ..."). The students have clear ideas about what needs to be taught and see it as a matter of adapting their methods of instruction to allow indigenous children to learn this curriculum. Teaching for such students involves 'handling' the indigenous children appropriately rather than altering the goals. Of course, in many ways this is the hierarchical model of learning which I am using in my university teaching in that I am attempting to lecture to my students about what I see as the 'correct' way to see things. This even happens in a way in tutorials in that often I set the agenda and control the discussion. This does not permit a two-way relationship any more than it might be permitted in my prospective students' classrooms. The inflexible nature of my instruction did not allow me to engage very deeply with students' ideas and address the issues of unconscious prejudices. I might accomplish more if I was willing to explore with my students rather than impose my views on them.

Finally, examining the students' writing suggests too that often they are struggling to articulate ideas. Their writing skills are not sufficiently developed to allow them easily to express them. Their struggles are signalled in awkwardness of expression and punctuation. For instance, the student who spoke of the "baggage" that Aboriginal children bring with them felt uncomfortable enough to put the word in quotation marks, but this was as far as her self-awareness seemed to go. Of course, the exam situation is not particularly conducive to

refined writing skills. But my experience with the students in the unit overall tells me that they do not tend to examine their ideas through writing, but seem more to put their thoughts onto the page as these thoughts first come to them. By this I don't mean that they are careless but rather that they don't see writing as a means of exploration, where they can write and reread and reflect and write again. I think also they are often in the position of trying to express unclear, complex thoughts with limited vocabulary and undeveloped writing proficiency. Talking is a more comfortable medium for them. Therefore, tutorials, when they free themselves from the idea that the teacher is the source of all knowledge, are useful means of exploration. Their reading also tends to be somewhat unreflective. It is difficult for them to question what is written. Hence Trouw's article about teaching Aboriginal children was not examined for its assumptions. It must be my role to encourage this questioning.

I am conscious that this paper has embodied a deficit view of my students: that they are empty or wrong-headed in relation to this issue. I need to find ways of better valuing my students' ideas within the process and content of my classes. To balance this view I will finish with the words of one student who seemed to perceive that teaching indigenous children might involve more than simply an adjustment in teaching style and content:

Some teachers are not aware of language and cultural backgrounds of these children. This is a shame as the class may miss out on a valuable learning experience. The learning experience is more than just learning about the 'dreamtime' and what the Aboriginal name for Ayers rock [sic] is. This experience is about learning about a way of life.

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# The Report and the Essay: Are We Muddling Science and Engineering Undergraduates by Asking Them to Write in Two Different Genres?

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This paper examines the literary structure and purposes of the report and the essay, and asks the question: are we muddling all but the more able engineering students by requiring them to write in two genres? Reports and essays are different in structure and purpose. Reports are often skimmed or selectively read, and should therefore be designed to ensure that a reader does not have to read an entire report in order to extract the necessary information. This can be achieved by a number of strategies: subdivision, formatting, and presentation of the information in the order in which the reader expects it. In contrast, essays present an argument in a linear form, and are meant to be read from beginning to end. Formal letters are reports in miniature and should thus be written according to the same principles as reports.

Professional engineers often use the principles of essay writing when designing reports, making it difficult for the reader to access the information. It is suggested that we may be disadvantaging most engineering students - those to whom writing holds no intrinsic interest - by requiring them to write in two different ways. The profession may be better served by our requiring them to write all assignments according to clear report-writing principles.

This paper is designed to stimulate discussion about an aspect of writing in the engineering curriculum. It has no unequivocal answers; I would welcome feedback on the topic.

## **1 BACKGROUND**

The curricula of engineering schools often require students to write in two different genres: the report on technical areas of the curriculum; and the essay, often required in the broad-based general studies aspects of the curriculum. It is always required that the essay be a "proper" essay - visually unformatted (i.e. no headings), and showing the writer's presence in the development of an argument.

Analysis of the professional engineer's attitude to writing [1] has shown that their view of it - and indeed their often deliberate choice of technical subjects - has been deeply shaped by their school experiences of English lessons, in

particular their perceived lack of essay-writing skills.

This paper seeks to examine the structural requirements for the report, the essay and the letter. It addresses only the structuring of information, and not the question of stylistic elegance of word choice. It asks: are we doing most of our students - and their future employers - a disservice by requiring them to write in both report and essay formats? Are we muddling all but the more able students about what will be required in their future professional lives?

## **2 THE DEFINITIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OF A REPORT, AN ESSAY AND A LETTER**

### **2.1 THE REPORT**

The aim of a technical report should be to maximise the ease of retrieval of information by the reader. Its visual formatting and its structure should both be directed unequivocally towards this end.

A report should not have to be read from beginning to end by someone needing to understand it. It must be structured so that readers are able to pick out only the information that they need. A reader of a report will often do either or both of the following:

- skim it to extract the skeleton of the information
- read only those sections that are of interest to that individual

### **2.2 THE ESSAY**

According to Rountree [2], the student essay should be "...less formal and more opinionated than a report. [It] presents a cunningly-constructed and persuasive argument. The writer's presence is strong in a good essay". The primary function of an essay is to present a structured argument. The argument is developed linearly; an essay is therefore designed to be read from beginning to end. It is not visually formatted i.e. headings and subheadings are not a characteristic of an essay.

### **2.3 THE LETTER**

A formal letter of the sort required from a professional engineer is similar in function to a report; it is essentially a short report, the function of which is to transfer information. Therefore, even though it is visually unformatted, it should be written according to the principles of report writing.

SUMMARY TABLE: REPORTS AND ESSAYS: DIFFERENCES IN STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE [3]

<b>The Report</b>	<b>The Essay</b>
A form of professional writing. Its aim: to maximise the ease of retrieval of information by the reader	A more literary form of writing. Its aim: to develop a linear argument.
Often skimmed or selectively read	Must be read from beginning to end.
Should be designed so that a reader does not have to read an entire report to extract the necessary information. Heavily formatted.	No text formatting, i.e., no headings, sub-headings, bold-facing, bullet-points, etc..
Its information is presented in the order in which the reader finds easiest to assess: outcome first, justification next.	Linear argument.
Rabbit should come out of the hat at the beginning	Therefore rabbit comes out of the hat at the end.

### 3 TWO STRATEGIES THAT A REPORT WRITER SHOULD EMPLOY

To make it as easy as possible for a reader to retrieve information from a report, the writer should use two strategies: formatting, and the order of presentation of the information.

#### 3.1 STRATEGY 1: FORMATTING TECHNIQUES FOR INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

- These may be summarised as follows:
- Placing the Summary (Abstract) at the beginning of the report.
- Using headings and subheadings.
- Using the decimal system of numbering headings and subheadings
- Making the headings and subheadings informative in themselves so that they form a brief summary of the section
- If sections are long, having section summaries at the beginning of each.
- Making the headings stand out by the use of centring, bold-facing, using capitals, initial capitals or small capitals, and indenting material below the headings.
- Making specific points in the text stand out by bold-facing key words, or listing within the text by bulleting (dot-pointing) or numbering.

There are two results of visual formatting: (1) the reader can readily find and extract the required information, and (2) reports do not present the reader with



pages of black text. This psychological aspect - that of making a report look other than daunting - is of the utmost importance for the reader.

### 3.1.1 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF FORMATTING

Studies in cognitive psychology [4] have shown that a page of uninterrupted black text has a severely off-putting effect on a reader. The breaking up of the text by intelligent paragraphing, such that no paragraph is more than 6-8 lines is only slightly helpful. If a page appears to look as though it is designed for rapid retrieval of information, then the reader is made to feel more positive about approaching it. This psychological effect is of paramount importance in presenting information to a technical reader.

### 3.2 STRATEGY 2: THE PRESENTATION OF MATERIAL IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THE READER EXPECTS IT

A reader is best able to evaluate information if it is presented in the order in which she or he expects it. This important concept in cognitive psychology is only now being appreciated in its application to report writing. In simple terms, readers are better able to evaluate a body of information if they know beforehand the outcome of that information.

The most obvious example of this concept is the principle of having a summary at the beginning of every report. A summary serves two functions, one obvious, one less so.

- The **obvious function** is to give an overview of information for the reader with no time to read the whole report.
- The **less obvious function** is to prime the reader with the outcome of the material so that the body of the material may be better assessed.

The justifications for a report's decisions will always be better assessed if the reader knows at the very beginning what those decisions are. This is therefore strong support not only for having a Summary at the beginning, but also for placing the Recommendations section immediately after the Summary (which is a suggestion that many organisations in NZ have readily taken up), and even for following it with the Conclusions section (which is accepted in the USA, but met with reluctance in Australasia).

### 3.3 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE REPORT AS A GENRE:

- Its aim must always be the maximum ease of information retrieval by its reader.
- It is a document that is heavily formatted, using a variety of formatting strategies.
- Its information is presented in the order in which the reader expects it: outcome first, justifications next.
- A writer of a report should never expect that it will always be read thoroughly from beginning to end. It is far more likely to be skimmed or selectively picked through.

#### **4 IS THE ESSAY OF VALUE IN TEACHING STUDENTS TO WRITE LETTERS?**

The essay, in contrast to a report, is designed to be read from beginning to end. Its purpose is the development of a logical argument in a visually unstructured way. One is not expected to skim-read an essay, nor selectively extract sections; one reads an essay in its entirety.

It is said by some that the essay is valuable because it teaches students to write letters. It is argued in this paper that this is based on a fallacy. The fallacy lies in the belief that because a letter is visually unstructured, then it must be like an essay. It is not. A formal letter is a report in miniature; its information should be structured in the same way as a report - for maximum ease of information retrieval - but without the aid of visual formatting.

Without visual formatting, the only strategy left for information retrieval is Strategy 2: presenting the information in the order in which the reader expects it. The message should therefore come at the beginning with the justifications following.

##### **4.1 THE MESSAGE FIRST: HOW TO TRANSMIT BAD NEWS IN A LETTER**

Bad news sometimes has to be transmitted in a letter, for example, a local authority's refusal of an application to build something. The writers of such letters (usually to the despair of their senior managers) often argue that if the news is bad then one should lead up to it gently; that one should develop the argument of the background to the decision, and then tell the person, with regret, that it was refused. They argue this in the belief that the reader of such a letter will read it from beginning to end. This does not happen; the letter is scanned to identify the news - whether it be good or bad - and the rest of the letter is then read.

Thus a letter is read in exactly the same way as a report; the need is first to identify the message, and only afterwards to access the supporting arguments.

It is now acknowledged by senior management in many organisations that the first paragraph of any letter should contain the news, good or bad. The rabbit should not be pulled out of the hat right at the end. Therefore the justification of essay writing as a necessary skill for engineering students to enable them to write formal letters does not hold. The principles of essay writing should not be applied to the writing of formal letters, because the argument should not be developed linearly.

#### **5 ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS TO WRITING**

Professional engineers' innate feelings about writing are often moulded by their experiences in school and university, even after years of professional practice. It is useful to examine their attitudes, and also their methods of approaching writing. These methods are often automatic and without a conscious strategy. However, in discussion, it is often possible to see how the writing methods of their formative

years influence both their strategies and their attitudes.

The writer has now run courses in report structuring and wording for more than 500 professional engineers and technical specialists, all of whom have been asked to estimate how long they spend in writing. The results of this show that engineers spend far more time writing than they ever imagined as undergraduates: a new graduate engineer will spend at least 30%; this will rise within 5 years after graduation to about 70%; and senior management will spend as much as 90-95%.

They thus spend a considerable amount of their professional life engaged in an activity for which most of them feel unprepared. The attitudes that are shared by very many of them [1] are:

- They disliked writing in school, because writing in their senior school years was in the form of essays, in which many of them performed poorly.
- They think of all writing as somehow allied to essay writing, and therefore feel that they are intrinsically bad at it.

The notion of essay-writing therefore colours their attitude to report writing. Armed with little or no formal instruction in their undergraduate years in the requirements of report writing, many of them resort to ill-remembered precepts of essay writing learnt years ago in school. These may be summarised as:

- open the document with the background information, often lengthily
- develop the argument, often chronologically
- come to a conclusion, often hidden within the text
- finish the document with a paragraph akin to the concluding paragraph of an essay.

A reader finds these reports difficult to extract information from. They may be minimally structured under sparse headings, but they are designed like an essay - to be read from beginning to end. They are not easy to skim read, neither can information be selectively extracted from them.

Most report writers who adopt this style acknowledge that they are - somewhat hazily - following the principles accepted in school for essay writing. Once the requirements of the reader are discussed, they readily acknowledge that it is far preferable to structure according to the principles outlined in Section 3.0 of this paper. They immediately adopt these principles, and communication within the organisation improves markedly.

## 6 POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

The points this paper therefore presents for discussion are:

1. In the absence of instruction, professional engineers tend to use the principles of essay writing when structuring the information in reports. Even when their document is visually structured by the minimal use of headings, the structure is that of an essay - the development of an argument

- in linear form.
2. Such a structure is poor for information retrieval by the reader. In contrast, the two major principles used to structure information in reports are:
    - there is heavy visual structuring by the use of formatting of various types
    - the information is presented in an order that maximises information retrieval. This order is not linear. Rather, information is presented in reverse. At each point, the reader first seeks the answer; the writer should not withhold the most important information until the end.
  3. Letters are reports in miniature. Like reports, their function is also that of information transfer. Therefore, even though they are visually unformatted, the order of presentation of information should follow the same principles as those of reports. Essay writing is therefore not good practice for letter writing.
  4. When we require our students to write both essays and reports, we are asking them to adopt two quite separate styles of writing. The principles of one of them - essay writing - they will never have to use again in their professional lives.
  5. Most engineering students are not interested in writing for writing's sake. They see writing as only one of a number of tools that they will have to use in their professional life. They do not want to bother with the arcane subtleties of the differences between the two genres. Instead they want clear guidelines about something that will help them become good engineers. Good students will undoubtedly take essay-writing in their stride and may even be interested in it as a genre. But the less able students are often resentful of the essay (because it reminds them of school failure) and confused about what is required for professional writing.
  6. We therefore have to ask ourselves the questions:
    - Are we doing most of our students a disservice by teaching them essay-writing skills?
    - Are we muddling them and leaving them confused about which principles to use in their future professional lives?

If we are convinced that we can teach all students - not only the more aware students - in such a way that they clearly see what is needed in their professional writing, then perhaps we are justified in getting them to write in both genres. However, if we believe that the future needs of the majority - and of those of their employers - are better served by giving them a set of unequivocal principles by which to write, then we should question the value of essay writing.

Perhaps we should instead be asking ourselves: if engineering students are required to write a discussion of the incorporation of cultural values into the practice of engineering, or of the influences on art of twentieth century history,

could they not be encouraged to write just as convincingly and usefully in the form of a research report?

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# Cultural Differences Within “Western” and “Eastern” Education

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This paper discusses the differences in cultural perceptions of knowledge in non-Anglo-Australian educational traditions. Distinction is made between “western” and “eastern” skills needed in the acquisition and presentation of knowledge. Comparison of educational expectations, assumptions and attitudes towards measurement of knowledge are made between Australian and Italian universities. The Italian example is then examined with reference to Kaplan, Hofstede and other writers, aiming to modify our definitions and perceptions of what constitutes “western” academic tradition and thus a “valid” university education. Implications for international educational exchanges and the recognition of educational training and qualifications are also considered. The discussion then opens debate on what is accepted by hosting universities as equivalent knowledge and academic standards. With the expanding diversity in the cultural background of international students studying in this country, there needs to be a broader understanding and appreciation of the educational training and skills they bring with them. It is as equally important to prepare the increasing numbers of Australian academics and students studying or working abroad within non-Anglophone educational cultures to develop competencies to work within different models of academic validity.

Types of knowledge and skills believed to be of value and worthwhile acquiring vary between cultures. Ways of attaining these can also be expected to differ according to agreed criteria within each culture. This paper discusses the differences between cultural perceptions of knowledge and learning styles in Anglo-Australian and other educational traditions. Part of this discussion questions the assumption that “Western” and “Eastern” learning styles are easily distinguishable into stereotypical groups. By drawing from “Western” examples which would fit the “Eastern” stereotypes, it is suggested that many Western cultures of a non-Anglo-Western type share similar educational values to Asian cultures. Perceptions of the Anglo-Western educational model as the yardstick to which other models should aspire are then discussed with reference to Hofstede’s dimension of Power Distance. The recognition of the validity of prior learning which is not of the Anglo-Western type is considered.

The alternative discourse styles found in international and NESB students’ writing are often compared unfavourably to the more direct English style. This may mask a cultural bias that other educational methods are not as valuable as those of the Anglo-Western type and that others should aspire to acquire the

prerequisite skills. Does this subtle (or otherwise) devaluation of other instructional styles also devalue the cultures of students who have spent their whole lives immersed in such diverse ways of thinking, both in their homes and at school? Some issues need to be raised for teachers of ESL or international students in relation to the teaching of one specific written discourse style common in English as the epitome of “good” writing. The question is whether educators of the modern Anglo-Western persuasion are willing to accept the validity of teaching and learning styles that in many ways are diametrically opposed to the current developments in education in many Western nations. Ellis (1995:9) commented when describing the differences between Vietnamese and Western teaching and learning styles that such thinking ( i.e. other cultures need to adopt Western educational models.).....*is predicated on the ethnocentric assumption that different cultures and different ways are departures from the norm....”*.

In discussions relating to the contrasts between international students’ “Eastern” and Australian students’ “Western” learning styles, a number of assumptions are made about the homogeneity of each group. Cognitive and learning styles differ not only between Eastern and Western cultures, but also within each culture. This brings to light the diversity in teaching and learning styles in Western Europe. Although on the surface it may seem that European nations have similar western educational traditions, the *style* in which each group manifests its educational values is unique and often quite different. One example of this, although there are many others, is the Italian style of university teaching which is set out in Table 1. The Italian or “Latin” model appears to be closer to an “Eastern” teacher-oriented, large Power Distance’ style than the commonly assumed modern “Western” paradigm as described by Hofstede (1986). While Australian teachers expect more egalitarian teacher / student relations, the student of a Latin-based education system would generally expect a greater social distance between teacher and student.

Indeed, when one speaks of educational traditions, both Classical Greece and Rome spring to mind as the roots of the Western tradition. Italy boasts of the oldest existing university in the world (in Bologna - founded in 11th century), so if “Western” tertiary education is to stem from a model, the Italian system would seem to be the natural choice. However, if a comparison is made between the Italian university system and the British, American or Australian systems, a number of differences in approaches become immediately evident. The first significant characteristic of Latin learning style is the focus on memory skills by means of rote learning. This is also a feature of Eastern European and Asian learning styles (Hendrichova & Sebkova, 1993; Marton et.al., 1993).

Although not considered of paramount importance in most Australian tertiary subjects, one wonders how students can develop a broad general knowledge, remember facts relating to the subject being studied, critically analyse, solve problems, use research skills have insight and understand the subject area without a well developed use of memory skills. The point being made here is that the skills being used in Australian institutions focus on tools developed for independent learning. Whereas the focus of the Latin and Eastern system is to

become part of the learned community by sharing in the body of valued knowledge. This is achieved by being well versed in all theoretical aspects of the subject area. The student must demonstrate a thorough understanding of the whole theoretical body of knowledge to be admitted to the graduate community. In Italy, the "laurea" or degree title literally means to be crowned in glory with laurels as the emperors or heroes were in ancient Rome. It is only at postgraduate level that evaluative research is permitted. Hence, in Latin, Eastern and Asian countries the emphasis in undergraduate education is the development of a very extensive general knowledge in the subject area rather than the art of critique and analysis.

Oral examinations are the standard form of assessment in Italy and some other Western and Eastern countries. A quick overview of Eastern and Western European educational systems shows that they use either a combination of written and oral assessment or purely oral as is the case in most faculties in Italian universities. It is of interest to note that due to pressure from the European Union and large numbers of exchange students, some Italian universities have introduced tutorials and written sections to examinations. Apart from the obvious language skills needed to be able to communicate effectively, students develop a number of memorization and oral presentation skills. These are very highly valued in Italy and other similar educational traditions. Written skills are less important and subsequently less well developed until the final thesis is written at the end of the studies. Kaplan (1966) speaks of the diversity in writing patterns between cultures pointing out that in other cultures communication is not as direct as in English. In Latin languages, the more divergent and eloquent the writing or the oral discourse within the accepted rhetorical style of the discipline, the more highly prized is the scholarly work.

Hence, what is considered good writing style by teachers in Latin or Eastern universities is judged by Australian educators as being "off the point", "circular", "fussy" or not following a "logical" sequence. Teachers of students who have been trained in the non-Anglo-Western styles may need to consider the use of comparative writing strategies as a means of developing the style and rhetoric used in Australian tertiary institutions. Students require time to acquire not only the second language skills but also the second culture skills. They need to think in English in terms of the logic it uses to construct discussions. They need to think like Australian students in terms of the skills and roles in teacher/student interactions they perceive are expected of them. Brown (1980:129) suggests that the second language learner goes through a process of acquiring a second cultural identity by assuming different patterns of thinking and feeling to operate in the new language. However, when taking into account Kaplan's model of different writing styles, it would seem that there is more cultural distance to be travelled between Anglo-Western styles of teaching and learning and Latin or Eastern styles than the latter two between them.

Agreement can be reached in some respects, but sensitivities concerning the "value" of diverse teaching and learning styles is a major obstacle to be dealt with. Here, some of the main concerns relate to the equivalence of one style of



learning and its outcomes in relation to another. In addition, the measurements, gradings or marks given to distinguish *degrees* of achievement require some cultural flexibility and a willingness to look beyond preconceptions and ethnocentrism. Some acceptance of these diversities has been reached between European universities which use guidelines to assess students' academic achievements on a comparative basis as Table 2 indicates. It shows equivalent gradings between nations participating in an international student exchange program (ERASMUS).

A number of concerns need to be raised in relation to comparability of gradings across cultures. Whilst the syllabus of a course can be negotiated and agreement can be reached regarding the credits that any study is worth in another nation, other cross-cultural issues then need to be resolved. What is the degree of difficulty and the depth of knowledge required of any subject? Sometimes, lengthy consultations and negotiations between institutions are required before an agreed "value" is arrived at. This process is complicated by the mere physical as well as social distance and educational outcomes expected of any two nations involved in educational exchanges. While Table 2 seems quite straightforward, it cannot deal with all the cultural notions that come with the concept of the grading given. For example, while in Italy it is not uncommon for students in Arts or Social Sciences to obtain "30 e lode", (30/30) which would be equivalent to a High Distinction in Australia, care needs to be taken in comparing this with the lower frequency of this grade given in Australian institutions. Perceptions of the criteria that constitute a High Distinction varies greatly between teachers, departments or institutions within a country, so it would not be surprising for problems to arise in translating a grading between countries.

The notions of adequate knowledge of core facts, general knowledge and understanding may be assessed differently in diverse cultures. Italian students are expected to be encyclopaedic about the subject being assessed rather than analytic and perceptive. Indeed, it would be seen as pretentious for an undergraduate to give a personal opinion or to question the lecturer's perspective on a particular point being studied. On the other hand, the Australian students are not expected to memorise every element of information in a subject since it is expected that problem solving skills, critical analysis and insight which are greatly valued as the mark of an accomplished scholar. The further the perceived social distance exists between cultures, the greater the need for accommodation and negotiation before consensus can be reached on the "value" of different teaching and learning styles. If Western education encompasses all of Western Europe as well as North America and Australia, then the core values of the education systems would be very similar. However, as the European Union has discovered in developing its education policies and guidelines, there has often been a lack of agreement on the validation of other nations' studies. Such issues as an English degree being of the same value as an Italian laurea are still a point of contention on the local level even if the governing authorities have imposed the "new order" in education.

Except for northern European nations and ex-British colonies, most other nations with which Australia has or will have educational exchanges do not adhere to the teaching and learning styles used in this country. Can we prepare our students to be academically flexible by introducing them to different models of learning thus giving them an appreciation of real-world variations? Are we perpetuating a subtle sense of Anglo-Western intellectual superiority by allowing judgements of educational and thus cultural validity to permeate our decision-making when international education issues and challenges arise? Consideration needs to be given to how diverse teaching and learning styles can be presented as being of equivalent academic value. This could be pragmatic in terms of future international study prospects for Australian students who will require considerable cross-cultural as well as language skills when confronted with unfamiliar teaching styles. But there are more important issues to be addressed by considering another educational model until now considered undesirable and therefore inferior.

There is little argument that we are geographically and economically part of the Asia/Pacific region and have much to learn from its diverse cultures. We are keen to interact with Asian nations with the establishment of Australian universities off-shore, but how far are we willing to accommodate the hosting country's educational culture in terms of teaching and learning styles? It seems at first glance that we intend to export our education system as the new academic yardstick for our Asian neighbours. Is this yet another prerequisite for economic development? We also accept increasing numbers of international students whose learning styles are so different from that expected in Australia that many require urgent assistance to be able to decode our teaching style and to adapt and operate in the new learning modality.

Hofstede's model of Individualist / Collectivist societies clearly shows that the vast majority of the economically affluent nations are grouped together on the low Power Distance / Highly Individualistic axis (except for Japan). If this is what an Anglo-Western education holds the promise of for our international students, then it may also entail a complete cultural and ideological shift for those who come from highly collectivist, family-oriented cultures (Ellis, 1995). The assuming of an Anglo-Western education system and thus thinking style may bring a shift in the way that students interact on an interpersonal level. As Brown suggests, "culture specific world views are reflected in language" (Brown, 1980:43) and one could add, the teaching and learning styles used also mirror the values of a society.

As stated earlier, the Anglo-Western educational model is not the only model of excellence in teaching and learning. To devalue non-Anglo-Western styles either overtly or subvertly is to devalue their cultures. Students may also develop the impression that their prior learning has been of little value and that the learning skills they bring with them are of little use. Indeed, one could argue that metamemory skills developed through rote learning are as valuable as those of critical analysis. Australian educators tend to see international students' lack of skills rather than the value of the skills which they bring with them as a base to

which to add new skills.

Is there room for a blend of both Anglo-Western and Latin or Eastern teaching and learning styles, without the marginalisation or exclusion of one or the other? This would not necessarily require modifications in the styles currently practised in Australia, but rather an understanding and validation of those attributes which produce excellence in other educational traditions. In "Community Guidelines for the Medium Term, 1989-1992" (1989) the European Commission commenting on the unification of Western Europe university systems states:

It is vital to preserve and respect the rich diversity of educational traditions in the Community, and to draw the best from this common heritage in promoting higher standards for the future. Blanket harmonization or standardization of the education systems is entirely undesirable...

This statement can be taken as testimony to the diversity *within* Western European society. Flexibility in teaching to cater for individual cognitive styles within a culturally homogeneous group of students can be extended to culturally heterogeneous groups. A blend of both Western and Eastern teaching and learning styles may be more appropriate for ESL or international students who are currently not achieving the desired educational outcomes or are not comfortable with a purely Anglo-Western approach.

It is hoped that the foregoing paper has helped to stimulate discussion regarding a number of controversial issues. To develop monocultural educational models by only accepting Anglo-Western teaching and learning models and strategies at the exclusion of the rest could be considered a negation of important core educational and thus cultural values of other cultures.

Increasingly larger numbers of our tertiary students have either been educated in another culture such as our international students and newer migrants or are of NESB background and are thus influenced by the home cultures and prior learning. An important element of improving the achievement of students with a different linguistic or cultural background is an awareness of the *value* of the first culture. Are we giving these students a sense of the validity of their prior educational / cultural values and training with those in Australia? This requires some knowledge and cross-cultural understanding of other cultures educational traditions and systems as well as a confirmation of the status of the prior learning that students bring with them. The teacher's task is then to develop those skills which are transferable and add new skills from the Australian educational context.

Ballard (1991:7-8) when speaking of international students' misconceptions of what Australian university lecturers require in written work and lecturers' limited cultural awareness comments: "...We looked at his essays and the comments ran like this: 'You have poor English but you are thinking well'. What the academic actually meant was that he was now thinking in a style that they recognised, in the way that they expected students to think...."

The issue clearly indicates subtle or sometimes not so subtle cultural relativism.

We may need to reflect on our own misconceptions and ethnocentrism in the evaluation of non-Anglo-Western education to achieve the best learning outcomes for a more globalised academic community. It is also possible to minimise students' culture shock in acquiring a second language and second culture. This can be developed through a deeper cross-cultural understanding and genuine appreciation of non-Anglo-Western education styles as being of equivalent academic value and excellence to Anglo-Western education.

**TABLE 1: SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING STYLES IN ITALIAN AND AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES**

Source: Spizzica, M., 1995 - based in part on Hofstede's (1986) Differences in Teacher / Student Interaction related to the Individualism versus Collectivist Dimension and Power Distance Dimension, pp. 312-313

### ITALIAN UNIVERSITIES

#### SKILLS

- \*Memorisation key tool in learning
- \*Encyclopaedic knowledge of subject area important
- \*Tutorial presentations usually absent from course work structure
- \*Group work not generally part of subject structure but students often study together for examinations - especially in memorising important facts
- \*Variations of each others' work is not considered cheating, since the exams are usually oral - rote recitation of major authors' ideas encouraged
- \*Teacher-centred education - premium on order - students need to accept teacher's opinions without giving own critique
- \*Traditional presentation of knowledge encouraged and rewarded with higher marks
- \*Individuality in presentation is discouraged, since the aim is to produce students who are well versed in the theoretical aspects of the subject

### AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

#### SKILLS

- \*Critical analysis key tool and aim in learning.
- \*Factual knowledge important but not focal outcome
- \*Individuality in tutorial presentations of what has been learnt, (within generally "accepted" rhetorical style) is rewarded
- \*Group work and tutorial participation part of some subjects, especially in applied subjects
- \*If work is "copied", it is considered cheating and plagiarism - students expected to put authors' ideas into own words in written work or in oral presentations
- \*Student-centred education - premium on initiative and lateral thinking
- \*Interpretation of knowledge in an individual style (within accepted rhetorical discourse style) rewarded with higher marks
- \*Individuality in presentation encouraged within *subtle* guidelines of acceptable presentation style - the aim is to produce students who can present within the acceptable "presentation" style using the

- \*Students are not expected to be innovative but rather to have learnt the theoretical basis of the subject thoroughly
- \*Student is expected to learn information given by the teacher during formal lectures, or from set texts only
- \*Research skills only to be used when writing thesis at the end of course during the fourth year
- \*Texts which are summaries of original authors used as basis of courses - overview given - student does not question validity of author's work
- \*Well developed oral communication skills prized above written skills

## ROLES

- \*Student is expected to take a passive role, never questioning teacher's ideas
- \*Teacher transfers wisdom to student
- \*Student shows respect for teacher through formal title such as "professore" and formal "Lei" (Thou) is used even outside class
- \*Student expects teacher to have all the answers, exceptional mastery of the subject is expected - concept of lecturer as "il barone"
- \*In teacher / student conflicts, teacher usually supported by authority
- \*Students expect that teachers give preferential treatment to some students, based on a variety of criteria including ethnic origins, political affiliation, gender, etc.
- \*It's not what you know, it's who you know that will help you get a

appropriate rhetoric

- \*Innovative ideas highly prized, since the student is encouraged to be an independent thinker and critic
- \*Student is expected to learn how to be independent in learning, extensive reading is required as well as lecture attendance
- \*Research skills need to be developed throughout undergraduate course in essays/projects since no final thesis is done in a three-year degree
- \*Texts using original work of authors given - in depth comparisons of ideas of different authors given, comparison and critique of each expected
- \*Well developed written skills prized above oral skills

## ROLES

- \*Student is expected to be pro-active, even questioning teacher's ideas
- \*Teacher is seen as "guide" to the instruments used for learning
- \*Student treats teacher as equal outside class. Use of first name common in or outside class
- \*Students can accept that teachers don't have all the answers - although mastery of the subject area is expected
- \*In teacher / student conflict, students supported by student union, authority expected to be impartial
- \*Students expect teachers to be impartial and egalitarian when dealing with students - although "special consideration" is given to students with particular needs at the teacher's discretion eg. students with language difficulties

job and anything else needed to survive

\*Students need to "save face" in teacher / student relationships - "fare bella figura" - even if the teacher is wrong because of the possible repercussions on his/ her results

\*It's not who you know, but what you know that will help you graduate and get a job (an Australian ideal?)

\*Students are allowed to say what they think to the teacher, without repercussions on his/her results - but is this myth or reality?

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF QUALITATIVE MARKS ACROSS GRADING SYSTEMS BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION GROUP, BY EUROPEAN MEMBER STATE 1994/95

Nation	Fail	Pass	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Belgium	0-9	10	12-13	14-15	16-17	18
Denmark	0-5	6	7	8, 9	10, 11	12, 13
France	8-9 insuffisant	10-11 moyen	12-13 assez bien	14-15 bien	16-17 tres bien	18-20 excellent
Germany	5	4	3	2	1	1
Greece	1-4	5	5	6	7-8	9-10
Netherlands	<5.5	5.5	6.6-7.0	7.0-8.0	8.0-9.0	9.0-10.0
Italy	<18 respinto	18-23 sufficiente	24-26 abbastanza buono	27-28 buono	29-30 molto buono	30 e lode lode eccellente
Ireland	F (0) D, D+= 1, 1.5	C (2)	C+ (2.5)	B (3)	B+ (3.5)	A (4)
Portugal	8-9	10-11 sufficient-	12-13 sufficient+	14-15	16-17	18-20
Spain	<5 suspeso insuficiente	5 aprobado	6 suficiente	7-8 notable	9 sobresaliente	10 sobresaliente y matricula de honor
United Kingdom	E/F <40%	C-/D 40%	C/C+ 41-49%	B-/B 50-59%	B+/A- 60-69%	A-/A+ 70-100%

Source : Spizzica, M., (1995) based in part on ECTS - ERASMUS working papers - 1994, University of Siena, Italy

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\* Power Distance - "... defines the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal..." - (Hofstede, 1986:307)

\* Perceived social distance as defined by W. Acton in Brown (1980)

# Advanced Learners' Literacy in Japanese Literature

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As a part of their Japanese language programs, a number of universities in Australia offer Japanese literature courses to advanced learners in order to foster literacy in Japanese. In reading the literary text, students are required to have not only a high linguistic competence but also a literary competence in order to cope with underlying meanings and nuances.

Our research is primarily concerned with the correlation between the linguistic competence of the Japanese language learners and their reading process in the interpretation of a Japanese literary text. The research aims to identify and evaluate the factors which significantly influence the learner's understanding of the literary meaning. The reading process of a text extracted from a Japanese novel has been examined at the lexical, sentential and textual level. The thematic understanding of the text has also been investigated.

Finally, our research findings lead us to suggest a possible program which could be developed by tertiary institutions in order to incorporate the teaching of literature into the language curriculum in the most effective manner.

## INTRODUCTION

As a part of their Japanese language programs, a number of universities in Australia offer Japanese literature courses to advanced learners with the aim of fostering literacy in Japanese. The study of literature, in contrast to the use of literature as a resource, makes literature itself the content or subject of a language course (Lizar, 1993:13). Literary texts are considered to be used most effectively with learners who have already acquired relatively high language competence in order to further advance their language development and expand language awareness.

In Japanese literature courses at tertiary level, a language-based approach or combination of language-based and literature as content approaches are widely used at present. A language-based approach is concerned with the processes of reading and is designed to develop sensitivity to language and an ability to interpret the creative uses of that language in the establishment of meaning by a



systematic linguistic analysis of a literary text (Carter and Long, 1991:7). The literature as content approach, on the other hand, concentrates on areas such as the history and characteristics of literary movements, the social, political and historical background to a text, literary genres and rhetorical devices. Students acquire a second/foreign language through the reading of set texts and literary criticism relating to them (Lizar, 1993:24). The ultimate goal of the literature subject in the second/foreign language context is to help students to become competent in reading and appreciating literature in the target language.

Goodman (1988:12) defines reading as:

a receptive language process starting with a linguistic surface representation encoded by the writer and ending with the meaning which the reader constructs.

Efficient and effective reading requires both a bottom-up approach, starting from smaller linguistic units and combining them to make progressively larger linguistic units, and a top-down approach, emphasising the interaction of the reader with whole texts, reading for meaning and the significance of context in reading and operating interactively (Baynham, 1995:168-169). Research on second language learners' reading (Devine, 1986; Hudson, 1986) has demonstrated that lower proficiency learners rely heavily on a bottom-up approach for processing information in a text, whereas advanced proficiency learners behave very much like native speakers demonstrating sensitivity to both graphic and contextual cues as well as to more general contextual information.

Reading literary texts, however, is not simply an extension of advanced reading. It requires not only high language competence but also literary competence in order to cope with underlying meanings and nuances since writers exploit conventions in the text, including the interplay of events, relationships between characters, exploitation of ideas and value systems, formal structure in terms of genre or other literary conventions, and relationships between any of these and the world outside literature itself. A competent reader recognises such conventions and interprets them in relation to the world of external experience which literature must in some sense imitate or comment on (Brumfit, 1986: 185-186).

Our research is concerned with the Japanese language learner's reading process in the interpretation of a Japanese literary text. It is intended to investigate whether there is correlation between the linguistic competence of the Japanese language learners and their reading. The research also aims to identify and evaluate the factors which significantly influence the learner's understanding of literary meaning. From the research findings, we suggest a viable program which could be developed by tertiary institutions for most effectively incorporating the teaching of literature into the language curriculum.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study it is hypothesised that

- (1) a subject with high Japanese language proficiency is able to read more effectively than the one with low Japanese language proficiency;
- (2) difficulties arise in reading a literary text vary according to levels of Japanese language proficiency;
- (3) a subject with higher language proficiency demonstrates a different reading behaviour from those who have lower language proficiency; and
- (4) a subject who has majored in Japanese literature and is familiar with literary conventions can find ways of integrating each implicit and explicit part with the rest of the text.

## SUBJECTS

The data for this study came from interviewing three advanced Japanese language learners who either had been or are currently undertaking a "Japanese literature" subject at an Australian tertiary institution. The 12 weeks course treats Japanese literature from the classic to contemporary period. The aim of the subject is to provide students with knowledge about Japanese writers and their literary works and to develop their ability to construct a literary meaning by conducting a close analysis of an extract from an original text.

Subject 1 (S1) and Subject 2 (S2) are currently undertaking university degrees in Japanese language. Their proficiency levels are III and IV, respectively, which are equivalent to the third year and the fourth year of Japanese study at the university. Subject 3 (S3) majored in Japanese literature and Japanese language at university and is currently pursuing an honours degree in Japanese literature. He had previously undertaken the literature subject. His proficiency level is V, which is equivalent to the fifth year and the highest among the three subjects. All subjects are of an Australian background and had the experience of studying in Japan for twelve months when they were in high school several years before this study was conducted. They have relatively high oral/aural competence in Japanese. 80% of S1's interview and 50% of S2's interview were conducted in English, whereas the entire interview with S3 was carried out in Japanese.

## LITERARY TEXT

An extract from a contemporary Japanese text *The Sea and Poison* written by Endo Shusaku was chosen for this analysis. Endo Shusaku is a Catholic writer, the consistent theme of his work being Christianity and the incongruity he has felt between the West and the East (Tanaka and Takeuchi, 1996). *The Sea and Poison* is concerned with the vivisection of American war prisoners at a university hospital during World War II and focuses on two characters, Suguro and Toda, the young doctors who were obliged to take part in the vivisection. Endo attempts to gain insight into the underlying human conscience by asking why the Japanese allowed such incidents to take place. The selected extract (Attachment 1) contains

a dialogue between the two characters on the night before the vivisection. The reason we have chosen the extract is that it is relatively easy from a linguistic point of view, but it poses considerable problems in literary terms.

#### DATA COLLECTION

The data were gathered after S1 and S2 had attended classes for six weeks and had studied Endo Shusaku and the particular work chosen for this study. S3 also had studied the author the previous year in the same subject. In the interviews, each subject was first asked to orally read the text and subsequently to provide an interpretation of three critical parts of the extract. The oral reading was intended to uncover linguistic difficulties which the subjects encounter with reading the literary text and also to examine their reading behaviour. Questions concerning interpretation were devised to deal with the level of contextual understanding and the understanding of the relationship between the textual information and extra-textual information, such as literary conventions associated with Japanese culture, by the subjects.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

A close analysis of the oral reading errors demonstrated a difference in reading behaviour by the subjects. The number of errors correlated to the subject's language proficiency. At both lexical and phrasal levels, S1, who has the lowest language proficiency among the three subjects, showed the greatest difficulties in reading and in understanding the meaning, followed by S2.

S1 and S2 were often interrupted at Kanji (characters) which they did not know or they misread Kanji. The Japanese writing system has three sets of graphical symbols: Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji. There are about 46 basic symbols in both Hiragana and Katakana. Each symbol represents one syllable and one or a group of symbols create a meaningful lexical unit. Hiragana is employed to write all grammatical elements and Katakana is used for words of foreign-origin (Neustupny, 1984). Kanji, on the other hand, is used for morphemes and since each Kanji represents at least one different reading and meaning, it has to be learned individually. Although Hiragana is occasionally used for morphemes when the appropriate Kanji is difficult to write or in cases of individual preference, before reading and understanding the meaning of any Japanese text, one has to know a certain number of Kanji.

The analysis has shown that S1 and S2's knowledge of Kanji has not reached an appropriate level for a full reading of such texts. They admitted that they usually spend most of their preparation time looking up Kanji in the dictionary. In the case of S1, he immediately does this when he encounters unlearned Kanji since it distracts him from constructing the meaning of the sentence. It is noteworthy that if there is a phonetic symbol (Hiragana) written for Kanji, S1 and S2 only look at this. This means that they are simply orally reading the text without

engaging in building-up the meaning of what they read. S3, by contrast, read slowly paying attention to the meaning although he, too, stopped at a few Kanji. S3 stated that for preparation he reads silently at first attempting to predict the meanings of Kanji in a sentence and he subsequently looks up Kanji in the dictionary when he has been unsuccessful in gaining the meaning from the context.

As can be seen from the result, Kanji is the prime factor which influences the initial reading in Japanese. However, it is worth mentioning that S2 claimed that a sentence with a series of Hiragana is difficult to read and to comprehend. This is because unlike in English, there are no spaces between words in Japanese writing and the reader has to identify an individual word and establish the syntactic structure whilst reading. Three sets of symbols are graphically distinguished from each other and have different functions, but if one set, for instance Hiragana, is used continuously, it is difficult to make a distinction between words. S2 stated that since each Kanji represents a meaning in itself, if one knows its meaning, reading becomes easier and faster. This is interesting because although as Japanese language educators we emphasise the need for students to acquire intellectually challenging Kanji for reading texts and the results of this study also confirmed its necessity, a subject clearly stated that Hiragana, which is introduced to the learners at the very beginning stage of the program and is considered less challenging, is equally problematic in a different sense.

Nevertheless, despite a dialect style in the dialogue, all subjects could cope with its reading and grasp its meaning. Thus, this level of non-standard Japanese language proved not to affect advanced learners' reading.

#### LITERARY INTERPRETATION

With regard to interpretation of lines 21-22, "Kotowaran no ka." "Un." ("Will you refuse?" "I suppose not."), there is a significant difference in the students' understanding of "Un.". The two doctors, Suguro and Toda, are obliged to participate in the vivisection, and they suffer from a sense of guilt. From the textual strategies of the dialogue which consists of few words full of hesitation, the scene evokes an atmosphere of hopelessness and fatigue under uncontrollable circumstances. "Un" is literally translated into "yes" in English, but it often functions as "aizuchi" in a dialogue, the listener's indication that he is listening and has understood so far (Takeuchi, 1993). With Suguro's utterances "Aa", "Un.", "Un." in lines 18, 20 and 22, it is clear that he is not actively participating in the conversation and therefore "Un." in line 22 is not a response to a question by Toda.

S1 and S2 interpreted "Un." in line 22 literally and decided it was a positive response to a yes-no question without taking the whole scene into consideration. Their reading was applied only at the linguistic surface level and they neglected to make sense of the literary meaning. On the other hand, S3 explained in the interview that both characters were not willing to participate in the vivisection

and that Suguro in particular seemed to be in deep emotional turmoil from lines 28-29. Thus to S3, “Un.” in line 22 is an *aizuchi* which means neither yes nor no and is used as a sign of despair. Overreliance on the linguistic code by S1 and S2 was demonstrated in processing information, whereas S3 attempted to use all the information available to him as the reading proceeded and was able to evince a deeper level of meaning.

As far as line 23, “*Kami to iu mono wa aruno ka na.*” (“Do you think there’s a God?”) is concerned, we asked a question of the subjects about what kind of God they think is referred to. In order to interpret the meaning of “God” in this sentence, the reader has to have extra-textual information on Japanese socioculture. All subjects had little knowledge about Japanese religious concepts: such as apathetic climate with the majority of the Japanese not having strong religious attachment even though they are influenced by Buddhism and the practice of Shinto rituals. Generally speaking, for Japanese, God is an ambiguous entity because there is little God-human relationship.

S1 and S2 pointed to a God from a different religion. S1, initially thought “God” in the extract was a Christian God, but later amended it into a Shinto God. As for S2, it was a Christian God reflecting his own religious experience and background. S3 answered that the word “God” here is a general God from the expression “*to iu mono*” (~ what is called), which was close to the author’s expectation. However, S3, too, failed to provide us with further explanation of the concept. S1 and S2, with lower Japanese language proficiency were unable to comprehend the linguistic code “~to iu mono”, thus the rest of the process for gathering information from the text became pointless. In addition, they did not possess sufficient background knowledge to compensate for linguistic deficiencies. As a result, they failed to interpret the word “God” appropriately. Although S3 was capable of decoding the linguistic code as well as the textual code, his meaning-building activity was not completed in the way the author would have expected due to lack of extra-textual knowledge.

Interpretation of lines 25-27, “*Nan ya, maa henna hanashi ya kedo, koo, ningen wa jibun o oshinagasu mono kara - unmei to iunyaroo ga, dooshitemo nogareraren ya ro.*” (“Oh what the hell, Suguro! Well, let me give it a try. Look a man has all sorts of things pushing him. He tries by all means to get away from fate.”) was intended to investigate the gap between the author and the subjects examining the understanding of the concept of “fatalism” by the subjects. All subjects were unfamiliar with the concepts of Buddhism, which strongly influence the Japanese. The central Buddhist idea is that people cannot circumvent fate, therefore, it is not worth challenging. Endo argues that Suguro and Toda portray a typical Japanese who thinks participation in the vivisection is his fate, thus he cannot get away from it.

S1 stated that despite the sentence being linguistically uncomplicated, he could not comprehend the phrases “*oshinagasu mono*” and “*nogareraren ya ro*”. S2 also stated that he struggled relating linguistic sequences with meaning. As for S3, he was successful in establishing that fate is understood by Toda as something

one cannot escape from. S3 indicated that fatalism is not exclusive to the Japanese but can be found among some Westerners who view fate as something beyond human intervention. However, to him, whether or not to participate in the vivisection is an individual choice and therefore not related to fate. The difference in interpretation of fate resulted from the contrastive Western and Eastern thoughts or thinking. Although Subject 3 (S3) substantially understood the meaning of the text, there remained some gap between his understanding and the meaning the author intended to convey. This gap would appear to result from a lack of cultural knowledge. Therefore, S3 too, was unable to appreciate the message from the author to the full extent.

Finally, we questioned each subject's strategies in the reading. S1 and S2, as previously mentioned, were undertaking a "Japanese literature" subject as a part of the Japanese language program. They mentioned that they would eventually like to be able to become fluent in reading in Japanese. S1 claimed that when he reads a Japanese literary text, he frequently encounters unlearned vocabulary and Kanji, and thus has to spend large amounts of time in looking them up in the dictionary. He is, therefore, unable to pay appropriate attention to syntactic structure and textual meaning. S2 also stated that his main concern is for vocabulary and syntactic structure of a sentence. By contrast, S3 answered that he concentrates on constructing a meaning using the linguistic cues as well as contextual cues, guessing messages encoded into the text by the author. S1 and S2 read the literary text to improve their language competence focusing heavily on the linguistic aspects, whereas S3 sets an eventual goal of appreciation of literature through integrating the meaning of written and implied parts of the whole text.

The results proved the first three hypotheses. S3 outperformed the other subjects in terms of level of understanding the text. He has the highest Japanese language competence (Level V) among the three subjects and demonstrated his capacity to cope with linguistic code in the text and transform it into the first levels of context. On the other hand, even though S1 and S2 have relatively advanced Japanese language competence (Level III and IV, respectively), they had considerable difficulties in reading a Japanese literary text at the lexical level because of lack of knowledge of Kanji.

The subjects' reading behaviour differed. S1 and S2 concentrated heavily on small linguistic units and neglected to build up an understanding of what they had read. S3, however, made predictions and was concerned for the textual meaning whilst reading, being aware of the significance of reading a literary text as a literary text, not as another reading material.

Although S3 was able to read the text more effectively than others, he has not fully acquired the literary competence which is crucial in reading a literary text. Therefore, he was unable to advance to the deepest level of meaning.

## CONCLUSION

The development of literary competence presupposes relatively high competence in reading in the target language. From the findings of our study, it became apparent that even advanced learners need to improve reading ability in order to read Japanese literary texts. However, more importantly, they need background knowledge on the author and his literary work as well as on the literary conventions associated with Japanese socioculture. Both quality and quantity of such input must be emphasised in literature courses because they are the key factors for identifying the messages from the author, which leads to appreciation of the literary work. We also suggest that a goal to achieve such an understanding in reading the literary text should be clarified since reading competence is affected by the reader's attitude.

In conclusion, in order to foster the ability to cope with literary texts successfully, educators must stress literary and linguistic competence. In a Japanese language program, both need to be taught concurrently.

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**ATTACHMENT 1**

- 1 The following day was the one preceding the operations. That evening Suguro, no longer fighting with the question 'why?' devoted himself to cleaning out the drawers of his desk
- 2 and arranging the things he kept on top of it. Toda took in this activity while smoking a cigarette.
- 3 'I'm going home. You?' Suguro asked.
- 4 'No.'
- 5 Toda's voice was hollow as he answered.
- 6 'Good night.'
- 7 'Wait a second.'
- 8 Toda got up suddenly and stopped Suguro at the door.
- 9 'What?'
- 10 'Just sit down a minute.'
- 11 Suguro sat down, but nothing was said. To speak would be to lie, Suguro thought. He felt that
- 12 Toda was laughing at him.
- 13 'Have a cigarette.'
- 14 Toda held out to Suguro the celluloid case containing the ineptly rolled cigarettes which were his handiwork.
- 15 Suguro took one, lit it, and then gazed at the blazing tip-gazing and saying nothing.
- 16 'You're another fool,'
- 17 Toda muttered
- 18 'Uh.'
- 19 'If you think you should have refused, you still have time to do it.'
- 20 'Uh.'
- 21 'Will you refuse?'
- 22 'I suppose not.'
- 23 'Do you think there's a God?'
- 24 'A God?'
- 25 'Oh what the hell, Suguro! Well, let me give it a try. Look, a man has all sorts of things pushing him.
- 26 He tries by all means to get away from fate. Now the one who gives him the freedom to do that, you can call
- 27 God.
- 28 Suguro sighed. 'I don't know what you're talking about.' The glowing tip had gone out, and Suguro laid the cigarette down on the desk top.
- 29 'For myself, I can't see how whether there's a God or whether there's not a God makes any difference.'

Extract from *The Sea and Poison* translated by Michael Gallagher



# Research Management: Discipline Specific Discourse and Supervisor/ Researcher Interactions

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The research student is continually faced with the uncertainty of selecting the proper course of action and a clear need to solve a problem. At the same time, graduate students and their supervisors will often experience frustrations related to problem solving issues in the supervision process. This paper will describe a research project recently undertaken with electrical and computer systems students and their supervisors at Monash University. Research on variations in preferred teaching and learning styles of supervisors and researchers in engineering will be described with reference to the work of Kolb (1983) and Hermann (1986). The paper will also outline the rationale for the project investigating the relationship between teaching and learning styles and research outcomes.

Discipline Specific Discourse has been described as having the following features: a macrostructure, discourse structure signalling, genre requirements, cohesion, logical and rhetorical structure and content structure. These properties should contribute to readability and comprehensibility, classification of both discipline specific and cross disciplinary discourse features and inform further research on academic writing by native and non native speakers of English (Kaldor, Herriman, Rochecouste, 1996).

While specific disciplinary features of the social sciences, the humanities, medical and biological sciences have been described in a number of studies, the discourse of engineering research has not received the same level of attention in the literature.

The idea of what constitutes research is defined in general terms to be applied across the academic spectrum by such groups as grant awarding and administrative bodies. However when the question "what is research?" is posed within the discipline of engineering the range of responses is revealing. At the faculty level, research in engineering, according to a recent study, can be broadly encompassed in the following definitions:

- 1 The pursuit of knowledge
- 2 The act of searching closely and carefully for a specified goal
- 3 An investigation directed to the discovery of some fact by careful study of a subject
  
- 4 The critical course of scientific discovery
- 5 Breaking new ground, discovering new knowledge
- 6 New and novel use of existing knowledge

(Wilkins, Bonwick and Symons, 1995)

Petroski (p10, 1992) has described engineering as a human endeavour that is both creative and analytical. Engineers define their profession as requiring aptitude in problem solving and designing (see Lloyd, 1991). As problem solvers a number of cognitive functions can be identified and applied to the engineering domain:

- The ability to think rapidly of several characteristics of a given object or situation
- Classifying objects or ideas
- Perceiving relationships
- Thinking of alternative outcomes
- Listing characteristics of a goal
- Producing logical solutions.

At the departmental level, electrical engineers define the research they are likely to engage in in the following terms:

- Creating a new theory
- Using a new material or component
- Creating a new circuit or product
- Solving an unsolved problem.

Problem solving is identified with good design throughout the streams of engineering. Indeed engineers prefer to see themselves fundamentally as designers (see Petroski, 1992). Interviews with practitioners of these disciplines found design strongly affirmed as a defining characteristic of engineering. Even within departmental streams however, design was described with very different emphases. Power engineers distinguished design properties by an emphasis on reliability.

**Power Engineering:**

- reliability
- balance between conflicting demands of minimum cost, maximum efficiency, maximum reliability, maximum availability.

The priorities of the electronic engineer as designer emphasised the ability for other to repeat and test the design.

**Electronic Engineering:**

- designability, testability: control of complex specifications
- design style must be easy to apply but not constrain or inhibit the ingenuity of the designer.

(Stevens and Wilkins, 1993)

**ENGINEERING EDUCATION AND LEARNING STYLES**

*...while educators are currently wrestling with the problems of introducing technology inot conventional academic curricula...there is yet no consensus as to how technological literacy can best be achieved (Petroski, vii 1992 op cit)*

The Graduate Careers Council of Australia in a recently released set of results based on research compiled by the ACER, reported that when rating the clarity of goals and standards in ordinary degree level qualifications and overall satisfaction with their course, electrical engineering was among those scoring the lowest by students (Australian 6.3.96).

Engineering faculties are aware of the mismatch of expectations and outcomes and a number of them are investigating ways to narrow the gap. Research into identifying and matching preferred learning and teaching styles (see especially Bradshaw and Nettleton, 1983, Kolb,1983) has been the basis of one such response at Monash University. A learning type measure derived from Kolb has been used with students and their supervisors to select and identify their own preferred learning and teaching style (McCarthy, 1987). Workshops and seminars on the use of the Learning Type Measure developed by McCarthy has enabled staff and students to discuss and reflect on their range of learning styles.

**SUPERVISOR RESEARCHER INTERACTIONS**

*'...the interaction between the gradual creation of the text and the growing perception and command of the text as an object' (Swales p182, 1990)*

Investigation into discipline specific discourse in the engineering faculty was initiated in 1995 with the cooperation of a small group of supervisors and their graduate students. The pilot study within the Department of Electrical and Computer Systems will investigate and attempt to define aspects of the research process, its stages and outcomes.

**PROCEDURE**

An initial interview with supervisor and student established the rationale for the research (eg with reference to data from the AVCC defining the role of the supervisor and candidate.) Student and supervisor were asked to complete and

were given a copy of a Learning Type Measure (LTM) profile and a learning preferences survey. Discussion of the student's research project to date included such matters as definition of subject area, expectations, phases of the process, establishing appropriate stages and frequency of follow up interviews, review of the process, etc.

#### OUTCOMES

In the pilot study, procedures followed will be those outlined by Swales (pp 182, 231, 1990). Namely to:

- note the effects of disciplinary experience and expectations on learning styles
- offer commentary on a community specific paradigm against which post graduate supervision in other discourse communities may be seen in particular respects to adhere or diverge
- utilise theoretical and descriptive work for good pedagogical effect.

It may also be possible to integrate the research outcomes into the supervision process providing better feedback and channelling of information at appropriate times between supervisor and researcher.

For some supervisors the study may serve to validate the process - affirming that they as participants are on the right track. By documenting the procedures currently practised, the study should provide data for guidelines and models of good supervisory practice.

All research in tertiary literacy needs to develop and inter-relate the three key concepts of discourse community, genre and the language-learning task. In this paper we argue that abundant evidence exists of a distinct discourse community and genre in engineering streams. The language-learning task is seen to be that of the specific research community the graduate student is entering and into which the supervisor is inducting or guiding the acolyte.

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# Native Speakers' Attitudes towards Sales Letters and Implications for Teaching Modern Standard Chinese

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This study aims to investigate the use of formulaic components as they appear in real Chinese sales letters and to compare these with the prescribed advice given in textbooks. To do this, 100 students of business writing and 100 managers were surveyed for their views on appropriate business writing. The divergence of the views of these two groups of native speakers indicates that there is a gap between business Chinese classroom teaching and business writing practice.

## INTRODUCTION

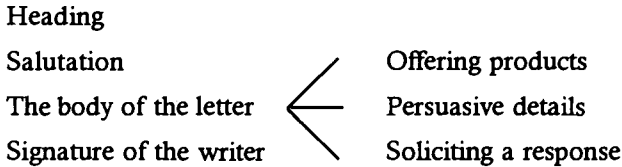
Very little study has been done on the forms of Chinese business communication. Kirkpatrick (1991) has made some interesting findings on forms of Chinese request letters. However, business Chinese is seldom touched upon in this direction and is only limited to the discussion of prescriptive rules by textbooks. In order to fill this gap, this paper attempts to describe the formulaic materials of sales letters and examine the opinions and attitudes of managers and students to see whether the prescriptive practices taught to students reflect managers' views of the discourse that they provide.

Chinese sales letters are in a transitional stage, because the writing of sales letters was suspended in 1949. From this time to when China 'opened its doors' in the 1980's, there was no need to write sales letters as part of the planned economy. At present, however, Chinese business is undergoing changes towards decentralisation and privatisation. Sales letters are now becoming increasingly important and common.

Changes in the position of sales letters are exercising great influence on the structure of writing courses. Business writing has become a very important subject in tertiary writing classes, especially in business universities. The sudden need for this subject has brought about problems relating to teaching curriculum and materials for business Chinese. For many universities, business Chinese is a new writing course, and scholars are beginning to compile textbooks for this course. For example, the five universities I visited last year used five different textbooks (Li, 1983; Li, 1990; He, et al, 1991; Chen et al, 1994; Gu, 1995). However, these

textbooks have basically the same content. All of them strive to prescribe rules and provide guidelines and made-up models for each type of business writing.

Since the textbook prescriptions of sales letters follow very similar principles, Gu (1995: 174) can be taken as representative. According to Gu, the formula used for sales letters is composed of a heading, a salutation, the body of the letter, and a signature. There is no need to include greetings or well-wishes. Thus the structure of the Chinese letter is:



These prescribed rules will be tested and used as reference in the following analysis of twenty authentic sales letters to see to what degree these rules reflect the business writing practice.

## THE DATA

In order to test the validity of the textbooks prescriptions, twenty sales letters were collected at random based on the following criteria: firstly, they had to be authentic letters and should not include advertising materials which were not in the form of a letter. Nor should they be sales 'tongzhi' (circular), which belong to another genre (Zhu, 1996). Secondly, they had to be letters promoting a range of products, such as computers, fax-machines, telephones, and pesticides. Thirdly, they had to be letters written to equals, and there should not be any superior and subordinate relationship between the writer and the reader.

## SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIABLES IN THE SALES LETTERS

### FORMULAIC COMPONENTS

Since these letters are written in the name of the companies concerned, it is very hard to find information about social factors such as sex and age. There are few salient sociolinguistic variables. Lexical items which encode social distance can, therefore, be manipulated by the writer as ritual access (Goffman, 1972). These lexical items will be examined in the formulaic components, which refer to the heading, the salutation, greeting, and well-wishes. The formulaic components of the 20 letters are shown in Table 1:

TABLE 1: THE USAGES OF THE FORMULAIC COMPONENTS IN THE CORPUS

Letter No.	Heading	Salutation	Greeting	Well-wishes
letter 1	-	+	+	+
letter 2	-	-	-	+
letter 3	-	+	+	+
letter 4	-	+	-	+
letter 5	-	+	-	-
letter 6	-	+	-	+
letter 7	-	+	+	+
letter 8	-	+	+	+
letter 9	-	+	+	-
letter 10	-	+	-	-
letter 11	-	+	-	-
letter 12	-	+	-	-
letter 13	-	+	+	-
letter 14	-	+	-	+
letter 15	-	+	+	+
letter 16	+	+	-	-
letter 17	-	+	-	+
letter 18	-	+	+	+
letter 19	-	+	+	-
letter 20	-	+	+	+

In Table 1, it can be seen that most of the letters employed salutations, half employed greetings, the majority employed well-wishes, and only one letter employed a heading. This finding shows that the actual formulaic components of the sales letters do not conform completely to the textbook prescriptions.

#### THE ADDRESS TERMS USED AS SALUTATIONS

There are eight address terms used in the corpus, they are: 'moumou jingli xianshen' or 'Mr. surname+title', 'pengyoumen' or 'friends', 'qinaide yonghu' or dear customers, 'fuze tongzhi' or 'person in charge', 'nushimen xianshengmen' or 'ladies and gentlemen', 'moumou jingli' or 'surname+title', 'jingqizhe' or 'respected reader', and 'moumou gongsi' or 'company names' as shown below in Table 2.

According to Table 2, the most popular address terms are 'person in charge' and 'surname+title'. Among the eight address terms, only 'moumou gongsi' refers to the company. All the other seven refer to the reader as an individual and are used to indicate different social distances. 'Qinaide yonghu' (dear customer) and 'nushimen xianshengmen' (ladies and gentlemen) are fashionable address terms that have been used since the opening up in recent years. 'Qinaide' (dear) is a very much westernised salutation. In Chinese culture, 'dear' is mainly reserved for lovers or very intimate friends. But nowadays, under western influence, more



and more people are beginning to use this address term in public both to show the speaker's or writer's friendly attitude, and shorten the social distance. 'Pengyou' (friend) is the address term used to replace the old-fashioned 'tongzhi' (comrades) to indicate friendliness.

'Moumou jingli'(surname+title) and 'fuze tongzhi' (person in charge) may have two connotations. First the writer shows respect for the reader by naming her/his responsibilities at work; second, the writer wants to direct the letter to the person concerned.

'Jingqizhe (respected reader) is a traditional and formal address term that has been used in classical business letters. 'Company name' is the only address term referring to the reader as a company. However, this address term has an impersonal tone, and is more preferred in textbooks, where many sample letters use this salutation.

**TABLE 2: USAGES OF A BREAKDOWN IN THE ADDRESS TERMS: SALUTATIONS AND READER**

**REFERENCES**

<b>Letter No.</b>	<b>salutation</b>	<b>reader reference</b>
letter 1	Mr. surname+title	ni (non-H you)
letter 2	friends	nimen (H you)
letter 3	dear customer	nin (H you)
letter 4	person in charge	nimen (pl. you)
letter 5	ladies and gentlemen	ni (non-H you)
letter 6	respected reader	gui (H your)
letter 7	surname+title	nin (H you)
letter 8	surname+title	nin (H your)
letter 9	dear customer	nin (H you)
letter 10	Co. name	gui (H your)
letter 11	respected reader	gui (H your)
letter 12	surname+title	gui (H your)
letter 13	surname+title	nin (H you)
letter 14	person in charge	nin (H you)
letter 15	person in charge	gui (H your)
letter 16	Co. name	Co. name
letter 17	surname+title	(non-H you)
letter 18	person in charge	you understand
letter 19	dear customer	you understand
letter 20	person in charge	you understand

**READER REFERENCES**

According to Table 2, two kinds of reader references are used. They are 2nd person pronouns: nin (H you), ni (non-H you), nimen (pl.you), you understood;

and references relating to companies: *ni gongsi* (your company), and *gui gongsi* (H your company), and the company names. The most respectful form of 2nd person pronouns is 'nin', which is the 'V-form' in Chinese. Perhaps equal respect is associated with 'ninmen', but this is a controversial address term. In theory, 'ninmen' is not an acceptable pronoun, because 'nin' was originally a plural (Cao, 1970). In spite of this, some people use 'ninmen' today to indicate the plural 'you' by analogy with other plural forms such as 'women' (we), 'nimen' (you) and 'tamen' (they); while many others argue strongly against this usage. 'Nimen' is a less respectful second person plural which can be used in the place of 'ninmen', since there is controversy about 'ninmen'. The least respectful term is the singular non-honorific 'ni'. 'You understood' is considered more respectful than 'ni', and people can avoid using non-honorific 'ni' by employing this address term.

'Gui gongsi' is the most respectful form among references to companies,. 'Gui' is an honorific written form indicating respect for the reader. 'Ni danwei' is a less formal way for 'your company', which represents a neutral respect level.

As shown in Table 2, a majority of letters used honorific reader references. Six letters used the honorific 'nin' either in the singular or the plural; five letters referred to the company as 'gui'. These eleven letters addressed the reader in a respectful tone. Three letters used 'you understood'. Most of the letters, therefore, used respectful address terms, and the least respectful 'ni' was only used by one letter.

#### SUMMARY OF THE FORMULAIC COMPONENTS AND READER REFERENCES USED IN THE CORPUS

Of the twenty letters listed above, only one letter, letter 16 is similar to Gu's (1995) prescription with a heading and no greetings or well-wishes in the letter. The other 19 letters all violate the prescribed rules in one way or another by having no heading, or including greetings or well-wishes. However, the prescribed formula does appear, in part, in some sales letters. For example, in terms of formulaic components, letters 5,10,11 and 12 only have salutations, and do not have greetings or well-wishes. Correspondingly, they either address or refer to the reader in the name of the company name, although letters 11 and 12 do show more respect for the readers by using 'gui'.

#### QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS

Based on the twenty letter corpus, the validity of the textbook prescriptions and the opinions of native speakers were checked and elicited by questionnaires and interviews. 100 tertiary students from two business schools and 100 company managers were selected. 10 interviews were conducted in each group (The questionnaires and interviews schedules are in Appendix 1). The results of the questionnaire and interviews will be discussed below.

## THE USAGES OF FORMULAIC COMPONENTS

One of the questionnaire items focuses on the native speakers' preferences over the use of the formulaic components. The results relating to this item are shown below in Table 3.

TABLE 3: NATIVE SPEAKERS' PREFERENCES FOR FORMULAIC COMPONENTS

	Heading		Salutation		Greeting		Well-wishes	
Responses	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Students %	76	24	100	0	28	72	80	20
Managers %	5	95	100	0	72	28	82	18

Note: Yes = Positive attitude; No = Negative attitude.

As shown in Table 3, there are some interesting and revealing similarities and differences among the two groups. The two groups shared great similarities in terms of salutations, and well-wishes. 100% of people in both groups preferred the employment of a salutation, and about 80% of both groups agreed on the use of well-wishes. This preference indicates a violation of the textbook prescriptions about the use of well-wishes. The two groups mainly differed in the use of headings and greetings in the letter. 76% of the students approved of the use of headings, while 24% disapproved. The opposite was true of the managers, as 5% approved of the use of the heading, while 95% disapproved. There was a significant difference in the response to greetings too. 72% of the managers encouraged the use of greetings, while 28% discouraged the use of them. The opposite was true with the student group and most of them discouraged their use.

## THE INTERVIEWS (TABLE 3)

Since both groups agreed upon the use of salutations and well-wishes, the interviews therefore focused on the use of headings and greetings.

Most (76%) students insisted on the use of the heading. They thought that the heading was important, because it acted as a title indicating what the letter was about. In startling contrast, only 5% of managers said headings should be used and 95% did not see the need for their use. Those who rejected the use of headings, the vast majority, said that headings were too formal. They preferred a more personal letter form without any headings.

Most of the students (72%) disapproved of the use of greetings. They thought that the writer should talk about the product directly and not bother with greetings. Here perhaps the textbook influence discouraging the use of greetings comes into play. In direct contrast, most of the managers (72%) insisted that greetings should be used to shorten the social distance. One general manager

thought that the use of greetings was important in that it could help build a personal relationship with the reader in addition to the buyer and seller relationship. In this way, the writer could lay a very good foundation for the development of further friendly cooperation. During the discussions with the managers, I found that the managers who did not feel that greetings were necessary were mostly from the South. A possible reason for this would be that the South has been more subject to western influence in recent years of opening up in China. What was important to these managers was detailed descriptions of products instead of greetings.

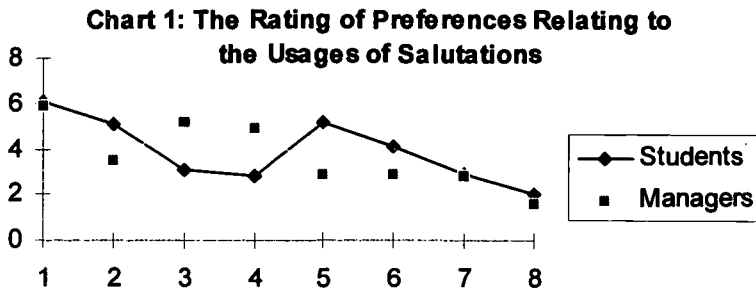
THE PREFERENCES FOR SALUTATIONS

This section examines the appropriateness of salutations. The native speakers in each group were asked to grade (between grades 1-8) the salutations found in the corpus (see Table 2). The highest mean score shows the most appropriate, the lowest the least appropriate. The results of the mean score of each salutation are shown in Table 4:

TABLE 4: THE RESULTS OF RATING RELATING TO THE PREFERENCES OF SALUTATIONS

Salutation	Student Mean Score	Manager Mean Score
1 dear customers	6.08	5.9
2 ladies and gentlemen	5.13	3.5
3 person in charge	3.1	5.2
4 surname + title	2.85	4.9
5 company name	5.22	2.92
6 friends	4.1	2.87
7 respected readers	2.92	2.82
8 Mr. surname + title	1.98	1.56

The above table shows that 'dear customers' was the most preferred by both groups, and the least preferred were 'respected reader' and 'Mr. surname+title'. They differed in the grading of the other six address terms. For example, the students rated 'company name' at 5.22, and the managers rated it at 2.92. Alternatively the results of the above rating can be shown in the following chart to indicate more clearly the difference between the two groups:



#### INTERVIEWS RELATING TO SALUTATION PREFERENCES

People from both groups agreed that writers of sales letters should adopt 'dear customers' as a salutation, because they thought that this address term could best reveal the relationship between the writer and the reader. 'Respected reader' and 'Mr. surname+title' were the least encouraged, because 'respected reader' was thought old-fashioned and 'Mr. surname+title' redundant. The preferred usage was either 'surname+title' or 'Mr.+ surname', but not the combination of the three.

The two groups differed in the use of the other five address terms. The students favoured the use of 'ladies and gentlemen' and 'company name'. They thought that it was fashionable to address the reader as 'ladies and gentlemen', as it was becoming more and more welcomed as a public address term. 'Company name' was also rated favourably by the students. They explained that textbooks often used this address term for sales letters written between two companies.

In sharp contrast, the managers rated what the students favoured rather low, and preferred to use 'person in charge' and 'surname+title'. They thought the letter could reach the person handling the purchasing directly by using either of these two address terms. If the letter adopted a more general address term, such as 'dear customers' or 'ladies and gentlemen', it might be passed around for a while before it was correctly directed to the right person. At this point, there is some difference between what the managers thought should be chosen, and what they actually chose. In Chart 1, 'dear customers' rates the highest with the managers, but in the interviews, none of them said that they ever actually employed this. They explained that when they came to write sales letters, they liked to use more specific address terms, such as 'person in charge' and 'surname+title'.

In addition, 'friends' was not as much favoured by the managers as by the students. The students thought this salutation very friendly, but to the managers, 'friends' was an informal address term, and it was not very appropriate for sales letters.

READER REFERENCES

In another questionnaire item, the native speakers were asked to grade the 7 reader references found in the in the corpus (see Table 2), and the results of the mean score of each reader reference are shown in 'Table 5.

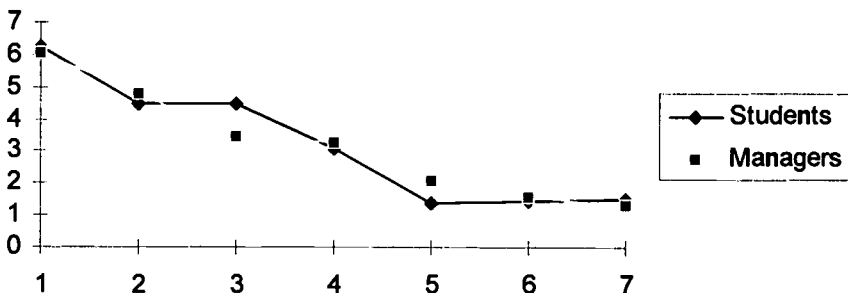
TABLE 5: THE RESULTS OF RATING RELATING TO THE USAGES OF READER REFERENCES

Reader References	Student Mean Score	Manager Mean Score
1 gui (H your)	6.22	6.06
2 nin (H you)	4.5	4.8
3 ninmen (H pl.you)	4.48	3.5
4 your company	3.1	3.25
5 you understood	1.4	2.1
6 nimen (pl.you)	1.45	1.6
7 ni (non-H your)	1.5	1.31

Unlike Table 4, Table 5 shows that both groups basically agreed on the order of their preferences. The two groups rated 'gui gongsi' (your H company) the highest: 6.22 for students and 6.06 for managers, 'nin' (H you) the second highest: 4.5 for students and 4.8 for managers. The less respectful address terms such 'your company', 'nimen' (non-H you pl.), and 'ni' (non-H you) were rated the lowest. Alternatively the results of the above rating can be shown in Chart 2:

Chart 2 indicates that the two groups only differed slightly in the use of 'ninmen' (H 'you' pl.): 4.48 of the students vs. 3.5 of the managers, and 'you understood': 1.4 of the students vs. 2.1 of the managers.

Chart 2: The Rating of Preferences Relating to Reader References



#### THE INTERVIEWS RELATING TO THE PREFERENCES OF READER REFERENCES

Both groups thought that the reader should be referred to respectfully in the letter. That is why they rated highly the two reader references of 'gui' (H your) and 'nin' (H you). In speaking of 'ni gongsi', 'nimen' and 'ni', both groups agreed that they were not polite or respectful enough.

The two groups mainly differed in the use of 'ninmen' and 'you understood'. The students said the sales letter may be addressed to more than one person, and it would be appropriate to use 'ninmen' to indicate respect to all the readers. But the managers said that although the letter was written to the company, only one person would handle the matter. What was more, they claimed that it was not right grammatically to combine 'nin' and 'men'. It is possible that 'ninmen' is becoming more and more acceptable among younger people such as the students while it is rejected by older people such as the managers.

#### SUMMARY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Generally speaking, the two groups shared one similarity in terms of reader references: both preferred the use of polite and respectful address forms. In all the other aspects, such as the use of formulaic components and salutations, the comments of the managers are closer to what has been found in the 20 letter corpus. The students' comments do not approximate to the forms found in the 20 letters, but are closer in some aspects to textbooks.

#### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

To sum up, the views of the students and managers exhibit more differences than similarities in the use of formulaic components and other lexical items in sales letters. The managers' views and suggestions are closer to what was found in the real letters, while the students' views and suggestions are closer to textbook prescriptions. One probable explanation for these differences is that the managers based on their judgement on their own experiences of writing and reading sales letters. The students, however, mainly based their judgement on prescriptive textbook advice. It can therefore be inferred that there is a gap between what is being taught in the business writing class and what is actually being practised in written business communication.

Therefore, in curriculum development for business Chinese, it is necessary for academics and textbook editors to investigate the gap between the classroom teaching and real business writing and collect data of all types of business letters and describe them in textbooks. Instead of prescribing idealised texts, researchers of business writing should focus on examinations of actual types of business letters. By using authentic materials, the students can be exposed to real writing practice and note the differences between effective and non-effective writings. In this way, they will be able to apply directly what they learn to business communication.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE ON CHINESE SALES LETTERS

1 Should the sales letter have a heading? Why? Or why not?

2 When the sales letter is directed to a company, should the writer address the reader in the name of the company, or in the name of an individual? Please indicate:

the name of the company \_\_\_\_\_

the name of an individual \_\_\_\_\_

3 Do you think that salutations, greetings and well wishes should be included in a sale letter? Please indicate in the following table:

salutation \_\_\_\_\_

greetings \_\_\_\_\_

well-wishes \_\_\_\_\_

4 If the letter needs salutations, what salutations should be used? Place a number in the following space, No. 8 represents the most appropriate rank of salutation, No. 1 the least.



the company's name	_____	dear customers	_____
respected ladies and gentlemen	_____	friends	_____
respected reader	_____	person in charge	_____
surname + title + gentlemen	_____	surname + title	_____

5 Rank the following eight address terms, No. 8 is the most appropriate and No. 1 is the least:

nin	_____	ni	_____
ninmen	_____	nimen	_____
nigongsi	_____	guidanwei	_____
you understood	_____		

6 How respectful and polite should a sales letter have to be?

- A. Very respectful and polite    B. Respectful and polite  
 C. Not very respectful or polite    D. Not respectful or polite

7 How important do you think for a sales letter to make the reader interested?

- A. Very important    B. Important  
 C. Not very important    D. Not important

8 How important do you think for a sales letter to be persuasive?

- A. Very important    B. Important  
 C. Not very important    D. Not important

9 Rank in order of importance 1-3: the need to be polite and respectful \_\_\_\_\_

the need to make the reader interested \_\_\_\_\_

the need to be persuasive \_\_\_\_\_

# Literacy Needs for Engineering Numeracy

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In this paper, I will put a case for a literacy education for engineering students. The case is argued in relation to the numeracy needs of engineers. Clarification of how both the terms literacy and numeracy are used is needed. By literacy, I will mean not only the "basic" decoding skills associated with reading and writing, but also critical reading skills, and the awareness of how texts are constructed purposefully. Similarly, numeracy is used to refer to an ability to situate, interpret, critique, and appropriately apply mathematical concepts and techniques in one's practice. I argue that numeracy is a critical social tool for engineering students (and professionals) in understanding how their world views are shaped. Embodying more than the ability to mathematically analyse systems and omnipressure processes, numeracy should enable engineers to critically appreciate the ubiquity of mathematics in their work and how their "mathematical world view" might be limiting their appreciation of the society in which they seek to have an impact.

References will be made to an attempt in an undergraduate engineering curriculum to address some of the literacy and numeracy needs. Both the potential and the problems this effort has presented will also be discussed.

## **SPEAKING ABOUT "GENERIC" SKILLS**

**A major issue is whether the nature of the BE (Bachelor of Engineering) program should be broadened to place more emphasis on the generic skills and attributes ... - communication, professional ethics and judgement, understanding of social, economic and environmental values, critical analysis and creative synthesis ....**

**How can these critical elements be included without fatally undermining the technical competence which remains central to good engineering? (Parr 1995, p 9).**

The sentiment expressed above by a dean of an engineering faculty can be detected in debates about the future of engineering education across most Australian universities, as well as in universities of many other English speaking countries (Parr 1995; National Academy of Engineering 1991). The questions raised in the quote reflect concerns that engineers have in their ability to play a leading role in society. Engineers have expressed concern about society's

perception of engineers as those who have promoted “technological overkill”, caused much of the environmental problems facing humanity, and ignored what society really needed and wanted as opposed to what technologies engineers wanted to provide for them.

The magnitude of the problem facing the profession reflects a disjunction between the engineering profession’s agenda for society, and society’s expectations about their own technological future. What is needed as part of the change in engineering education is a way of bridging that gap between the engineers’ view of their social role, and society’s view of their needs and the part that engineers can play in meeting their needs. This requires not an education which simply “balances” the teaching of “generic skills and attributes” such as those stated above and that of the technical “competence” (besides, how can you separate those skills, or are they attributes(?) of the technical competence if they are “generic”). What I believe is required is a closer examination of what has been “generic” in engineering education and practice up until now, and what needs to form the generic basis of the engineer’s technical development in future.

An analysis of the professional discourse of engineering and how it has contributed to the apparent alienation of engineers from society, and how the discourse itself needs to change, has recently been documented through the collaborative work of an engineer, an engineering communication educator, and a linguist (Johnston et al 1995). An analysis of engineering discourse within engineering design environments is also explored in detail by Bucciarelli (Bucciarelli 1994). The focus of this paper will be on the part that mathematics plays in shaping engineering discourses, and why an examination of this is needed, if we are to shift the culture of engineering closer to where the rest of society is. In particular, I suggest that a critical awareness of the ubiquity of mathematics in engineering may provide engineers with a tool for reflection of their professional discourse because, mathematics discourses, as all discourse

define, describe and delimit what is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension - what it is possible to do and not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. ... A discourse provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions. (Kress 1985 pp 6 - 7)

So how might numeracy provide a tool for engineers to unravel their current discourse? And why is this currently not well recognised or valued?

## NUMERACY AS A CRITICAL TOOL

In recent years, a colleague in adult numeracy and I have been working to develop a socially inclusive definition for numeracy. Definitions of numeracy and their evolution are documented in the literature (Lee et al 1991, pp 14 - 36; O’Donoghue 1995), but in a previous paper, we defined numeracy as

a critical awareness which enables individuals to bridge the gap between academic mathematics and the diverse realities of their life, and which

the learners reflect in their social practice. ... Thus being numerate means being able to situate, interpret, critique, use and perhaps even create mathematics in context, taking into account all the mathematical as well as social and human complexities which come with that process. (Yasukawa et al 1995, pp 815 - 816)

This definition tries to embody a social inclusivity into mathematics learning which is absent in (if not contradictory to) the dominant cultures of mathematics education. Mathematics education in its formal setting has played a socially violent role of filtering out those people who are not obedient to the rules of equations and formulae. Engineering is one of the disciplines which have unashamedly applied this filter in sorting out who will enter the profession and who will not.

If we view the role of education to be that of increasing social justice through raising students' social awareness and expanding their life options, then that philosophy must be reflected in our teaching of mathematics (and every other subject). The definition of numeracy given above is an attempt at expressing such a philosophy (perhaps a vision?) of mathematics education.

Being engineering numerate, then means that engineers and engineering students not only have a critical understanding of the mathematics used in particular technical contexts, (perhaps what is meant in linguistics as the "context of situation" (Halliday 1985, pp 24 - 25)), but also how mathematics shapes the values and culture of engineering, ("context of culture"? (Halliday 1985, pp 46 - 45)).

### **A CONTEXT FOR THIS PAPER**

Much of my views and ideas expressed about the state of engineering numeracy come from my recent teaching experiences in the School of Electrical Engineering at University of Technology, Sydney. I have been trying to address the question of numeracy in a senior level subject, Mathematical Modelling, whose stated objectives have been to

1. broaden your knowledge of engineering through exploration of mathematical modelling processes;
2. demonstrate relevance of mathematics in engineering science and practice;
3. develop awareness of different interpretations of the nature of mathematics, and its implications in the context of engineering;
4. develop awareness, appreciation, and familiarity with some of the available modelling resources, including print, software and human expertise; and at the same time develop recognition of the need to exercise caution in using mathematics as a tool; and
5. provide the opportunity to experience some authentic processes of mathematics practice.

The rationale, content, and the teaching methodology of the way I have run the subject are documented elsewhere (Yasukawa 1995; Yasukawa & Yates 1994) and will not be elaborated upon in this paper.

### THE NEED FOR NUMERACY

So how numerate are the engineering students we see in our courses at present? The application of a mathematical “ability” filter to select potential students in engineering, and the weighty presence of mathematics in engineering courses may suggest that engineering students are at least able to see the value (if not its limitations) of mathematics in engineering. It has been a revelation to me that this is not the case for many engineering students. A senior engineering student in my subject Mathematical Modelling once wrote that

(for) the first year and a half of this course all we seemed to get taught was maths and physics and yet we were never told why or how it was relevant to electrical engineering.

It is surprising on the one hand, that given the ubiquity of mathematical equations and formulations in almost all of their technical subjects, students like the one above (and there are many others who have expressed similar sentiments) do not associate themselves as maths users. On the other hand, it is perhaps the very ubiquity of mathematics in engineering which has removed the mathematical basis of engineering analysis from students’ and practitioners’ consciousness.

It is curious to me to hear many engineers profess that “mathematics is fundamental to engineering” and yet struggle when asked to articulate how this is so. Some claim that they haven’t solved a differential equation since first year maths, as some form of confession of the perceived absence of maths in their practice. I have spoken to a number of practitioners who are eager to criticise academic engineers for wasting their time in “mathematical work” when, in practice, they would make decisions based on their “feel for the system” and, in the case of control systems, “just watch the trace on the screen, and twiddle the knob until the response looks right”.

What is interesting in this is not just the contradiction between maths being fundamental, and yet apparently divorced from practice. Also at issue is the lack of awareness that even though they may not be analytically solving equations using the large repertoire of methods they learned in their maths classes, their whole control systems might be based on a mathematical representation of a real world system or process. This suggests engineers’ understanding of mathematics as simply a process of following rules and algorithms, and not as a way of viewing and framing the world. There is also a lack of awareness that a series of human interventions take place to ensure that what the engineers watch is a particular type of trace of a particular aspect of the system, modelled according to a particular mathematical formulation when they claim to be making judgements based on their “feel” for the system.

There are arguments from a strictly pedagogical perspective about the problems in teaching for what comes down to rote learning. But beyond that, if the mathematical methodology they use is divorced in their consciousness from the mathematical theories and concepts upon which they are based, how well can they judge which method to choose if a method has not been pre-programmed or prescribed? And how can they judge if a chosen method is appropriate or not, from even the “purely technical” perspective?

Examination of the work that Mathematical Modelling students submitted over the years has suggested to me that generally their main goal in their mathematical work has been to get something written down on the other side of the “=” sign. Rarely, unless explicitly asked, would we see much attempt in students teasing out the validity and appropriateness of the method with which they are working. In relation to a literacy framework of (Freebody & Luke 1990), which was proposed as a possible framework for numeracy (Lee et al 1991, pp 94 -95), our engineering students are reasonably competent decoders of mathematics, confident (within narrowly and prescribed technical applications) users of mathematics, but suffer demonstrably in their role as participants and analysts of mathematical texts.

### SO HOW DO WE TEACH STUDENTS TO BE MATHEMATICAL TEXT PARTICIPANTS ?

The most powerful use of mathematics in engineering is in modelling because this is when their object of study, control, and design are framed. Engineers model systems and processes to design process controls and optimise the system under different constraints and performance measures. So one would hope that engineers see the connections between a particular modelling formulation and why that particular formulation is most appropriate at least in the narrow technical sense, if not in the broader social context.

We should be teaching students to articulate what it is about a particular mathematical formulation they are using which makes it more useful for the purpose they have at hand compared to another. When I ask them why differential equations (one of the most dominant classes of models) are considered so useful in modelling physical systems, very few students are able to articulate the reasons. Even though, from their high school years, they have studied calculus, differentiation and rate of change, students are not able to sit back and explain how differential equations, by expressing the relationships between different rates of change, tell us something about the dynamics of the system, or the energy relations within the system. Nor are many of them confident about “excavating” the actual information about the process from the equations.

I might, for example, ask them to describe to me in words or a diagram what “story” is told by a model of the population of a species represented by the simplest class of differential equations

$$dx/dt = ax(t)$$

While they will automatically, even if not asked, go on to “solving” it using their “standard” approach of Laplace transforms (which in this case is not incorrect but a terrible “overkill”), many will not be able to tell me that this equation describes a population whose rate of change is proportional to the population (and hence will grow faster and faster as the population gets larger). Unless the “story” is understood, students are not in a position to question assumptions underpinning the model, and the limitations and consequences of relying on the model.

Boomer writes about the role of language in the meaning making process of scientific concepts (Boomer 1986), with reference to Vygotsky’s studies about the conceptual understanding being the making of connections between the learner’s spontaneous knowledge and the new scientific concept (Vygotsky 1986). Getting students to use language to make meaning of abstract mathematical concepts can be helpful. On occasions, I have asked students to think of metaphors, images, or familiar events they associate with words, such as *equilibrium* and *randomness* which, apart from “our” everyday usage, are associated with key technical concepts. Then I would ask them to write out or look up the technical definitions of these terms. I would finally ask them to try to make meaning out of the technical definitions by explaining connections between their mathematical definitions and their metaphors or images; how does the “everyday” meaning inform the technical meaning. Some are able to see the object of the exercise, and go on to delightful creative elaborations. But the exercise is very difficult for those for whom the “everyday” use of the words is not “everyday” at all because their “everyday” languages do not include English and my assumed “everyday” usage is as foreign to them as the technical use of the words.

So literacy development in the sense of building the vocabulary and simply using English for informal, social purposes, is necessary if we are to aim for the participant role in engineering numeracy. The conceptual engagement, and the subsequent connections between concept and method require a certain level of literacy for students to be able to articulate those connections and analogies. This is not the sort of language use that some mathematics departments are beginning to address, in getting students to understand the formal structure and functions of mathematical proofs. Useful as that may also be, of priority is the development of students’ use of a common non-technical language (which in the Australian university and professional environment would be English) with which they could think and talk about their everyday world if we want them to be able to do more than reproduce formal, field specific language structures. It is a matter for making the mathematical concepts more accessible for their use. At the end of the semester one Mathematical Modelling students wrote

From this subject I have learned that there are many possible solutions (or different models) that can be formulated to solve or satisfy a set of conditions or problem, and it is the individual who draws upon his knowledge and experiences that these solutions reflect. ... it is important that we allow ourselves to explore and create our own experiences. ... If there is one thing that I would like to think I have learnt ... is that maths is accessible to those who want access to it. I feel confident

about my maths ... and the accessibility of mathematics.

If engineers are going to have a “feel” for their process and systems, they need to also have a “feel” for the mathematics underlying how their systems and processes are designed and controlled, so that they know what they are “feeling” and what they are not (and cannot). In relation to the differential equation shown above, it is critical for students to “read the story” contained in that concise, apparently harmless piece of text. They should recognise that the equation implies unlimited population growth, and what assumptions must have been made for someone to propose such a model for a population. They need to make connections between the mathematical concepts and the contexts of their use in order to make informed judgements as to whether this model (or any other) is one that they would want to use. Being an effective mathematical text participant is essential for becoming an effective, informed, and socially responsible user of mathematics.

The type of text participation, where learners make connections between the abstract concepts and the everyday concepts is also critical in their realisation that underneath all the symbolic representations of engineering models and systems lies human selection of what to see and study, that knowledge and inquiry are humanly grounded, rather than prescribed by an “objective” order. This awareness reaches beyond the participant role to that of the analyst role.

### **SO WHAT ARE THE TEXT USER AND ANALYST ROLES IN RELATION TO MATHEMATICAL TEXTS ?**

A comment that many students initially make when they are asked to critique examples of controversial mathematical models, is that these models are not “objective”. They are eager to advise that “good” mathematical modelling is about neutrality and objectivity. This belief, that provided that you are sufficiently “good”, your model will be objective and bias free, pervades a lot of the thinking that goes on in engineering. One aspect of mathematics education which I believe contributes to this is the way in which written mathematical texts, in particular in textbooks, are constructed.

Mathematical texts are admired for their conciseness, “logical” structure, and definitiveness. Texts of mathematical proofs exemplify these features. Only the bare essential mathematical results which inform the argument are included. The arguments are made with a minimal use of words, and often these words are replaced by shorthand symbols such as “ $\square$ ” to mean “any”, “ $\exists$ ” to mean “there exists”, “...” to indicate a continuation of a pattern which is assumed to be understood by the reader, and so on. Students of mathematics are taught to imitate these ways of “writing” mathematics, often not through explicit instruction, but through examples and inference. What is not made explicit is that the layout of the text doesn’t tell the whole story.

The deception is that the structure of a mathematical text does not reflect the ways in which mathematicians “do” mathematics. “Doing” mathematics involves making choices about which method to use, which direction to pursue, and



where to end the inquiry and report the results. The concise and “logically” organised text which finds its way to publication doesn’t reveal the process which went behind the conclusion of the inquiry. It doesn’t reveal the value judgements which were made, the reasons behind the choice of a method (sometimes very personal like “this is the method I know best”), the appropriateness of a particular method over another, and the dead ends which were met along the way.

The silence of the human value judgements, and the definitiveness of mathematical texts easily deceive people into believing that mathematics is “truth”. Students are not encouraged to demand the full narrative with which they might be able to relate the mathematical results to the human reasoning process which went behind it. So when they are asked to “use” mathematical texts, it is not surprising that they do so uncritically, without exploring the relations between the story that is told by the text, and the context in which in which it may have evolved and have been used.

Thus the definition of a successful user of mathematical texts requires an understanding of the context of the immediate situation in which they are applying a mathematical tool. It requires students and engineers to excavate all the stages of human intervention and choices which are made in the process of modelling a system or process. In my Mathematical Modelling class, I use a diagram to provide a snapshot of the non-linear and iterative process of modelling, and how we are making value judgements at all levels all along the way, and that there is no guarantee that at the “end” of the process, we have anything definitive to say about the real world in which we started.

As text analysts, students and engineers need to be asking questions of the following sorts: are their mathematical tools the most appropriate, if so why; why has this aspect of the system been chosen for modelling (and why have other aspects been left out); what stake has the modeller got in this process, who will benefit, and who will lose out; how do the “final” results inform us about the process in the “real” world from which they were extracted and filtered? The technical judgements which go into the construction and use of the model need also to be critiqued, but with reflection upon the broader contextual critique. One of the students who came to this realisation in Mathematical Modelling put it like this:

I now feel a lot more confident with my maths. It's not that I've learned a lot of new theory, just that there's more understanding of the underlying mechanisms. That's not to say I'm going to run out and solve the unsolvable, but I now know that no matter how much maths you throw at a problem, the chances are that if you don't fully understand the problem, you won't come up with a meaningful solution.

One of the most critical aspects of the analyst's role is this questioning of the relationship between their technical contribution and the social world from which their technical “problem” was originally extracted. None of the decoding, conceptual engagement, use, and technical critique processes are relevant unless the engineers have “read” the needs of society appropriately, and can read the

connections between, and consequences of, their technical solutions to the society in which they work. This requires the engineers to understand their stated and practiced professional culture. This may emerge from an education which encourages a critical examination of the engineers' discourse, and how it has shaped their relationship to society at large. Unless the importance of this form of reflection and critique are embodied in the curriculum, I don't believe that we can hope to realise the "vision" we may have for engendering numeracy in the engineering culture.

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

Numeracy and literacy are critical social tools for engineers, particularly in the context of their vision for change towards a more socially inclusive culture. Thus both numeracy and literacy ought to be visible themes in engineering curricula. At present, there is not a well developed understanding of what is meant by literacy and numeracy in engineering, not to mention the lack of expertise in engineering faculties in teaching numeracy and literacy.

There is a need to raise awareness of why "generic communication skills" cannot be separated out from the practice and ethos of engineering, and therefore, that "improving" communication skills is not about sending students who make grammatical mistakes off to a language skills centre somewhere "out there". Having said that, it is also clear that engineering academics generally don't have the framework to teach literacy and numeracy themselves.

As a numeracy teacher, I see the need, but lack the knowledge and the language to adequately address the literacy needs of engineering numeracy. In this regard, my main aim of participation in this forum is to "cry for help" from those literacy teachers and linguists who might be able to help me frame some of the views I have expressed about numeracy and mathematics so that at least I can articulate more clearly the linkages which need to be made between engineering numeracy and literacy, and learn how to address them.

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