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AUTHOR	Gruber, Helmut
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ABSTRACT

A compulsory trainee program for new staff members at the Vienna Business University was established in the academic year 1998/99. In the course of this program new staff members are prepared in the following three areas of their work: research work in their department, especially dissertation writing; teaching classes; and administrative skills. Most trainees hold a Master's degree in their respective fields--these lecturers are required to finish their dissertations within two years to get the chance for a tenured position. Trainees' expectations of the academic writing program range from getting help to overcome writing blocks to general questions of academic research to detailed questions which arise in the context of writing their dissertations. This paper focuses on three issues which are related to the academic writing program: the overall structure and the general didactic concept of the program; the problem of choosing relevant sample texts for exercises for a diverse audience; and the problem of conveying linguistic concepts to an audience of non-linguists. The paper explains that the program's main aim is to equip participants with linguistic skills to enable them to revise a first draft of a text on the micro and macro textual levels, and that the reason for this foregrounding of revising skills is not only the program's tight time frame but also the varied disciplinary background of the participants which makes it difficult to deal with content related aspects of text planning. According to the paper, the most important prerequisite for conveying discipline-specific scholarly concepts in a practice-oriented context is the courage to simplify them, while a second aspect of the course's success or failure is the type of presentation of course materials--a PowerPoint presentation, for example, offers the advantage of animation, making it easier to develop certain definitions in a series of slides. (Contains 12 references.) (NKA)

Young Economists and Lawyers Learn How to Write an Academic Text.

by Helmut Gruber

Paper presented at the International Conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing across Europe (1st, Groningen, Netherlands, June 18-20, 2001)

1 framework of the program: the aims of the trainee program for new staff members at the Viennese Business University[1]

Since 1987 the Viennese Business University (BU) offers a range of internal trainee programs for academic (and non- academic) staff. These programs centre around the two overall topics of "assistance in research and teaching" and "personality development/ communicative skills". Every staff member, independent of their present position, may attend courses offered in one of these areas. This regulation yielded unwanted effects insofar, as courses were attended by persons with very differently developed skills which made it difficult to serve the needs of all participants.

In an attempt to improve this situation a compulsory trainee program for new staff members was established in the academic year 1998/99. In the course of this program the new staff members should be prepared for the following three areas of their work:

- Research work in their department, especially writing their dissertation
- Teaching classes
- Administrative skills

This profile of requirements resulted in a four-module program which consists of course blocks in "university organisation", "research skills", "pedagogic and didactic skills", "international competencies". Each module comprises several course units which are conducted in 1 – 3 day block seminars. These blocks are offered during the major university holidays (February, March, July – September). All in all the trainee program lasts 30 days, the most extensive module is "research skills" which comprises 5 seminars ("German academic writing", "epistemology", "qualitative methods", "quantitative methods", and "literature search in the internet and in online databases"). Originally the academic writing course was the longest of all (namely 3 days), but in the course of general budget cuts in the Austrian university system the duration of the course was cut to 2 days.

The seminar topics were established in cooperation with academic staff (professors as well as lecturers) in order to achieve a maximum of acceptance amongst them. Each seminar is offered twice a year. Until the end of 2000 each new staff members (even those who were only on short contracts in replacement positions) had to attend the whole program which resulted in rather high numbers of seminar participants (20-30 persons). Due to the budget cuts this regulation was changed at the beginning of 2001. Since then only staff members who have at least 2 year – contracts are obliged to attend the seminars which resulted in a drastic reduction of the number of participants (8–15).

[1] This chapter is based on several internal papers of the Vienna Business University which mention no author, title, and date.

2 Characteristics and motivation of participants

Although the BU offers only four academic programs (political economy, business administration, international business administration, economy and business pedagogy), it comprises a variety of different departments which contribute to research and teaching in these four programs. The academic fields these departments deal with range from "traditional" economic subjects like "management studies", "political economy" etc. to sociology, various specialised law departments to several language departments (as each student of the BU is required to enrol in language courses in two foreign languages). According to this academic variety new staff members (i.e. also trainees) come from very different academic backgrounds: most of them graduated form an economic program, but there are also lawyers, mathematicians, sociologists and graduates from various arts and humanities programs who attend the trainee program.

Most trainees hold an MA in their respective field, only very few of them have already received their doctorate. These young lecturers are required to finish their dissertations within 2 years (or at most 4 years) in order to get the chance for a tenured position. This time pressure results in a very high motivation of these young staff members to attend any and all seminars which they think might help them finishing their dissertations as soon as possible. However, a minority of the trainees does not want to write a dissertation at all, but they rather take their 2 years contract as a (paid) opportunity to monitor the job market in their field and wait for the best job offer to come. This minority is not interested in the trainee program at all and attends the seminars only sporadically if at all.

Thus, the motivation of must of the participants is rather high, but this does not mean that all of them have the same expectations or ideas about what should be "trained" in an academic writing course. Participants' expectations range from getting help to overcome their writing blockades over general questions of academic research ("how to I conduct a literature search", "how differ academic from non-academic sources", "how do I find a representative sample for an empirical investigation" etc.) to very detailed questions (or problems resp.) which arise in the context of writing their dissertation.

3 The academic writing program

In the remainder of this presentation I will focus on three issues which are related to the program:

1. the overall structure and the general didactic concept of the program
2. the problem of choosing relevant sample texts and texts for exercises for a diverse audience
3. the problem of conveying linguistic concepts to an audience of non-linguists.

3.1 The overall structure of the writing program

The entire program is divided into a "theory block" and workshop-like "practice block" during which the participants should apply and practice those writing skills which they acquired during the theory block. The main aim of the whole program is to equip participants with linguistic skills which enable them to revise a first draft of a text on the micro- and the macro textual levels. Questions of cognitive planning and structuring of texts are not in the focus of the program (although they are not totally neglected, of course). The reason for this foregrounding of revising skills is not only the tight time frame of the program but also the varied disciplinary background of the participants which would make it very difficult to deal with content related aspects of text planning.

For administrative reasons the first three "instalments" of the program were offered on three consecutive days. This meant that the practice block had a somehow artificial flavour as the participants were not able to write own texts and revise them within one single day. To resolve this problem the participants were asked to work with already published texts (which were carefully chosen to present them with good as well as with bad examples of German academic writing). However, as participants (and I) continuously complained about this situation the BU-administration at last agreed to split the training into two halves. Thus, in the new version the theory block is offered at least 3 months prior to the practice block so that participants have enough time to write their own texts (in most cases parts of their dissertation research) and circulate them in their group and as well as send them to me in time. This procedure enhanced participants' satisfaction enormously and facilitated a workshop- like character of the practice block.

The theory block focuses on skills of text revision (as mentioned above). Here I use the following three step didactic technique ((Martin, James R. 2000)):

- Introduction/ explanation of a linguistic concept (teacher activity)
- Recognition of linguistic structures (instantiations of the concept) in a sample text (trainee activity)
- Active usage of the concept, revision of a sample text (trainee activity)

Hence, this didactic concept requires the use of sample texts in the theoretical part also (cf. below). The overall course structure is the following (this structure is also the table of contents of the course notes):

1. Introduction
2. Components of the writing process
    2.1. mechanisms of text revision
3. Language and language use
4. The structure of academic genres
    4.1. The dissertation
    4.2. The research paper
        4.2.1. The introduction

4.2.1.1. Functional phases of the introduction of an empirical paper
4.2.1.2. Functional phases of the introduction of a non- empirical paper
4.2.2. The literature review
4.2.2.1. Linguistic characteristics of the literature review
4.2.2.1.1. "Strong author orientation" (descriptive style)
4.2.2.1.2. "Weak author orientation" (argumentative style)
4.2.2.1.3. Different kinds of speech act verbs in the literature review
4.2.2.2. Organisational patterns for the literature review
4.2.3. Methods and Material
4.2.4. Results
4.2.4.1. The use of tables and graphs
4.2.4.2. Functional phases the "results" chapter
4.2.4.3. Linguistic characteristics of the "results" chapter
4.2.4.3.1. "Strong table orientation"
4.2.4.3.2. "Weak table orientation"
4.2.5. The "discussion" chapter
4.2.5.1. Functional phases of the "discussion chapter"
4.2.5.1.1. Empirical papers
4.2.5.1.2. Non-empirical papers
4.2.6. The abstract
4.2.7. The list of references
5. Linguistic features of academic texts on the micro-level
5.1. Cohesive devices in texts
5.2. The thematic progression
5.2.1. Types of thematic progression
5.2.2. Topic sentences and resumes
5.3. Establishing transitions between parts of the text
5.4. Manipulating the thematic progression of a text
5.4.1. Meaning and its realisation in grammatical categories
5.4.2. Logical connections in texts
5.5. The person of the author in an academic text

Chapters 1-3 offer a short general overview about various aspects of the writing process and about the discourse model which the training is based on (which is mainly Swales' model, (Swales, John 1990)) and the genre based approach of the Sydney school, (Drury, H. and Webb, C. 1990; Drury, Helen 1991; Drury, H. and Taylor, Ch. 1996), (Halliday, Michael A. K. 1994 (2nd ed)), (Jones, J. Et Al. 1989; Jones, Janet 1998), (Martin, James R. 1992), (Ventola, Eija 1996)). The main purpose of this introductory part is to "standardise" participants' expectations and to thematise those expectations which cannot be met during the course.
Chapter 4 introduces basic structural units of the macro-structure of academic genres with an emphasis on the introduction and literature review, and the results and

discussion parts respectively. Central to this part of the training is the introduction of Swales' functional phases and rhetorical moves to the participants and to discuss certain of their linguistic features with them. Using sample texts participants also learn to recognise and to manipulate these linguistic entities.

In chapter 5 participants learn basic principles of cohesive devices and thematic progression in academic texts and methods of manipulating thematic progression. Here I focus especially on the different types of thematic progression and for what communicative purposes they might be used and on the use of topic sentences/ advance organisers and résumés. (*Aussprache wie im Dt.*)

In the following two sections of my presentation I will focus on two problem areas which arise in the context of conveying various linguistic concepts for a non-linguistic heterogeneous audience, namely the choice of relevant sample texts and the presentation of subtle linguistic concepts to non-linguists.

3.2 Choice of sample texts

Sample texts are used in two types of exercises:

- Structure – recognition – exercises: in this type of exercise participants are requested to find and classify certain linguistic structures (e.g. genre stages, rhetorical moves, theme-rheme patterns) which were introduced to them before during the course. Ideal sample texts for this kind of exercise are those texts, in which the respective structures are most prototypically realised.
- Text – revision – exercises: in this kind of exercise (which participants always have to do after the previous type of exercise) participants are requested to recognise faulty linguistic structures in a text and then to revise them. Of course, ideal sample texts for this kind of exercise would be texts in which the respective structures are realised in a faulty or dysfunctional way. As this kind of "faulty texts" are only rarely found in journals I use mainly texts where I manipulated certain linguistic features (e.g. thematic progression patterns).

Two factors influence the choice of sample texts:

- The heterogeneity of the group of participants: as mentioned above, participants come from a variety of disciplinary background. Roughly, they may be divided into three groups: "lawyers", "social scientists", and "others" (and this group may be very heterogeneous again). This division shows that it is impossible to find texts which are relevant (with regard to their content) and/ or comprehensible for the whole group.
- The usual way of participants' reception of texts: like probably all non – linguists participants are used to focus on content and not on structural properties when reading a text.

In the original course – concept I tried to account for these two factors by choosing sample texts which were *equally irrelevant for all participants*. This effect was easy to achieve as I took all sample texts from one volume of the German linguistics journal "Linguistische Berichte". I made sure that the sample texts did not contain too many and too specific linguistic terms to facilitate at least a superficial understanding of the texts. The general non – relevance of the sample texts should also help participants to focus their attention on linguistic structures. I explained my sampling strategy to the participants at the beginning of the course and on the whole they understood and accepted it (of course, they had not other choice ☺). Anyway, during the first two "instalments" of the course it turned out that many participants found it extremely difficult to analyse texts which they did not fully understand in a way which was totally unfamiliar to them. The result of these difficulties was that it took them an extremely lot of time to do the exercises, which of course had a negative impact on the whole time schedule of the course.

Since then I use a "mixture" of sample texts: some (very cooperative) participants of previous courses were asked to send me journal articles which they thought were very good examples of the genre "research article" in their field. From these texts I took some sample texts in the fields of economy and law, and thus reduced the amount of linguistic sample texts drastically. The use of this "mixed sample texts" reduced the amount of time participants need for working through their exercises. However, especially lawyers seem to be very easily "distractible" by the content of a text: it is always difficult to prevent them from discussing the arguments which are brought forward in a law text and to concentrate on the linguistic features of the texts.

3.3 What is "thematic progression"?

I turn now to the second problem I mentioned above, namely how to convey the appropriate level of linguistic knowledge to a lay audience in a writing course, or – to put it in concrete terms – the question is: What is "thematic progression"?

To find out the patterns of thematic progression in a text, participants require to be familiar with two basic concepts of text linguistics:

- Kinds of reference (recurrence, partly recurrence of textual entities, pronominal reference, lexical cohesion etc.) between textual entities
- The classification of theme and rheme in the clause

It is relatively easy to explain to an audience of academics (who had a few years of grammar teaching in school, even if they did not like it) what linguists mean by "reference" in a text and which (major) kinds of reference between textual entities are possible and appropriate in German academic texts.

However, it is not so easy to explain the concepts of "theme" and "rheme" to them. The first problem here is a theoretical one: which definition of "theme" and "rheme" should one chose? As Tomlin et al. (1997) show, different theoretical schools in linguistics define these two concepts quite differently, and additionally, there are also the two "competing" concepts of "Given" and "New". I.e. the first hurdle to take in the conception of the whole course was to chose which definition would be the most "appropriate" one. In this case I decided to use the definition of "theme" and "rheme" which was developed by systemic functional linguistics, especially by M.A.K. Halliday ((Halliday, Michael A. K. 1994 (2nd ed))). The reason for this choice was mainly a practical one: using Halliday's model it is relatively easy to find the theme and the rheme of a German clause. Roughly speaking the portion of the (main) clause which comes in front of the finite verb (the front field) is the "theme" and all the rest is the "rheme" (cf. (Steiner, E. and Ramm, W. 1995)). Although things are not as simple and from a linguistic perspective this definition of theme and rheme makes only sense if the concepts of "given" and "new" are also used in an analysis, for the practical purposes of a writing course, Hallday's conception is totally sufficient.

A second problem in this context is the terminology (or the "linguistic meta-language") itself. Most lay people have a certain sense of what a "theme" in a clause or text is, but they probably do not have in mind how systemic functional linguistics defines the concept: namely as "the starting point for the message" or "the ground from which the clause is taking off" ((Halliday, Michael A. K. 1994 (2nd ed)): 38). The term "rheme" is even more opaque for non – linguists and because of their close phonetic resemblance the two terms are easy to confuse with each other. To equip the participants with an adequate "meta-language" in dealing with texts and their thematic progression it was nonetheless necessary to convey these to concepts in a comprehensible way to them. In the following I will present the solution which I chose for this problem in my PowerPoint presentation which accompanies the course:

WORÜBER (WHAT	GIBT'S IS	WAS NEUES? NEW HERE?)
Für Patient 1 (Of patient 1	**sind is**	**die Leistungen in Aufgabe A weitgehend normal the performance in item A largely normal)**
THEME	RHEME	

WORÜBER (WHAT	GIBT'S IS	WAS NEUES? NEW HERE?)
Die Leistungen in Aufgabe A (The performance in item A	**sind is**	**für Patient 1 weitgehend normal of patient 1 largely normal)**
THEME	RHEME	

WORÜBER (WHAT	GIBT'S IS	WAS NEUES? NEW HERE?)
Die Leistungen (The performance	**sind is**	**für Patient 1 in Aufgabe A weitgehend normal of patient 1 in item A largely normal)**
THEME	RHEME	

WORÜBER (WHAT	GIBT'S IS	WAS NEUES? NEW HERE?)
In Aufgabe A (In item A	**sind is**	**die Leistungen für Patient 1 weitgehend normal the performance of patient 1 largely normal)**
THEME	RHEME	

WORÜBER (WHAT	GIBT'S IS	WAS NEUES? NEW HERE?)
Weitgehend normal	**sind**	**die Leistungen für Patient 1 in Aufgabe A**

(Largely normal	is	the performance of patient 1 in item A)
THEME	RHEME	

In this example I try to show participants that (as a consequence of the obligatory verb second position combined with the rather free constituent order of the other constituents) in a German (declarative) main clause more or less all constituents may constitute the "theme" (the word by word translation in brackets below each sample clause should give an impression of these permutations, I know that these translations are ungrammatical in English). Additionally, by the use of the line above each version of the sample clause I try to establish a kind of "vernacular paraphrase" for the linguistic terminology which is presented in the line below each sample clause. N.B. that the "vernacular line" contains three elements: the theme part ("What"), the finite verb ("is") and the rest of the clause ("new here"). Through this tripartite structure I do not only want to convey the two linguistic concepts of theme and rheme to the participants but I also want to show them, that in a German main clause the verb is the key position which marks the boundary between theme and rheme.
The next example follows the above one and is intended to show participants the context sensitivity of theme-rheme patterns of clauses in a text:

Die Leistungen von Patient 1 sind in den unterschiedlichen Aufgaben <u>verschieden</u>.
(Patient 1 performs in the various tasks <u>differently)</u>

<u>Weitgehend normal</u> sind seine Leistungen in Aufgabe A.
(<u>Largely normal</u> is his performance in item A)

<u>Stark gestört</u> sind sie hingegen in Aufgabe B.
(<u>Strongly disturbed</u>, however, is his performance in item B.)

In this example the thematic progression with a "split rheme" (the rheme "different" of the first clause is continued in the thematic parts of the two following clauses by the use of "largely normal" and "strongly disturbed", cf. (Danes, Frantisek 1974)) results in a rather "fluent" text. Additionally, this example (a topic sentence with to following sentences) serves as a starting point for explaining to the participants how they might use patterns of thematic progression in texts. A simple manipulation of the thematic progression pattern in this short text, which is presented as the next example, then shows that a change of the thematic progression pattern results in a more "stumbling" text passage:

Die Leistungen von Patient 1 sind in den unterschiedlichen Aufgaben <u>verschieden</u>.
(Patient 1 performs in the various tasks <u>differently)</u>

<u>Seine Leistungen in Aufgabe A</u> sind weitgehend normal.
(His performance in item A is largely normal.)

Stark gestört sind sie hingegen in Aufgabe B.
(Strongly disturbed, however, is his performance in item B.)

This kind of "permutations" shows the participants the salience of theme-rheme patterns for the "smoothness" of a text and establishes a basic understanding how these patterns work and how it is possible to manipulate them.

4 Conclusions

In closing I would like to report on my experiences in conveying linguistic concepts to a non-linguist audience (of course, these experiences would be different if I had a different (non-academic) audience):

In my opinion the most important prerequisite for conveying discipline - specific scholarly concepts in a practice-oriented context is the courage to simplify them. Because (1) participants of my writing courses are simply not interested in linguistic discussions about subtle theoretical problems and of course it is impossible to explain the salience of these discussions to them in a one day crash course. And (2) participants are entitled to get a "tool kit" for revising their texts and enhancing their writing skills, but they do not want to have an introductory course to text linguistics. Another aspect of the call for simplification is the participants' deep conviction, that their trainer knows an answer to every question. This somehow naïve believe in the "know-it-all" capacity of their trainer might be surprising as the participants are young researchers who should know that in any academic field there are always open questions. But obviously, as soon as they leave their own academic field, researchers adopt a lay-person attitude towards "experts".

A second aspect of the success or failure of the course is the kind of presentation of course materials. In the first "instalments" of the course I used transparencies which accompanied most of my teaching activities. However, this approach did not prove to be very successful as it was necessary to change the transparencies very frequently and the print was in some cases too small to be readable for all participants. Since last year I use a PowerPoint presentation which offers the big advantage of animation. This feature makes it much easier to develop certain definitions etc. in a series of slides and to show the effect of changes in examples (cf. above) in a more lively way.

All in all, I would like to stress that the successful conveying of specialist linguistic concepts is not a "by-product" of academic research, but rather demands genuine and complex skills.

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Signature:

Printed Name/Position/Title: Helmut Gruber/ Assoc. Prof./ Dr. phil.

Organization/Address: Dept. of Linguistics University of VIenna, A-1090, Berggasse 11

Telephone: +43/1/4277-41722

Fax: +43/1/4277/9417

E-mail Address: helmut.k.gruber@univie.ac.at 18/07/01

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