



Rethinking Academic Writing Pedagogy for the European University

Ruth Breeze.

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The recent effervescence of internationalisation in European higher education, with universities offering more and more English-medium degrees and master courses, is making ESP/EAP practitioners rethink their role and respond to this new challenging context. With the aim of helping academic writing professionals in this changing landscape, Breeze tries to bring theory and practice together and establishes “long conversations” on second language (L2) writing.

In Chapter one, the author analyses the recent emergence of writing programmes within English as a language of higher education in Europe, discerning three models. In the first model, the language of the country is the main medium of study and foreign language courses are an optional extra. This model has evolved into a second one, which includes universities that offer language courses for specific and academic purposes or merely demand a minimum competence requirement. The third model summarises the recent internationalisation trend among European universities to offer English-medium programmes. Yet, from the language experts’ viewpoint, the assumption that students in these programmes already possess the appropriate language level at entry level is questionable, in particular as far as writing skills are concerned.

Chapter two heeds writing across cultures and reviews important research on contrastive rhetorical analyses. Cognisant of the complex European landscape, Breeze then focuses on the need for English teachers to be acquainted with the differences across disciplines not only in terms of rhetorical structure, style or register but also in terms of epistemological discipline-specific conventions. The genre analysis approach, with all its possible variations, is revised drawing on research while very practical advice is also offered to teachers who find themselves teaching academic writing to heterogeneous groups.

Chapters three, four and five tackle crucial aspects that lie at the heart of teaching L2 writing. In Chapter three, current traditional approaches to first language (L1) writing are described, their main advantages and shortcomings being weighed. The tenets of mainstream movements are discussed, ranging from the expressive writing school in the 60s, the introduction of cognitive and strategy approaches in the 70s, the acknowledgment of the social dimensions in the 80s to the post-process movement and genre movements. Because L2 writing borrows from L1 writing theory, Chapter four reviews dominant process and genre models in L2 writing and outlines the basic suppositions these schools rest upon and the main criticisms they have received. This review provides fundamental insight for practitioners, who will appreciate this overall picture of the state of the art. Chapter five presents post-process thinking, pointing to four main critiques of process, strategy and genre approaches, and discusses the extent to which new models suit L2 writing. It becomes clear that no approach should be idealised and that teachers can combine different approaches while being acquainted with their shortcomings.

Chapter six revolves around approaches to the teaching of writing that aim to integrate writing with other academic skills, promote student socialisation into disciplinary communities and raise awareness about the nature of academic communication. Among the areas pinned down we find collaborating with content teachers; encouraging students to write collaboratively; using writing-to-learn movement tenets; devising activities that integrate writing with reading or speaking; and using simulation methods that promote a deeper understanding of academic writing. Novel computer-based methods of teaching L2 mainly through the use of corpus tools like concordancers and wordlists as well as web-based tasks that draw on the Internet, blogs and online platforms are dealt with in Chapter seven.

Finally, Chapters eight and nine address two different but important issues: how we can help students become effective L2 writers and how teachers should provide feedback and assess student writing. The author revises research on academics' practices when writing a research article and examines the roles of writing centres at European universities, in particular from the perspective of remedial institutions and centres that teach writing to postgraduate/doctoral students and to academics that need to write up articles in English. In this respect, the title of Chapter eight ("New directions: addressing writers' needs") may be somewhat misleading as the chapter focuses on academics who need to write articles in English, leaving

out ESP courses to graduates/undergraduates and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) training to content teachers who lecture in English, an increasingly important direction in the recent European landscape. It would have been interesting to read on how and the extent to which writing is integrated within a “pure” CLIL framework and within other varieties of CLIL found in Europe. Teacher and peer feedback as well as different types of assessment are dealt with in the subsequent chapter and some useful feedback forms are provided at the end.

The book closes with a reflection on the different strands explored and revisits core features that may serve to design academic writing courses. Readers of this book will certainly be informed to “provide better support and more individualised guidance to help our students attain full competence as writers in their chosen and academic professional areas” (page 161).

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