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**Chapter 38 English for academic purposes and discourse analysis**

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English for academic purposes (EAP) is an activity at the forefront of language research and teaching today, with a distinctive focus on the ways language is used in particular academic contexts. This chapter shows how discourse analysis is central to this enterprise by offering an overview of its importance, outlining something of my own contribution to the area, and making some predictions about future research directions.

# **What is EAP?**

EAP is an approach to language education based on identifying the specific language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target academic groups, and which recognizes the subject-matter needs and expertise of learners (Hyland, 2018). It sees itself as sensitive to contexts of discourse and action, and seeks to develop research-based pedagogies to assist study, research or publication in English. While some of this research looks at the ways language relates to local contexts and practices (e.g. Paltridge et al, 2016; Swales, 1998), EAP is generally understood as a text-oriented approach. Teachers try to identify the diversity of disciplinary discourses in the academy and encourage students to engage analytically with target discourses and develop a critical understanding of the contexts in which they are used (e.g. Macallister, 2016).

The emergence of EAP in the 1980s, as a response to growing numbers of second language (L2) students in university courses, originally produced an agenda concerned with curriculum and instruction rather than with theory and analysis. EAP was then largely a materials and teaching-led movement focusing on texts and on the search for generic study skills, which could be integrated into language courses to make students more efficient learners. The huge expansion of university places in many countries since then, together with an increase in full fee-paying international students to compensate for cuts in government support, has resulted in a more culturally, socially and linguistically diverse student population than ever before. Moreover, with the rapid rise in refugee populations around the world and the consequent increase in international migration, it is common for teachers find non-native users of English in their high school classrooms for whom the concept of ‘academic language’ (expressed in any language) is an unfamiliar one. In other words, students bring different identities, understandings and habits of meaning-making to their learning, which means that teachers can no longer assume that their students’ previous learning experiences will provide appropriate schemata and skills to meet the demands of their subject courses.

Added to this complexity, students now take a broader and more heterogeneous mix of academic subjects. In addition to traditional single-subject or joint-honours degrees, many students opt for modular degrees and emergent ‘practice-based’ courses such as nursing, management and social work. These new course configurations are more discoursally challenging for students who have to move between genres, departments and disciplines. Further, while in the past the main vehicles of academic communication were written texts, now a broad range of modalities and presentational forms confront and challenge students’ communicative competence. They must learn rapidly to negotiate a complex web of disciplinary specific text-types, assessment tasks and presentational modes (both face to face and online) in order first to graduate, and then to operate effectively in the workplace. The diverse learning needs of students are therefore focused on the challenges to communicative competence presented by disciplinary-specific study, by new modes of distance and electronic teaching and learning, and by changing circumstances, both within the academy and in society at large.

To address these changes, EAP has developed a strong research base which emphasizes the rich diversity of texts, contexts and practices in which students must now operate. EAP has crucially depended for its growth on its ability to identify accurately what these features and practices are, so that they may be taught to students and relayed to academics seeking to publish in English. In this enterprise discourse analysis, particularly text-based forms of genre analysis, has become established as the most widely used and productive methodology. Drawing on a range of methods and theories it seeks to provide insights into the structures and meanings of spoken, written, visual and electronic texts, into the demands placed by academic contexts on communicative behaviours, and into the pedagogic practices by which these behaviours can be developed. Discourse analysis is a key resource in this research agenda and has made an enormous contribution to our understanding of academic communication.

# **What has discourse analysis told us about EAP?**

Discourse analysis is a collection of methods for studying language in action, looking at texts in relation to the social contexts in which they are used. In EAP it has tended to inform the understanding of concrete texts rather than institutional practices and has largely taken the form of focusing on particular genres such as the research article, the conference presentation, and the student essay. Genre analysis can be seen as a more specific form of discourse analysis, which focuses on any element of recurrent language use, including grammar and lexis, that is relevant to the analyst's interests (Hyland, 2009). As a result, genre analysis sees texts as representative of wider rhetorical practices and so has the potential to offer descriptions and explanations both of texts and of the communities that use them.

Genres are the recurrent uses of more or less conventionalized forms through which individuals develop relationships, establish communities and get things done using language. Genres can thus be seen as a kind of tacit contract between writers and readers, which influence the behaviour of text producers and the expectations of receivers. By focusing on mapping typicality, genre analysis thus seeks to show what is usual in collections of texts, and so it helps to reveal underlying discourses and the preferences of disciplinary communities. These approaches are influenced by Halliday's (1994) view of language as a system of choices that link texts to particular contexts through patterns of lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features and by Swales’ (1990) observation that these recurrent choices are closely related to the work of particular discourse communities, whose members share broad social purposes.

A range of spoken and written academic genres have been studied in recent years. Written genres include undergraduate essays (Dong & Buckingham, 2018), theses (Aull, 2019), homepages (Hyland, 2013), abstracts (Jiang & Hyland, 2017), academic blogs (Zou & Hyland, 2019), and research articles (Hyland, 2012a). In academic speech, research has explored audioslide presentations (Yang, 2017), lectures (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2020), conference presentations (Poos & Simpson, 2012) and three-minute theses (Hyland & Zou, 2021). Analyses have also explored texts in disciplines as diverse as biochemical research (Poole, Gnann & Hann-Powell, 2019), pure maths (McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012) and art-history (Tucker, 2003), and compared how genre features differ across time (Hyland & Jiang, 2019), discipline (Hyland, 2004a; Yang, 2014), and genre (Zou & Hyland, 2019). Together this research demonstrates the distinctive differences in the genres of the academy where particular purposes and audiences lead writers to employ very different rhetorical choices. Table 38.1, for example, compares frequencies for different features in a corpus of 240 research articles and 56 textbooks.

*Table 38.1* Selected features in research articles and textbooks

| per 1000 words | Hedges | Self-mention | Citation | Transitions |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research articles | 15.1 | 3.9 | 6.9 | 12.8 |
| University textbooks | 8.1 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 24.9 |

We can see considerable variation in these features across the two genres. The greater use of *hedging* underlines the need for caution and opening up arguments in the research papers compared with the authorized certainties of the textbook, while the removal of *citation* in textbooks shows how statements are presented as facts rather than as claims grounded in the literature. The greater use of self-mention in articles points to the personal stake that writers invest in their arguments and to their desire to gain credit for claims. The higher frequency of transitions, which are conjunctions and other linking signals, in textbooks is a result of the fact that writers need to make connections far more explicit for readers with less topic knowledge.

Perhaps the most productive application of discourse analysis in EAP has been to explore the lexico-grammatical and discursive patterns of particular genres in order to identify their recognizable structural identity. Analysing this kind of patterning has yielded useful information about the ways in which texts are constructed and the rhetorical contexts in which such patterns are used, as well as providing valuable input for genre-based teaching. Some of this research has followed the move analysis work pioneered by Swales’ (1990) which seeks to identify the recognizable stages of particular institutional genres and the constraints on typical move sequences. Moves are the typical rhetorical steps which writers or speakers use to develop their social purposes, and work on academic genres has produced numerous move or step descriptions, such as those of grant proposal abstracts (Matzler, 2021), the 3-minute thesis (Hu & Liu, 2018) and the peer seminar (Aguia, 2004).

We cannot, however, assume that a particular text will always rigidly observe a given genre structure. Often analyses show that moves overlap or occur out of sequence, and there is frequently less uniformity than might be expected. This is partly because writers make different choices about what to include and partly because local communities may have specific uses that override common structures. Moreover, the same genre can look very different in different communities or when written in different languages, while a report in chemistry will look very different from one in economics or engineering. Analysts have also long been aware of the dangers of oversimplifying by assuming blocks of texts to be mono-functional and ignoring writers’ complex purposes and ‘private intentions’ (Bhatia, 1999). There is also the problem of validating analyses to ensure they are not simply products of the analyst's intuitions. Transitions from one move to another in a text are usually motivated outside the text, as writers respond to their social context, but analysts have not always been able to identify the ways these shifts are explicitly signalled by lexico-grammatical patterning.

Because of such difficulties, attention has tended to look at particular features of genres rather than moves. One feature of academic genres to receive attention is writers’ use of *evaluative that* constructions in articles and dissertations (Hyland and Tse, 2005), a structure that allows a writer to thematize evaluative meanings by presenting a complement clause following *that* (as in *We believe that this is an interesting construction*). Corpora are increasingly used in this endeavour, with studies exploring the common 4-word collocations, or lexical bundles, which are typical in many professional and student academic genres (Hyland, 2012b). Other studies have looked, for example, at circumstance adverbials in student presentations (Zareva, 2009) interactive features of undergraduate lectures (Morrell, 2004), and evaluation in book reviews (Hyland & Diani, 2009).

Perhaps the most obvious area in which corpora have facilitated academic discourse analysis is on descriptions of vocabulary use. This shows, for example, that a high proportion of the lexis students encounter at university is discipline related (Hyland, & Tse, 2007; Durrant, 2014). So attempts to create general academic word lists, such as The Academic Vocabulary List (Gardner, & Davies, 2014), can discriminate words found in academic and other registers, but do not help students with the fact that words may change meanings when they cross disciplines. In a study of a 6.7-million-word corpus of texts from economics and finance, for example, Ha and Hyland (2017) identified over 800 words which had a meaning specific to those fields, even if they had a general meaning too. As a result, several discipline-specific vocabulary lists have been created, for example, for those studying plumbing (Coxhead, & Demecheleer, 2018) and agriculture (Munoz, 2015).

Discourse analysis has also pointed to cultural influences in linguistic and rhetorical preferences by academic writers (e.g. Connor, 2018). Although ‘culture’ is a controversial term, one influential interpretation regards it as an historically transmitted and systematic network of meanings that allow us to understand, develop and communicate our knowledge and beliefs about the world. As a result, language and learning are inextricably bound up with culture. Not only are our values reflected in and carried through language, but cultures make available certain taken-for-granted ways of organising perceptions and expectations, including those we use to learn and communicate. Familiarity with particular rhetorical modes, different organizational styles, and expectations about the reader's involvement with the text all shape the ways in which a writer approaches an assignment in their second language (e.g. Finn, 2019).

It is, therefore, probable that the schemata of L2 and L1 (first language) writers differ in their preferred ways of organizing ideas which may influence how students construct academic discourse in English (You, 2013). But it may be wise to be cautious when interpretating the role of culture in L2 writing. Zhao (2019), for example, using correlational and regression analysis, found that various writer background variables, such as age, gender, cultural background, and familiarity with the target language and culture, had very limited impact on L2 writers' textual voice construction. This is despite the fact that this is often said to be a factor vulnerable to cultural variation.

Researchers therefore seek to avoid a ‘received view of culture’ that unproblematically identifies cultures with national entities and which emphasizes predictable consensuality *within* cultures and differences *across* them (e.g. Atkinson, 2004). Despite this, there are considerable differences in preferred practices across languages. So, for example, L2 students may find that academic English, compared with their L1, may:

• be more explicit about its structure and purposes with constant previewing and reviewing of material

• employ more, and more recent, citations

• be less tolerant of digressions

• be more cautious in making claims, doing it with considerable use of mitigation and hedging

• use more sentence connectors to show explicitly how parts of the text link together.

In other words, discourse analysis shows us that while we can’t simply predict the ways people are likely to write on the basis of assumed cultural traits, students’ first language and prior learning can influence ways of organizing ideas and structuring arguments when they write in English at university.

While most academic discourse research has focused on the written or spoken word, discourse analysis is not only the linguistic analysis of texts and studies have sought to establish the ways that texts are firmly embedded in the activities in which their users participate. Na and Hyland (2018), for example, show how three ‘text mediators’ employed their different expertise and processes to a manuscript written by a Chinese PhD student. Examining textual changes and the advice given, they show how a successful text can crucially depend on the relationship between the participants. In another study, Zou & Hyland (2020) used semi-structured interviews to examine how academics see the challenges of writing academic blogs. They show how writers attempt to convey information to new audiences while employing both academic and disciplinary conventions. The best known study combining discourse analyses with extensive observations and interviews is Swales’ (1998) ‘textography’ of his building at the University of Michigan. Using these varied methods, Swales provides a richly detailed picture of the professional lives and projects of individuals in the computer centre, the Herbarium and the university English Language Centre.

Finally, discourse analytic research has been conducted from a critical perspective (See Fairclough this volume), focusing on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in disciplines, schools and classrooms. Distinguished by an overtly political agenda, critical studies have attempted to show that the discourses of the academy are not transparent or impartial means for describing the world but help construct, regulate and control knowledge, social relations and institutions. Particular literacy practices possess authority because they represent the currently dominant ways of depicting relationships and realities and these authorised ways of seeing the world exercise control of academics and students alike. This can, of course, create tensions for students in coping with university literacy demands.

Overall, the analysis of academic discourse texts has contributed hugely to our understanding of such texts and practices and this understanding has fed into EAP teaching. Analyses have provided teachers, materials designers and students with an understanding of how target texts are structured and the reasons they are written as they are. EAP practitioners draw on the findings of discourse analytic studies to determine what is to be learned and to organize instruction around the genres that learners need and the social contexts in which they will operate.

## **What has my work contributed to this area?**

The editors have asked authors in this volume to say something about their own contribution to this research. My work has mainly addressed two broad areas: the role of interpersonal aspects of academic persuasion and disciplinary variations in academic literacy practices.

First, my research has helped to establish that written texts embody interactions between writers and readers. While this view is now widely recognised, it was once considered self-evident that academic writing was an objective, faceless and impersonal form of discourse, simply reporting the ‘real’ academic work that was done in the lab, the library or the office. Today, knowledge is seen as a persuasive construction in which academics do not simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations. Here, discourse analysis can help show how writers seek to offer a credible representation of themselves and their work by claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material and acknowledging alternative views.

As this view gains currency, considerable attention has turned to the features that help realize this interpersonal and evaluative dimension of academic texts. Beginning with work on hedges (Hyland, 1998), I have explored various interpersonal resources such as personal pronouns (2001a), reporting verbs (2004a), questions (2002a), directives (2002b) and nominals (Hyland & Jiang 2021a), as well as looking at particular genres such as acknowledgements (2004b), journal descriptions (Hyland and Tse, 2009), popular science texts (Hyland, 2010) and academic homepages (Hyland, 2013). Most recently, colleagues and I have sought to describe interactions in academic blogs (Zou & Hyland, 2019), Three-minute theses (Hyland & Zou, 2021) and in the hypes used to promote research in the Covid pandemic (Hyland & Jiang, 2021b) as well as to trace changes in academic persuasion on the last 50 years (Hyland & Jiang, 2019).

In addition to studying individual features, I have offered a framework, or rather two frameworks, for analysing the linguistic resources of intersubjective positioning. This has collected together a range of features under the headings of ‘stance and engagement’ (Hyland, 2005a) and ‘metadiscourse’ (Hyland, 2005b). The first of these attempts to capture how discoursal choices help construct both writers and readers. *Stance* is an attitudinal dimension, which includes features that refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions and commitments, either intruding to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or stepping back to disguise their involvement. *Engagement* (Hyland, 2001b), in contrast, is an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognizing the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties and including them as discourse participants. *Metadiscourse*, on the other hand, seeks to offer a more comprehensive way of examining interaction by broadening the scope of interactional resources to include features such as conjunctions, framing devices and glosses on content. While these are often considered as simply helping to tie texts together, they have an important role in relating a text to a community.

Interaction in academic writing thus involves both ‘positioning’ and ‘proximity’ (Hyland, 2012a). Essentially, we take a *position* as a particular kind of person only in *proximity* to a community. How we chose to express ourselves must resonate with group members so that our claims to membership are visible in the repeated patterns of language choices and acknowledged by insiders. The terms represent two key facets of identity in academic communication. When they claim a right to be heard and to have their work taken seriously, writers must display competence as disciplinary insiders.

Essentially, we can see disciplines as language-using communities that provide the context within which students learn to communicate and to interpret each other's talk, gradually acquiring the specialized discourse competencies to participate as group members. Texts are influenced by writers’ memberships of disciplinary groups, which have objectified in language certain ways of experiencing and talking about phenomena. Assumptions about what can be known, how it can be known and with what degree of certainty all help to shape discourse practices, so that what counts as convincing argument, appropriate tone, persuasive interaction and so on is managed for a particular audience (Hyland, 2004a). But, like any community, disciplines are composed of individuals with diverse experiences, expertise and commitments, so that actions and understandings are influenced by the personal and biographical as well as by the institutional and sociocultural.

One of the most striking differences in how language differs across fields is the use of hedges. These function to withhold complete commitment to a proposition, implying that a claim is based on plausible reasoning rather than on certain knowledge. They indicate the degree of confidence the writer thinks it might be wise to give a claim while opening a discursive space for readers to dispute interpretations (Hyland, 1998). Because they represent the writer's direct involvement in a text, something that scientists generally try to avoid, they are twice as common in humanities and social science papers as in the hard sciences. One reason for this is that in the humanities there is less control of variables, more diversity of research outcomes and fewer clear bases for accepting claims than in the sciences. Writers can’t report research with the same confidence of shared assumptions, so papers rely far more on recognizing alternative voices. Arguments have to be expressed more cautiously by using more hedges. In the hard sciences positivist epistemologies mean that the authority of the individual is subordinated to the authority of the text and facts ‘speak for themselves’. The implication is that writers often disguise their interpretative activities behind linguistic objectivity. They downplay their personal role so as to suggest that results would be the same whoever conducted the research. The less frequent use of hedges is one way of minimizing the researcher's role.

This variation is also apparent in student essays (Hyland, 2009) and dissertations (Hyland, 2004c) and in the *kinds* of writing that students are asked to do: even students in fairly cognate fields, such as nursing and midwifery, are given very different writing assignments (Gimenez, 2009). In fact the failure to recognize that discourse conventions are embedded in the epistemological and social practices of the various disciplines means that writing is a black box to students, particularly as lecturers themselves have difficulty in explaining what they mean. Entering the academy means making a ‘cultural shift’ in order to take on identities as members of those communities.

## **An example analysis**

As an example of a discourse analytic study of academic texts, I want to discuss a paper my colleague Kevin Jiang and I published a few years ago examining the idea that academic writing is becoming more informal (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). This was to empirically verify an apparently widespread assumption that there has been a gradual shift away from standard detached and impersonal styles of writing to ones that allow more personal comment, narration and stylistic variation (e.g. Leedham, 2015). There are three ways of looking at this potential phenomenon:

1. That it is part of a wider trend which values interpersonal engagement.
2. That it imposes artificial equality, undermines precision and disguises power.
3. That it is all an illusion. The result of intellectual fashion, especially among applied linguists who relentlessly seek out interactivity in writing wherever they can find it.

To see if academic writing is becoming less formal we focused on published research articles, looking at 360 papers in four disciplines over the past 50 years.

The first consideration was to decide what we were looking for in texts and here we found that it was typically defined in opposition to ‘formality’. The **Cobuild dictionary, for example, defines formal speech as “very correct and serious rather than relaxed and friendly” while in pragmatics, formality is associated with ‘negative politeness’ and the need to respect the other’s face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In academic writing** Heylighen & Dewaele (1999: 1) state that:

A formal style is characterized by detachment, accuracy, rigidity and heaviness; an informal style is more flexible, direct, implicit, and involved, but less informative.

**In other words, formality** helps to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation by minimizing the context-dependence and fuzziness of expressions, while informality rejects stuffy orthodoxy to project a relaxed and approachable persona. Style guides and textbooks contain numerous admonishments for writers to avoid informality, all texts have to include a little of both to be engaging and informative and this suggests a continuum between formality and informality rather than a binary contrast.

Unfortunately, there is little agreement on what informality looks like. Heylighen and Dewale (1999) and Biber (1988), while using different approaches, characterize formality as a cline with formal texts more nominal and informal texts as more verbal. This is, however, is a very broad approach which equates formality with context independence and makes assumptions about the function of grammatical classes in achieving this. But while pronouns deixically anchor a statement to a context, it is not the case that nouns are always more formal than verbs as they can highlight a writer’s stance towards a message and so introduce a more informal and engaging element into texts (Jiang & Hyland, 2015). Instead, we adopted the approach taken by Chang and Swales (1999) who compiled a list of 10 of the most frequently mentioned grammatical features associated with formality in 40 style manuals.

To determine changes in these features, we compiled three corpora to present a snapshot of four contrasting disciplines, applied linguistics, sociology, electrical engineering and biology, at three periods over the past 50 years: 1965, 1985 and 2015. We selected six papers at random from each of the same five journals which had achieved the top ranking in their field according to the year impact factor in 2015. The corpora were grammatically annotated (part-of-speech tagged) using *Tree Tagger* then combed for ‘informal elements’ using the *AntConc* concordance software (Anthony, 2019). Some of the features, such as *first person pronouns, direct questions, contractions, exclamations, second person,* and *unattended anaphoric pronouns*, were retrieved through concordancing individual items (e.g. I/we and this/these/that/those/it). Others, like *split infinitives*, *initial conjunctions* and *sentence final prepositions* were searched using a regular expression query based on their syntactic structure. After extracting the items, each one was then checked manually by each author independently to confirm it was a target feature.

In broad strokes, we found that there has been a small increase of around 2% in the use of informal features in published academic writing over the past 50 years, when the increase in overall words published is taken into account. This is, however, largely a result of increases in hard science writing rather than in the social sciences, which have become slightly *more* formal. writers in applied linguistics have steadily reduced their use of informal elements since 1965 by about 10.3% and sociology by about 3%. Electrical engineering gradually increased the number of informal features in its main journals over the period, up by 9%, and biology, often the outlier in these kinds of studies, rising by a substantial 24.8%.

These overall figures are largely influenced by the frequencies of three main features: first person pronouns, unattended reference and sentences beginning with conjunctions/ conjunctive adverbs. Second person pronouns, contractions and split infinitives were much further behind. Preposition endings, direct questions, exclamations and listing (etcetera) expressions had relatively low frequencies overall and have been omitted to save space here. Table 2 shows the movement of these features. It can be seen that informal features are not changing in a single direction nor behaving in uniform ways, either across times or disciplines. Contractions and spit infinitives now seem to be more tolerated by copy editors than in the past and have increased across most fields, as have direct questions, while listing markers show a marked decline overall. Sentences ending with a preposition fell slightly in the soft knowledge fields and barely showed any movement in the sciences. Second person increased greatly in applied linguistics but fell in sociology while first person fell in applied linguistics and rose in the other disciplines.

Table 38.2: Changes in use of key informality features by discipline

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Feature** | **App Ling** | **Sociology** | **Elec Eng** | **Biology** |
| First person | -18% | 47% | 47% | 213% |
| Unattended pronouns | -34% | -37% | -2% | -45% |
| Initial conjunction | 24% | 28% | 28% | 30% |
| 2nd person | 104% | -53% | 0% | 0.1% |
| Contractions | 650% | 122% | 0% | 100% |
| Split infinitives | 250% | 300% | 300% | 2200% |

Overall, the convention of avoiding the first person to convey an impersonal stance, once a hallowed principle for style guide writers and science authors, now seems to be less rigidly adhered to, most dramatically in biology with a massive 213% rise. It may seem surprising that it should be a scientific discipline which has been most enthusiastic in undermining what is a cornerstone of positivist objectivity. First person pronouns are a powerful means for establishing authority and personal projection and it appears that in the changing and highly competitive context in which research is now conducted, this is a consideration which is becoming ever more important to writers. Its decline in applied linguistics is perhaps related to changes in research away from first person teaching accounts or due to the self-consciousness of language-sensitive writers aware of the strong claims it makes for agency.

Unattended reference, or backward-pointing pronouns (*this*, *these*, *that*, *those*, and *it*) refer to antecedents of varying length, from individual words to entire sections of texts and have declined dramatically across all disciplines. But what governs the writer’s decision to include an “attended” noun phrase, either spelling out the referent or not, remains uncertain. For some observers, the unattended option has a restricted referential capacity and an appropriate noun is needed, while others believe an unnecessary Noun Phrase slows down the flow of new information to the reader. This, then, is a trade-off between snappy economy and ponderous clarity. More importantly, writers can use the noun phrase to emphasise their point.

Finally, sentence initial conjunctions, while common in spoken language, seem to have been "legitimized" in English academic writing. *But, thus and however*, were particularly common in the corpus with sociologists being the most enthusiastic users and electrical engineers the least. Diachronically, we found considerable increases in the frequency of these ‘informal’ initial conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs with a rise of 50% since 1985, due largely to increases in the use of initial *however*, *so* and *indeed.* The smaller increase in biology illustrates something of the distinctive ways that discipline pursues and argues problems (Hyland, 2004a) and the developed sense of rhetorical awareness among many of its writers (Halloran, 1984), perhaps extending to issues of ‘correctness’ in stylistic choices.

## **Looking to the future**

Predictions are always difficult to make, but it is clear that the influential role of discourse analysis in assisting teachers to prepare students for their language-related experiences is unlikely to diminish any time soon. There are, however, a number of areas where research is likely to make an increasing impact on EAP.

The first is the area of clarifying the interdisciplinary complexities of the modern academy. Many student genres remain to be described–for instance counselling case notes, reflexive journals and clinical reports–while analyses of more occluded research genres would greatly assist novice writers in the publication process. We also know little about the ways genres form ‘constellations’ with neighbouring genres (Swales, 2004); or about the ‘genre sets’ that a particular individual or group engages in; or about how spoken and written texts cluster together in a given social activity. In addition, as I have mentioned earlier, the mix of academic subjects now offered to students impacts on the genres they have to participate in, compounding the challenges of writing in the disciplines with novel literacy practices that have barely been described. Discourse analyses have much to contribute in all of these areas.

Second, it is also clear that considerable research needs to be undertaken before we are able to identify more precisely the notion of ‘community’ and how it relates to discipline and the discoursal conventions that it routinely employs. Nor is it yet understood how our memberships of different groups influence our participation in academic discourses. For now, the term *discipline* might be seen as a shorthand form for the various identities, roles, positions, relationships, reputations, reward systems and other dimensions of social practices constructed and expressed through language in the academy, but these concepts need to be refined through the analyses of academic texts and contexts.

A third broad area to which discourse analysis can contribute is the description of new online genres. Academics are increasingly urged to promote their work to wider audiences through blogs, Facebook posts and other social media outlets, and this presents challenges in terms of shaping texts for heterogeneous, non-specialist and potentially hostile audiences. Writers have to create arguments which not only draw on academic conventions but which also appeal to outsiders and a lay public, possibly anticipating criticism which is public, anonymous and often harsh. All of this involves crafting new texts in new ways. Online learning genres also offer students advantages and challenges as teachers increasingly make use of social media and wikis to encourage students to both collaborate with each other and engage with new audiences. Analysis of these texts would be valuable to such learners.

A final broad area gaining the attention of discourse analysts is the role of multimodality in academic communication. Academic texts, particularly in the sciences, have always been multimodal, but textbooks and articles are now far more heavily influenced by graphic design than ever before and the growing challenge to the page by the screen as the dominant medium of communication means that images are ever more important in meaning-making. Analytical tools, such as those developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and others, for example, provide a starting point for researchers and teachers to explain how visuals have been organized for maximum effect, while considerably more work needs to be done to understand the role of multimedia and hypertext in EAP classrooms.

I hope it is clear from this paper that, while EAP is a practically oriented activity committed to demystifying prestigious forms of discourse, unlocking students’ argumentative abilities and facilitating their access to greater life chances, it is grounded in the descriptions of texts and practices. The findings of discourse analytic studies are invaluable in this endeavour, replacing intuitions about texts and revealing how they work as rhetorically persuasive and interactive as well as disciplinary-specific ways by which individuals represent themselves, their work and their audiences. By providing teachers with a way of understanding how writing and speaking are shaped by individuals who make language choices in social contexts, it contributes to both the theory and practice of EAP.

# **Further reading**

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