Case study II
Hidden Literacies?
The development of academic writing by international students on an International Pre-Master’s Programme in a UK university

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Gaining Access to UK Higher Education

International (non-UK) students in UK HE in 2011-12

- totalled 435,230 compared with 428,225 in 2010-11 (an increase of 2%) made up 14% of full-time first degree students and 13% of all first degree students
- made up 69% of full-time taught postgraduates and 46% of all taught postgraduates
- made up 48% of full-time research degree students and 41% of all research postgraduates

(UK Council for International Students’ Affairs, 19.02 2013)
Academic Writing in the UK

- writing as a high stakes activity (Jones et al., 1999)
- Institutional ‘practice of mystery’ (Lillis 1999)
  - Explicit / Implicit    Visible / Invisible

Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 1998)
- The centrality of identity in academic writing
- The impact of power relations on students writing
- Contested nature of academic writing conventions
- Requirement to switch writing styles and genres
- Writing as ideologically inscribed knowledge construction

Academic Socialization
- Acculturation into disciplinary and subject based discourses and genres
- Students acquire the ways of taking, writing, thinking and using literacy that typified members of a disciplinary or subject area community.
- Genres stable, once learned and understood can be reproduced unproblematically.

Study skills/EAP
- ‘divorced form subject content and [disciplinary] knowledge’ (Wingate, 2006 p.459)
- Surface features of language form
- Students can transfer their knowledge unproblematically from one context to another
Aim & Questions

To explore the situation of international students on the International Pre-Master’s Programme and recognize what assists student learning of academic writing and where the learning actually takes place.

1. How does writing support on the International Pre-Master’s Programme help international students to answer academic writing requirements?

2. What do these students do in order to meet these requirements?
Academic Writing in the IPMP Handbook

Programme Aims

The programme is designed to provide a structured pathway into postgraduate programmes related to the fields of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law for international students of high potential.

The full-time three term programme aims to:

1. support you in gaining entry to some of the best postgraduate degree programmes in Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, including management related degrees and Law
2. improve your understanding of and ability to use academic English appropriately and effectively at postgraduate level
3. provide you with a range of study, English and communication skills to help you succeed in your postgraduate study in the UK
4. introduce you to the British educational system and the traditional lecture/seminar/tutorial format
5. provide you with a specially designed course related to the academic field in which you intend to specialise.
Academic Writing in the Language Centre?
Self-access study centre
# Writing Classes

## Common English Linking Words

1. How would you describe the linking words in the following sentences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>When</em> I lived in Germany, I ate a lot of chocolate.</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>If</em> you come, I’ll tell you.</td>
<td>Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. He read a book <em>which</em> was not very good.</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4A. I went to work <em>although</em> I was ill.</td>
<td>Concession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4B. I like pizza, <em>while</em> John does not.</td>
<td>Contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I went to work <em>and</em> finished the report.</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6A. I wanted to finish the report <em>so</em> I went to work.</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B. I went to work <em>because</em> I wanted to finish the report.</td>
<td>Cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I went work <em>to</em> finish the report.</td>
<td>purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have some questions, but about the subjects

Essay title: How valid are Enlightenment ideas for non-Western World?

Tutor: I think it’s a question, and there’s no right answer for this, right. And to most of those questions there is no right answer for this. So, to a certain extend ((uhm)) you gonna be judged on just, you know, using appropriate ideas, organising it well, nice paragraphing etc. etc. So to a certain extend I might not worry perhaps as deeply as you are worrying about getting it right ((laugh)) and worry a bit more about showing you’ve read the nice books and...

Student: Right, I don’t try to find the right answer. I just try to find how can I organise my essay, I mean.

Tutor: Sure, sure. ((uhm)) So if you divide the theories of Enlightenment into secularism, human rights and something else that might be one way to organise your essay. You might look at it from the point of view of Western countries and non-Western countries, that is a different way to organise your essay. Something like that that just brakes it into easy pieces and you tell your reader: I’ll do this and this and this. It might not lead to the perfect answer but it’s a clearly understandable structure. ...That’s my point. Did that help?

Student: Yea.

Tutor: I’ve answered the Enlightenment question!
Writing classes

Writing Tutor: We teach in general and we hope students will be able to make these connections. It is all Social Sciences so it should be possible for students to do it.

Student: In Business Management do we do critique? Will we use it?
Tutor: No, in Business Management, you will write a report and Jean [Business Management lecturer] is in charge of this. I don’t know how she’s going to do this.

Subject tutor: The idea is that the things like the non-content material that I am judging are things that have been covered in the EAP sessions.

When it comes to the essays, they are part of a kind of wider thing really which is that we are testing their ability to put together an essay, a written assignment, on the assumption that that will be an important part of their assignments on their Masters course. Now to what extent all the students on our course are going to be writing essays on their Masters course ((laughs)) is pretty unclear. ... I mean I have to say obviously the people doing the kind of general Humanities things and the International Relations kind of things, obviously they will and it’s excellent training for them, but some of the Business students you wonder, some of the Law students, do they have to write essays like that, I don’t know. I think there’s a case for the Law students that is just... it’s kind of probably a good discipline for them to be able to do that, but for the people going off to do very Finance based Mathematical courses, I don’t know.
Writing classes are ‘good for me’

Maria Teresa:

Peter [writing tutor] told me everything. All I know is because of Peter. (...) It’s like that you have to have a beginning, a middle and an end, but in the beginning, in the middle and the end, actually you say the same things. Like in the beginning you introduce your idea and what you’re going to say and what’s your position and where you’re going to get, and then the devises (...) like giving examples (...) to like make it stronger your point like. (...)And then put something like, “In conclusion...” (...) And in the conclusion you state what your essay’s about, you know, yeah, you just state it all over again and again and again; (...)That’s it!”
Building an argument: ‘knowing’ the structure

Maria Teresa:

They [tutors] say “You have big problems in your structure, in your structure and your organisation. You have to change.” “How?” “Just organise your ideas. ... You have to have this, this, this and this.” Okay, I know that I have this, this, this and this, but the problem maybe was that I wasn’t able to organise this specific idea of the question, you know.
Mind-mapping with a friend

How valid is the distinction made between sex (biological fact) and gender (social construct)?

Sex → biology / chromosomes

Gender → social construct

Religion heritage

Patriarchal Society (depends on location)

How men and women are viewed differently in society

Mutual relationship

Conceived ideologies

→ How men and women perform different activities in society

Gender roles

Everyday life

Women raise children

Men as income provider

Women care for the home

→ How men and women perform different activities

Biological factors

→ How men and women perform different activities

Sex → biology / chromosomes
Genji:
I worried about it [an essay for the optional module] because I think Law essay is different from CTS, the critique and other essays. (...) it’s hard for me to get information from Peter’s class and our [subject]teacher, I think he didn’t give us information about how to write essays too. So for this one I really ... I am not sure if it’s a good one.

Yang:
They taught us about the lecture but not about writing. So I don’t think I got some support from them’.

Agnes:
Actually what is really important that... yeah, when you have somebody like your friends who know something about the topic then you can discuss it. And that’s why in my opinion I got A for my critique because there was a girl, Greek and a Turkish girl, and they disagreed in many things ((laughter)) because she doesn’t like the European Union but I am more favouring the European Union. And then I discovered new ideas through her, so that’s really important.
Maria Teresa:
Yeah, I think... and I read in the internet, like before I wrote each essay, I went... like I researched, especially in the beginning, like the first essays, I went to the internet and researched like what does make a good essay and what is the structure, you know. And yeah, I think... and you have to learn the methodology and that’s what I did.
Reading is the key

Agnes:
Actually that was a kind of problem not just for me in my opinion but also for other students because we were talking about this, do you know how you could structure your essay and actually what you want to write in your essay and it was our problem that we didn’t really know and we had to read about it. But it was a kind of process, reading about these topics and it took lots of time, but after that it was much easier when we knew how we wanted to structure or what we wanted to write about.

Ana:
Writing comes from reading.
Beatrice:
So what I did was to buy a little book written by Benedictus, the Pope, which is a great theologian. (...) it is very easy to read. It’s simple. (...) It was about the life of the Apostles, you know, (...) I remember that for example I learned the word ‘believers’ because I put the word in the draft (...). Believers like brotherhood,... I needed words linked with religious life. (...) I learned the word, he use it a lot, ‘And so’ ‘And then...’ and I had never heard that word from the teachers. And I said, “Oh, well, he’s a book writer, so I used it in the assignment, in both assignments.
Hidden Literacies?

→ Reading
→ Mind-mapping
→ Talking to friends
→ Networking
→ Read / Share information
→ Look for examples of texts/papers
→ Pay attention to language while reading literature
→ Ask native speakers
→ Translate from students’ native languages

• Explicit but decontextualized
• Hidden/invisible

‘The acquisition of academic literacy may be akin to a game (Casanave, 2002; Newman, 2001), it is a game with a bewildering set of rules, many of which are never made explicit to student writer. (Harwood & Hadley 2004: 356)
(Re)Thinking and (Re)Situating Academic Writing Support

- What can be the role of students’ ‘hidden literacies’ in the development of their academic writing?

- Taking into consideration students’ literacy activities, should we be looking for alternative spaces for teaching & learning of academic writing in the UK higher education?