

Pedagogical Concerns and Approaches to EAP Writing Instruction within an ELF Program

ELFプログラムでのEAPライティング指導における
教育的関心とアプローチ

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ABSTRACT

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research lends itself well within the domain of spoken English where speakers actively negotiate meaning within shared contexts. In an ELF circumstance, speakers are not bound by native speaker (NS) norms; rather, their “success” can be measured by their ability to communicate functionally. Yet, what are the implications for writing instruction within an ELF program? And more specifically, how should college-level ELF instructors address the issue of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing since, broadly speaking, EAP assumes that Non-Native Speakers (NNS) should conform to native forms of language use. The author suggests several pedagogical approaches meant to assist L2 writing practitioners working within existing ELF programs. In particular, the author explores how some tenets of ELF can be incorporated into a multiple-draft, process approach writing classroom.

KEYWORDS: ELF and EAP writing, ELF composition, ELF writing instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 English as a Lingua Franca

For more than two decades, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research has called into question basic assumptions regarding language use and appropriate learning goals for non-native users. At its foundation is the belief that the pursuit of native-like English proficiency, which is rarely attainable, is unnecessary as most non-native English speakers adopt their own use of English shaped by local circumstances and needs. Thus, English as a Lingua Franca challenges the concept of ownership of English and the idea of a standard English in a profound manner. Widdowson (1994, p. 379) puts forward the view that the “custodians of standard English are self-elected members of a rather exclusive club” who fear linguistic variety since it might

lead to the downfall (in their view) of standard English as a means of international communication.

Jenkins (2006, p. 160) went even further to describe ELF as a “contact language used only among non-mother tongue speakers” yet now acknowledges that most ELF researchers accept that native speakers can take part in international communication. Within an ELF construct, many Non-Native Speakers (NNSs) have become effective communicators despite not conforming to native-speaker norms of proficiency. More simply put, according to Seidlhofer (2011, p. 197), “‘Failed’ learners can be (come) effective users of English.” In the classroom, ELF practitioners endeavour to establish learning objectives which are more achievable and “real-world” by encouraging students to develop “strategies for making sense, negotiating meaning, [and] co-constructing meaning” Seidlhofer (2011, p. 198). Moreover, ELF students are encouraged to exploit local linguistic resources, including First Language (L1) communicative strategies, to achieve communicative goals.

Seidlhofer (2011, p. 198) suggests that regardless of the amount of language a NNS ultimately acquires, it is their “capability” with the language which can help them when they “need (or wish) to conform to standard norms where such conformity is contextually appropriate.” Standard English (SE) is a “required” variety of English for academic discourse since it is used for institutional purposes. Accordingly, it can be assumed that exposure to an EAP writing curriculum can provide NNSs with opportunities to use their developing ELF capabilities to understand and conform (if they wish) to an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) discourse community. To this end, the author believes that it is possible (in several pragmatic ways) to satisfy the learning goals of most EAP writing programs while remaining faithful to some general ELF principles. In particular, ELF instructors and writing tutors can assist ELF writers at each stage of the writing process. Below are several instructional approaches which attempt to balance an ELF orientation with well-established Second Language (L2) writing instruction practices.

1.2 Introducing English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Before writing tasks are assigned, NNS students need to understand how academic writing is situated among other types of writing. The metaphor of composition being akin to a track and field competition, with EAP being but one of several “events,” often helps students visualize EAP as a distinct discourse genre. Staying with this metaphor, each writing “event” has developed its own forms, standards and (reader) expectations; moreover, these conventions have evolved according to the rhetorical goals which are embedded in each form of discourse. From this standpoint, ELF teachers can exemplify the various features of EAP writing, i.e., appropriate rhetorical distance, explicit (versus implicit) language use, common discourse structures, citation rules, etc., as a means of illustrating how critical inquiry is shaped within written academic discourse. Additionally, by exploring EAP this way, students will be more prepared to deconstruct and interpret writing prompts which normally frame

critical points of view and establish investigatory boundaries.

1.3 Prewriting/Drafting stages

During the prewriting and drafting stages, ELF students should be prepared to negotiate the meaning and scope of their writing assignments with their instructors and classmates. It is also at this stage where students can bring to bear their oral communicative strategies to forge their thoughts and opinions. In return, ELF instructors need to illicit critical thinking by encouraging students to investigate their topics thoroughly and to search for commonplace arguments which either support or refute their opinions. However, to be mindful of ELF research, instructors should also be careful not to favor students' opinions based upon linguistic accuracy, but rather on the merit of the ideas expressed and on their pertinence to the writing topic and prompt. Borrowing from Kumaravadivelu's (2006) idea of post-method, Toh (2016, p. 363) describes the possibilities of "a respect for locality, heterogeneity and the potential for fresh meaning making" when ELF teachers abandon what Holliday (2005) characterizes as "English-speaking Western [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages] TESOL." In other words, when ELF instructors engage in meaningful dialog with students and allow themselves to become part of the negotiation and renegotiation of meaning, they are, in turn, valuing thinking which is informed by ELF.

1.4 Drafting/Revising stages

As ELF promotes the notion of natural linguistic diversity and challenges the idea of a standard English, care should be taken to present model essays which reflect this perspective. The simplest solution is to utilize model essays which have been authored by NNS writers (written at the same stage of composing) in order to highlight the authorial choices made by other NNS authors. Peer-review type activities where students are asked to investigate and comment on "global" issues (i.e., essay structure, ideas/arguments, arrangement of ideas/arguments) can help raise important awareness in their own writing. ELF students need to be given a chance to discuss concerns regarding comprehensibility and decide (collectively, when possible) whether an author has failed to express her ideas clearly or not. The goal of this activity is to ready students to examine their own drafts and decide if any changes need to be made at the rhetorical level. It is important to remember that all discussions concerning sentence-level issues should wait until the editing process has begun. In essence, ELF instructors should, take to heart one guideline which Drubin and Kellogg (2012, p. 1399) have proposed "for writing and evaluating manuscripts." Briefly, they remind editorial boards who review professional manuscripts authored by NNS that "Nonnative speakers of English can write effective manuscripts, despite errors of grammar, syntax, and usage, if the manuscripts are clear, simple, logical, and concise."

1.5 Revising/Editing stages

The consequences and/or potential “benefits” of textual intervention as a means of avoiding future “errors” is beyond the scope of this paper. However, while conferencing with students at the revising and editing stage of the writing process, ELF instructors can effectively explain and illustrate the types of feedback commonly employed by teachers. One approach is to divide feedback into three areas, where “errors” are discussed in accordance to their impact on comprehensibility.

To begin, areas where intended meaning is ambiguous to the reader should first be identified. Then, through reader-response discussions, authors can negotiate meaning with readers and, in the process, rethink, rephrase (and rewrite) their own passages until they are mutually intelligible. Additionally, as overall comprehensibility can be greatly improved by the selection of accurate vocabulary items, instructors should closely examine the lexical choices made by students. Then, as Kaur (in Murata 2016, p. 251) has suggested, ELF teachers can promote the awareness of these choices through learning activities which can over time help learners to “select lexical items that are precise and exact in conveying meaning in a given context.” Once students understand how their ideas are more easily conveyed through better vocabulary choices, they might become more motivated to improve their lexical knowledge. Finally, grammatical errors which greatly distract or confuse the reader, i.e., subject-verb agreement or subject-pronoun errors, should be explicitly discussed; however, these discussions should focus on how these errors are affecting the author’s intended message.

1.6 Editing/ Assessment stages

In the final stage in the writing process, ELF instructors will have to decide which “errors and/or deficiencies” are acceptable in a final draft. They will have to decide which characteristics reflect the variability of NNS English, and the degree to which this variability strays from the general features of academic discourse. Ultimately, writing instructors are influenced by the assessment guidelines used to judge their students’ writing. In many cases, assessment protocols and rubrics are created at the institution and/or program level to reflect the values and expectations of a writing program. Since ELF places a strong emphasis on comprehensibility over correctness, it can be “naturally” assumed that rhetorical features related to organization, content, idea development, cohesion & consistency and support & reasoning, for example, would be valued over most syntactic concerns.

Taking an ELF-informed perspective requires institutions to acknowledge the use of non-standard English. In the case of EAP composition, writing issues related to sociolinguistic and/or grammatical control should, thus, be discounted as an empathetic reader (within an international communicative setting) should be able to compensate for any non-standard features and receive an author’s intended message. Needless to say, the use of idiomatic language should not be encouraged or rewarded during assessment.

2. CONCLUSION

Teaching academic writing within an ELF program brings many challenges. Paramount among these challenges is the acceptance of the notion that writing which reflects non-standard, non-native-like English can still be considered satisfactory within an academic setting. Traditionally, L1 and L2 composition instructors have shared the common goal of developing confident writers who can produce clear, cohesive writing. And, to this end, they have held their students to the same standards of achievement. Yet, since ELF research holds that L2 authors should not be penalized for their “inability” to produce native-like products, assessment metrics must also be reassessed.

As a part-time writing tutor within a center which is committed to English as a Lingua Franca, the author has sometimes struggled to subsume traditional expectations of student writing performance within an ELF paradigm. As a result, the author has sought answers to the following questions in order to inform and support his pedagogy:

- What are the hallmarks of ELF?
- What types of accommodation are admissible within an ELF framework?
- How can writing for academic purposes be approached pedagogically within an ELF program?
- What are some possible approaches (on a practical level) towards conferencing ELF writing students?

To conclude, the author respectfully suggests that the commitment to ELF thinking be clearly reflected in rubrics designed to assess academic discourse. The significance of creating such rubrics is two-fold: First, the process will oblige the institution to make important judgments regarding the values and skills it would like to emphasize (from a student performance standpoint); and, second, these judgments will assist teachers to select appropriate teaching approaches in an effort to meet program objectives while remaining faithful to ELF.

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