

REVIEWS

Schmied, J. (ed.) (2011) *Academic Writing in Europe: Empirical Perspectives. Research in English and Applied Linguistics. REAL Studies 5.* Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag. 156 pp.

The fifth volume of REAL became real! In 2005, this series began by documenting a bilateral project between the English Department at Chemnitz University of Technology and the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University in Brno and initially focused on a Saxon-Czech perspective. Four volumes later, the scope has been substantially expanded. Now it involves pan-European aspects and has taken on even global dimensions.

The present volume *Academic Writing in Europe: Empirical Perspectives* is a comparative approach to academic writing. Nine authors from seven European universities cover no less than 19 academic disciplines in seven genres. The contributors compare an impressive number of language phenomena and contrast different national conventions. Their research is based on corpora which have proven to be efficient and revealing tools for a cross-disciplinary/cross-cultural comparison. As the editor Josef Schmied points out, an empirical view on academic disciplines provides evidence from real data beyond ideological interpretations.

The study of academic writing on a European scale has become particularly important in the light of the Bologna process, a strategy for the creation of a comparable academic landscape in Europe. Much has been achieved in teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) so far. However, the quality of training and education leaves definitely room for improvement, and therefore it is necessary to continue the debate on academic writing.

The following contributions are as diverse as the academic disciplines they examine. Yet they all serve one purpose – to give non-native speakers valuable guidance towards improving their proficiency in English.

With his article *Academic Writing in Europe: A Survey of Approaches and Problems*, Josef Schmied from Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany sets the topical frame of this volume. He describes the key concepts of academic writing and illustrates the usefulness of corpora for this field of research. He explains how empirical studies of corpora help enhance authors' writing skills and their awareness of academic conventions in specific discourse communities. In this context, Schmied hints at shortcomings of EAP teaching and demands a stronger focus on genre-specific language phenomena in academic writing. He furthermore highlights the problems of availability and compatibility of data in Europe and discusses whether English as the academic *lingua franca* in Europe is compatible with the national traditions of non-native users of English. A

valuable part of Schmied's contribution is a checklist for the composition of good academic texts employable for experts as well as academic novices.

In the subsequent contribution, Susanne Wagner, the second researcher from Chemnitz University of Technology, contrasts the use of concessive markers in academic writing of native and non-native speakers of English. The L1 language data includes British and American English and stems from two large reference corpora as well as two specialized corpora of academic student writing. The L2 learner corpus comprises written texts by German and Czech natives majoring in English Studies. The analysis of several concessive markers revealed clear differences between native and non-native texts as well as between German and Czech student writings. Most importantly, Wagner describes a general overuse of certain contrastive markers by non-native writers. The German students' use of the examined concessive markers is closer to American English than to British English. The Czech students' writing, on the other hand, is closer to native speakers for a few features, but strikingly different to both native and German use for other concessive markers.

The contribution of Christoph Haase from UJEP in Ústí nad Labem investigates the collexematic distribution of modal verbs in English with a particular focus on the use of harmonic and disharmonic modal double-pattern constructions. In doing so, he demonstrates the relationship between author commitment and an objective depiction of scientific facts. Furthermore, Haase provides an innovative method for the measure of collocational strength of multi-word expressions for small data sets. He suggests that there is no correlation between a harmonic use of modal sequences and the level of commitment. The author attempts to answer the question of whether there is a 'culturome' in academic writing. He concludes that specific patterns of evidentiality, as the commitment-independent way of discussing facts, cannot be attested for particular academic communities.

The paper by Giuliana Diani from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy compares person markers, i.e. first person pronouns *I*, *we*, *io* and *noi*, occurring together with stance verbs (e.g. *think*, *want*, *volere*, *sembrare*), in Italian and English university lectures to find out whether a speaker's attitude towards the topic of the lecture is expressed. Therefore, she analyses five English lectures, chosen from *MICASE*, and five Italian lectures from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. The findings show that there are cross-cultural differences in the usage of person markers between English and Italian lectures. The frequency of first person singular and plural pronouns and the number of stance verbs are higher in English than in Italian. Diani concludes that these results may be due to the fact that both cultures have distinct views on self-representation.

Sara Gesuato from University of Padua, Italy examines academic course descriptions, which have two main objectives: first, they inform about the structure and content of the course (informational aim) and second, these descriptions provide information about course requirements (regulatory aim). The analysis focuses on the influence of the informational and regulatory aims on the language, content and structure of this genre. In order to do so, she notices the authors' course conceptualization and their orientation towards the readers of the description. Gesuato compiled a corpus of 100 academic course descriptions across ten academic disciplines and classifies the course descriptions according to the content, the semantic-syntactic encoding and the tone of the text. Her study shows that course descriptions have a clear structure and contain relevant information only to avoid misunderstandings, which is mainly achieved by the use of simple present and the *will*-future and the restricted usage of epistemic modality. Especially with regard to the regulatory aim of the description, the readership is addressed impersonally by the writer to limit a direct imposition of requirements on the course participant.

Mariarosaria Provenzano from the University of Salento, Italy aims at investigating the hybridization process of Islamic and Western academic texts on finance. She contrasts two corpora of university textbooks, one containing texts written by Islamic scholars in English addressing Western university students and the other one consisting of texts written by Western scholars for Western university students. The author compares the Islamic concept of *riba* to the related Western concepts of *debt/loan*, *return*, *interest* and *profit*. Moreover, Provenzano briefly examines the application of hedges in the selected Islamic textbooks. According to her findings, the Islamic concept of *riba* is connoted rather negatively in the Islamic texts, whereas the same concept is perceived positively and equated with the term *interest* in the Western texts. In the Islamic texts, hedges seem to be important devices to tone down controversial financial concepts and to construct a relationship between Islamic writers and the Western audience.

The research article by Larissa D'Angelo from the University of Bergamo, Italy investigates communicative strategies of academic posters. Drawing on a corpus of 60 posters from the academic disciplines Physics and Law, D'Angelo conducts a textual and semiotic analysis to provide an insight into how different academic cultures influence the composition and communicative purpose of academic posters. Although both examined disciplines are very different fields, all posters in the small corpus follow basically the same conventions in terms of form and content. Linguistically, however, the plethora of boosters in Physics posters presented a striking difference between the two disciplines.

Irena Hůlková from Masaryk University, Brno examines conjunctive adverbials (CAs) in academic prose. As a basis, she uses a corpus compiled of research articles from several academic disciplines. She focuses on the frequencies of these adverbials in the whole corpus as well as the particular disciplines. Apart from that, she investigates possible gender-specific preferences in the use of CAs. According to Hůlková's findings, frequencies of and predilection for CAs is gender-independent. However, she discovers a preference for certain CAs in different academic disciplines.

In the final contribution to the volume, Martina Malášková from Masaryk University, Brno compares the use of hedges in linguistic and literary research articles (RAs). The first part of the paper describes basic concepts pertinent to hedging and explains the three semantic categories of hedges, i.e. content-, writer, and reader-oriented hedges. Based on a relatively small corpus of five RAs each from the journals *Applied Linguistics* and *Essays in Criticism*, Malášková found that all three semantic categories of hedges were utilized in both disciplines. The linguistics RAs, however, were overall more heavily hedged than the literary articles. To the scholar's surprise, writer-oriented hedges, which act as writer protection, were the most common semantic type of hedge in both fields. Malášková concludes that a writer's need for protection from reader criticism outweighs other viable pragmatic motivations.

Of course, this slim and accessible volume can only give an introduction and survey of the new empirical approaches to academic writing in Europe. It sketches the main dimensions of genre, discipline, and national convention and their analysis in different corpora. The editor identifies a paradigm shift from a text-based viewpoint to a reader-oriented perspective. The contributors to this volume intend to raise general consciousness among all practitioners in EAP, from student to professor, that good research results are to be presented in good style; the unity of form and function is essential for an unspoiled reading experience even for academic papers. Despite remarkable progress, differences in language levels between national cultures are also distinguishable. Therefore, sustainable research in academic writing is important to further the cultural and mental integration within a European academic community.

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