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Beyond Alienation: Spatial implications of Teaching and Learning Academic Writing

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Abstract

Despite existing work on the situated and sometimes alienating nature of academic writing practices, the implications of the specifically spatial nature of these practices continue to pose questions for teaching and learning in higher education. This paper addresses these questions through a study of the views and experiences of students and teachers of academic writing in postgraduate teacher education (n=33). Specifically, it introduces a concept, xenolexia, which complements that of alienation by recognising the dynamic nature of academic writing, texts and practices without reifying them. Discussing the fundamentally spatial nature of this dynamism, the concept of xenolexia is used to analyse perceptions of

academic writing practices as “foreign”. The features of this “foreignness” are examined from the point of view of both teaching and learning, and lessons about identity and dynamism in academic writing are drawn for writing pedagogies in postgraduate teacher education contexts.

Keywords: Higher education; academic literacies; alienation; space;

Introduction

This paper uses empirical work on perceptions of writing conventions to draw conceptual, analytical and practical conclusions about pedagogies of academic writing. It draws on data to focus on the fundamentally spatial aspects of academic textual conventions and their perceived “foreignness” in the teacher education field. This data, taken from semi-structured interviews with students and teachers of academic writing, invites a double conclusion. First, a reconceptualisation of the spatial relationships implied by this perception of “foreignness” can and should inform our understanding of writing practices. Second, conclusions for pedagogies of academic writing can be highlighted, suggesting teaching and learning strategies that take the phenomenon which I call “xenolexia” into account.

My conclusions follow several steps. The first step conclusion is conceptual, and pursues the suggestion that lessons are implied by the similarities between language learning and the acquisition of academic writing skills (Saunders and Clarke, 1997). If one of the barriers to the development of effective academic writing skills is indeed the sense of estrangement or alienation that some students report, a specifically spatial perspective on academic writing which can inform practice. A focus on space is not, of course, new in this area, as we see below. But this focus on space invites a closer examination of what is meant by alienation and, therefore, space in these “multiple” contexts. This focus also invites an examination of the pedagogies which are needed for multiple, non-homogeneous learning spaces. I argue that a new term, “xenolexia”, is needed to describe the multiplicity of these practices.

My second step uses xenolexia analytically to use it to discuss data collected among students and teachers involved in academic writing at Masters and doctoral level (UK HE levels 7 and 8) in the postgraduate teacher education field. Starting with interviewees’ significant references to the “foreignness” of academic text, my analysis builds on a tension

between deficit and exclusion within pedagogies of academic writing. A “deficit model” of skills acquisition, criticised for assuming that incompetence in academic writing expresses some form of lack, is a common finding, as we see below. This assumed lack in students’ ability to meet institutional norms - which can indeed seem opaque or arbitrary - can be unhelpful. But while tacit assumptions about what is or should be known can constitute powerful forms of exclusion in HE contexts, the converse is also true. A misleading “discourse of transparency” itself risks alienating those who do not already take these discourses and conventions for granted (Fernsten and Reda, 2011; Tapp, 2015) because it requires adhesion to a model or identity which, as my data shows, students see as “foreign”. Discourses of alienation and deficit, therefore, do not provide the kind of “positive educational experiences” which are “responsive to students’ needs” recommended by Krause (2001,147) for example.

I suggest instead that focussing on spatialization and forms of xenolexia in academic writing is one way of meeting these needs. Specifically, my analysis examines ways in which feelings of the “foreignness” of academic text are expressed as elitism, exclusion, inflexibility and even infantilization on the data. These negative features, imputed to academic writing conventions by respondents, are shown to reflect a single, more positive phenomenon, namely xenolexia.

The third and final step links these conceptual and analytical moves with practical pedagogical considerations, since such lessons are still lacking (Murray et al, 2008; Wingate, 2014; McGrath and Kaufhold, 2016). I conclude that, to be effective, the teaching of academic writing must take into account the xenolexic features of academic writing. These implications include a recognition of the positive role of resistance in and to academic writing, and an emphasis on the implications of writing’s dynamic characteristics. I start with academic writing’s spatial nature by considering writerly identity as a largely spatial phenomenon.

Space, Alienation and xenolexia

Defined as “a collection of buildings constructed around a library”, a university is first and foremost a physical *place* where one *reads* for a degree and *writes* a thesis (Rolfe, 2013,107). **Space and place can be seen as distinct: in Kantian terms, *space* is a conceptual given of ideal subjective apperception: without it the experience of a particular *place* is impossible. This is a traditional view of higher education, where the places provided for learning (buildings, libraries, classrooms and so on) are rightly understood to be important to both learning and the institutional identity. But this**

distinction obscures the imbrication of space as conceptual and place as material. For example, modern university libraries are not simply material stocks of books to be consulted, but increasingly link physical and virtual architectures by replacing shelves of reading material with online resources and the devices, networks and support structures (both physical and virtual) they require. Thus libraries bring a renewed focus on academic writing as a spatial practice. It is not simply that writers require suitable spaces in which to write: space and writing are conceptually inseparable and define each other reciprocally. We can understand why this is the case by looking at how quite tangible developments in academic practices are fundamentally spatial. But they also indicate the less tangible heterogeneity of learning spaces generally. Practices do not develop in isolation from their environment, and they are not simply created by a powerful body which bears on the spaces where they develop. Rather, practices emerge and develop in tandem with the new buildings, information and systems which they embody. The way we understand space matters, therefore, if we are to understand the development of practice as something which does not simply exist, or is created *ex nihilo*, but which grows from the middle, *in media res*, in this way.

Space

Although Rolfe's definition above alludes to HE as a space where we do things with text, a more complex understanding of the relation between space and writing has been attempted. Research into "academic" or "situated" literacies in influential work such as Lea and Street (2006), Lillis (2003) and Street (2010) recognizes the importance of space and challenges an "autonomous" or "skills approach" to writing based in the deficit view of student need (Lea and Street, 1998). This situated approach places particular stress on academic writing's fundamentally contextual nature on one hand and the play between institutional power structures and writer identity on the other (see, for example Barton et al, 2000; McGrath and Kaufhold, 2016; Tuck, 2016). The literacies involved in these spaces are always connected to identities, be they social or individual (see, for example, Lankshear, 1997; Ivanic et al, 1999; Barton, 2007). Researchers and pedagogues have therefore sought to respect the interests and identities of those engaged in the process of developing and designing what it means to write (Lillis, 2003; Lea and Street, 2006; French, 2016). This may explain why approaches to situated literacy have often been "embedded in *discursive practices*" (Badenhorst et al, 2015, 2 – my emphasis).

The spatial aspects of writing are also emphasized by "multiliteracy" and "multiple" literacy theories (see, for example, Mills, 2009; Masny and Cole, 2010; Masny and Waterhouse,

2011; Cooper et al, 2013). For multiple literacy theorists, learning spaces are no longer passive or predefined containers awaiting the content we put into them, but emergent, processual hybrids (see, for example, De Souza, 2006; Orlikowski, 2007; Fenwick and Edwards, 2011; Turner et al, 2014). **Digital literacy is becoming a *sine qua non* of academic life as technological changes, for example, inflect the way students relate to multimodal text and multiple literacy practices. A simple example would be the way we can now obtain and exploit previously rare or difficult texts through instantaneous access to online resources 24/7 in the libraries mentioned above. Just as the ability to access such texts enriches and informs our writing, it also facilitates superficial skimming, ornamental referencing and plagiarism.**

However, the reverse is also true, as writing practices affect writing spaces as part of a reciprocal process (Cooper et al, 2013). As further technological development is promoted, it is embedded and facilitated by stakeholders in this digitization who also develop with the new capacities it brings (see, for example Kress, 2003; Lankshear, 2007; Swist and Kuswara, 2016 see also QAA, 2015; BIS, 2015 & 2016). These changes reflect the intense pressure on universities to equip graduates with employability skills (Moore and Morton, 2015). While the relevance of traditional forms of academic writing to this employability discourse is moot, writing in its various forms still plays an important role in the creation and development of a wider economy based to a great extent on the creation and dissemination of (written) knowledge. Inseparable from growth in multimodal content, mobile technologies and the massive wireless access, these developments involve “millennial students” who are more diverse, technologically literate and socially connected than their predecessors (Goldman and Martin, 2016). Literacy practices in this context are dynamic rather determined, part of a diverse process of becoming rather than a fixed entity or set of constraints.

This diverse process is perhaps easier to imagine than to actually work with. Teachers find it pedagogically helpful to present writing practices as fixed entities transmitted to autonomous learning subjects. Indeed, studies of academic literacies have often pointed out a tendency to identify writing pedagogy with the acquisition of the microskills and formal properties of students’ academic writing (syntax, argument and clarity) rather than content *per se* (see, for example Lea and Street, 1998). These relatively simple conventions often relate to form: structural formulae, punctuation conventions and referencing rules. These conventions can be regarded as static insofar as it is possible – in theory at least - to reach consensus on exactly what is required and how to teach it.

However, when writing is equated with style and convention rather than arguments, ideas or debates, what happens to content in the form of creative thinking or the production of new knowledge? Many have criticized techno-rational policy action which demands a “commodified model of literacy” (Hamilton, 2014,112). The itemization and quantification of writing practices reflect the commodification of knowledge for mass consumption (see, for example, Molesworth et al, 2009; Ritzer, 2014; Odena and Burgess, 2015; Beighton, 2016a).¹

The concern for “foreignness” in the data below also attest to the extent to which commodified approaches to literacy really cater for diversity. The importance of the latter stands out in the recent massification of the UK’s previously elite HE systems and attempts by HEIs to expand beyond the boundaries of traditional delivery methods (Hallett, 2013; Weaver et al, 2014; Wingate, 2015; Shay and Peseta, 2016). However, critics say that this growth also exposes an ethnocentric, logocentric culture in academic writing according to which pedagogies have been undermined by the view that writing is a set of skills to be transmitted to students defined by deficits to be palliated by remedial support (e.g. Street, 2010; Itua et al, 2014). This discourse of individual lack is recognisable in a certain ambiguity within discourse about pedagogy. While education institutions should “[create] environments that make learning possible, and that afford opportunities to learn” (Krause and Coates, 2008, 494), the responsibility for learning ultimately lies with students, whose success depends on “how the *student* makes use of *his/her* environmental resources” (ibid – my emphasis).

This focus on the individual and on the quantifiable “skills” of academic writing is understandable. Teachers and learners are keen to achieve assessment criteria, and simple objectives have their advantages. Pedagogies which emphasize the acquisition of formal properties of text mentioned above can be adopted as a result. Such pedagogies reflect an understandable desire for compromise between different expectations and a way to initiate the alienated into the formal practices of an academic community. **But this results in a linear and essentially passive pedagogical space produced *ex nihilo* for individuals to fill. Again, the example of libraries is telling; today’s architecture makes favours open plan, transparent structures, within which physical resources are replaced by their virtual counterparts (online documentation, flexible teaching / learning spaces and**

¹ Universities are asked to exploit “significant potential for market expansion” (CBI, 2013: 23-24). The student, similarly, is a recognised part of this nexus of academic decision making (CBI, op.cit), reminding us that this is a neoliberal picture of the student as cost-effective producer of their own enhanced employability status (Hillage and Pollard, 1998;) through processes of self-commodification and speculation (Bauman: 2007; Lazzarato, 2014; Beighton, 2016c; Brunila and Siivonen, 2016).

undifferentiated zones where, for example, cafes, resources, breakout rooms and information desks share the same fluid, polyvalent space with no single, specific function. Teachers, learners and spaces are merely receptacles whose lack is awaiting completion. This ignores the dynamic relation between space and ourselves while also downplaying, in a predictably anthropocentric way, the importance of space as a continually expanding system defined by sets of relations, not just a lack to be filled.

Academic writing pedagogies need to tackle more complex writing conventions. For example, exactly *when* to reference, *how* to construct an argument, *how* use theory or in what form to present data in writing are all crucial. And just as formal conventions imply the linear spaces described above, process-oriented pedagogies which take account of this complexity (see for example Kempenaar and Murray, 2016) imply a very different pedagogical space.

To understand this, we can turn to the work of French thinker Henri Bergson (2013a) and his influence on what is sometimes called “new materialism”. The latter draws on Bergson’s view that space must be understood as a heterogenous multiplicity and, therefore, a process (e.g. Barad, 2007; Coole and Frost 2010; Leonardi, 2013; Fenwick, 2016, Beighton, 2016b; Davies, 2016 *inter alia*). Drawing on process philosophers from Bergson and Whitehead (1985) to Deleuze (1994), for new materialism things are not simply there as objects and, like Bergson (2013b:42-52), sees creativity and excess at the heart of matter.² That we ourselves are also multiple, heterogeneous part(s) of multiple, heterogenous space(s) is reflected, for example, in interactive technology whose multi-layered relationships merge virtual and actual, concrete and immaterial, person and thing. This multiplicity is “the domain of nondifference between the microphysical and the biological” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b,314). Understanding this domain requires an examination the productive nature of every organism and a critique of analyses which fail to accommodate it. Alienation, I want to suggest, is an example of the latter in data which actually expresses the kind of productivity which Deleuze and Guattari refer to.

Alienation

As a concept, alienation has a long history in religious and political analysis. It relates to writing by denoting a sense of disconnection or isolation which students associate with

² New materialism, like Bergson, rejects traditional vitalism and its view that some life-force invests things with its ineffable purpose. It is not just that such presuppositions explain nothing, but that the teleological finalism which they imply simply does not exist in nature (Bergson, 2013b). Spatial multiplicities, on the contrary, can do no other than relate and therefore require no immaterial life-force or conceptual lack to explain them .

unfamiliar academic conventions (see for example ASHE, 2005; Mann, 2005; Rovai and Whiting, 2005; Soria and Stebleton, 2012; Harrison and Grant, 2015; Badenhorst et al, 2015). Students feel alienated from their true selves by the perceived lack of such skills. They can struggle to “connect with the academic conversations in their disciplines” (MacMillan, 2014,943) while feeling unable to challenge existing power relations and social inequalities. The term “alienation” has thus become associated with undesirable learner outcomes; academic failure; low levels of engagement and retention; and the individualistic, skills-based pedagogical approaches mentioned above (Krause, 2001; Weaver et al, 2014; Masika and Jones, 2016). As scrutiny of quality of provision redoubles (BIS, 2015 and 2016), increasingly diverse, “non-traditional” students – the term itself is suggestive of a certain view of the academy – add to the challenge and are challenged by many practices.

However, while the term alienation draws our attention to such issues, it simplifies somewhat the relations between writing practices and writing spaces. As a convenient label, it homogenizes very diverse sets of discipline-specific practices where teachers’ understanding of conventions, expectations or interpretations vary immensely. It unnecessarily implies a binary space where “they” reject “us” and encourages a deficit picture of student identity according to which the learner is lacking in some way (Lindsay, 2015, Douglas et al, 2016). As I have suggested, this perceived lack imputes a certain passivity to students, downplaying the way students must actively link ideas which present them with an intellectual challenge to their own “emerging grasp” of literacy practices (Hallett, 2013,527 see also Lillis et al, 2015). Thus the alienator / alienated binary is not just a simplification which comforts the belief that resolution is waiting somewhere between a pair of opposites. It also avoids engaging with a community’s deeper characteristics by constructing a conceptual space where “noncommittal commentators” can “preach the moderation of the middle” (Culp, 2016, 19). Ironically, alienation’s simplifications may actually hinder the wider ambition of more socially just higher education spaces.

Xenolexia: causes, functions and effects

As an alternative, I want to suggest the term “xenolexia”. This neologism comes from the neuropathology of xenomelia, an admittedly discomfoting analogy. Referring to the way individuals seek elective amputation of one or more of their own body parts (see, for example, Krafft-Ebing, 1894,162), xenomelia involves the continuous experience of being physically ‘overcomplete’ (i.e. having too many limbs). This leads to requests for surgical removal of the unwanted extremity, often for sexual gratification (Hilti et al, 2013).

The link with writing emerges in this feeling of overcompleteness, which suggests that it is not driven by a desire to fulfil a pre-existing lack but rather by excess. Explaining xenomelia by lack misrepresents this feeling of excess without explaining its causes, functions or effects, a misrepresentation which I want to apply to our understanding of writing's "foreignness". An explanation of the implications of such overcompleteness is provided by Deleuze and Guattari (2004a), for whom desire is never the desire *for* something which is lacking. On this view, xenomelia expresses a primal desire which, far from seeking to complete a lack, engenders new ways of being alive. Rather than rejecting a foreign body, xenomelia deconstructs an existing one and reconstructs a "body without organs" or "BwO" (ibid). The BwO's expression of productive desire offers new affective possibilities and an Other form of existence, in the case of xenomelia those of a human body expanded beyond its assumed limits.

In the case of writing, this suggests that new forms are produced rather than incorporated into existing forms or bodies. Xenolexia, like xenomelia, expresses productive desire this time in academic writing pedagogies often predicated on lack. Rather than simply assuming deficit on the writer's behalf, it suggests the causes, functions and effects of relations between writer and text. My data suggests that writers can seek to amputate an important part of their (academic) identity by rejecting practices which they find alienating, but the reasons are to do with excess rather than a perceived deficit or lack. Causally speaking, like xenomelia, xenolexia is not simply produced by alienation or a rejection of otherness. Counterintuitively perhaps, feelings of academic rejection are inspired by a sense of overcompleteness as desire constantly produces new relations and ways of being, in this case through the production of text. Strongly affective relations with writing conventions are a case in point, and xenolexia describes how both text and writer develop productive spatial relations and identities without recourse to an origin such as lack. Thus xenolexia does involve amputation, but of a very specific kind. Rather than amputating one's identity – excising changing one's essential self in order to conform – xenolexia amputates the very notion of essential self as desire multiplies the connections made by the relational self. Misrepresenting these troubling but essential aspects of relational academic identity limits both academic success and, ultimately, identity itself as a relational concept.

Xenolexia also helps explain how constructive and dynamic spatial relations pertain between person and text. The function of writing is to relate productively since text and writer dynamically reciprocally determine each other. This means that both text and writer change as relations are established between shifting bodies rather than between ideal entities. Just

as xenomelia expresses the simultaneous disorganisation and recreation of a body, xenolexia expresses not lack but desire as a machinic opening of the body to a whole assemblage of new connections and territories (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b,177). There is a space outside the alienator/alienated binary.

Finally, the effects of xenolexia become visible in accounts of foreignness provided by writers themselves, below. These feelings of foreignness are the effect of an outside which exists in the form of desire and the relations it produces. Learning academic writing is thus an ongoing creative construction whose effects are felt each time the writer engages anew with this outside. This complex and often troubling creation of space is intimated by the data, below.

Method

Aiming to develop relevant pedagogies in this area, I looked to the perceptions of academic writing of students and teachers engaged in study at postgraduate level (UK HE level 7 and 8). As befits my pedagogical focus, all were engaged in the field of postgraduate teacher education, often as both students and teachers. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that interviewees had a stake in either teaching or learning academic writing at this level where the relation between writing and emergent professional identity is arguably strongest.

The choice to examine the aforementioned cohort was significant to the study. The learner/teacher mix is common in the education field, as subject teachers are commonly both practice-focused and involved in academic research / study. Some of the ambivalence of the views expressed can be interpreted as an expression of the interviewees' own ambivalence towards a field (academic writing) where they are regarded as both novice (in terms of their role as research student) and expert (in terms of their teaching role). But it also enables them to comment on the issues from at least two different perspectives, and thus be potentially insightful.

All participants gave consent and were offered an opt-out, and responded to face to face questions about the nature of academic writing and the ways in which it is commonly taught and learnt. For consistency, all were asked four simple questions: first, to define academic writing; second, to explain why it was important; third, to highlight barriers to the successful development of academic writing skills; and fourth, to suggest ways in which any barriers could be overcome. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed from the literacy perspective outlined above.

In presenting the data, I have chosen to first highlight ways in which particular accounts of alienation were expressed by students in various ways. This shows the extent to which the alienated /alienator binary is present in many analyses. I then focus in more depth on two participants who are better described as teachers of academic writing, although both were at the time of writing also studying at doctoral level. This analysis, which highlights xenolexia's more constructive account of academic writing development, then feeds into a final section on the pedagogical conclusions which can be drawn from this data.

Data

Students commonly underline the restrictive nature of academic conventions (e.g. Wingate, 2014). However, rather than criticising academic writing's restrictiveness or alienating effect in simple terms, my initial findings consistently pointed to more complex variations on alienation. Notably, students made regular and explicit reference to a sense of the "foreignness" of writing conventions:

it's like learning a new language. I know that I'd be expected to also use these terms, but I thought I was learning about education, not a foreign language.

(Student A)

Foreignness is used here to describe the perceived distance between one community and another. It suggests that a spatial barrier is established and policed by language and conventions which regulate entry. Further data, below, suggests that this barrier also incorporates three other connected restrictions, namely exclusion, elitism and inflexibility. Exclusion, here, meant imposing academic text as a lingua franca for entry into a foreign academic community: Some Other, this implies, is deliberately using convention to downplay the community's own internal diversity, while simultaneously identifying and excluding nascent writers from this given space. Criticisms of this kind of exclusion were also echoed in respondents' evocation of a certain elitism which writing conventions also embody:

It creates a selective, advantaged pool of individuals who generate 'new' schools of thought referenced from limited sources that fail to involve those who cannot or will not follow the rules. (Student D)

I feel that it is quite elitist [and] narrows down who is involved with academic writing. (Student C)

This elitism serves as a (false) justification for exclusion, and installs a hierarchy between those *in* the know and those *outside* it. As a mechanism of exclusion, elitism constructs a boundary between the majority (us) and the privileged minority (them) and therefore an ultimatum to would-be participants. Conventions literally define a space between those in the know and the rest. This spatial binary is inflexible: academic conventions, these responses imply, rely on a conception of the space between in and out which is essentially impermeable. This was evoked for example in strong reactions which opposed child / adult identities. Certain conventions, for example, were infantile because “they told us not to write like that at school...it seems so childish” (Student E). The sense of rejection is palpable in such accounts and goes some way to explaining why the adoption of academic writing practices can present pedagogical difficulties and the desire to amputate oneself of one identity and producing another.

Teachers

This spatial analysis also arose in the views of teachers interviewed for this study. Looking to inform pedagogies of academic writing, I focus on two respondents, Bella and Odette, whose accounts of academic writing combine double teacher/learner perspective(s). Their personal and professional experiences of academic writing practices suggest that pedagogical lessons can be drawn from the perspective of xenolexia.

Odette

Odette, who grew up outside the UK, initially taught English abroad before moving into teacher training and management in England. While she sees academic writing as “just another genre of writing”, as a genre it has the boundaries of any community which demands that participants write “in a particular way” and “conform to [its] rules”.

This echoes the students’ evocation of boundaries, inflexibility and Otherness. **It is the Other who defines the genre’s limits, particularities and rules.** But Odette’s emphasis on the role of this community meant that, as a genre, academic writing could not be seen as static or given. **Rather, it implies for learners a productive engagement with Other ideas:**

It’s also an attempt to create a genre that reflects way of thinking, so the content is erm, about thought that is not just a personal narrative but, has some kind of basis in other people’s research, other people’s thinking.

For this reason, Odette insisted that writing must involve a move from personal opinion to what she calls a more evidence-based approach. Her view is based on her idea of how

knowledge works through its relations: the content of writing must be spatial (“beyond the other kind of content”) and relational (not just “story-making without anything else”). This emphasis on space and relations reflects the function of writing, which is to provide a “net that holds things together” and a “net around knowledge”. Crucially for Odette, since such knowledge is “world knowledge” and is produced by or written by other people, a space for the novice writer is created because such knowledge is heterogeneous and therefore more contested than a “seamless individual narrative”. Alienation, which comforts this individualistic narrative as we have seen, seems inadequate to the task of analysing such development.

Certainly, like the students above, Odette accepts that academic writing works as a social marker with elitist overtones. It is often used to display the fact that we can “think in a particular way” or “organize our thoughts in a particular way” because it displays “a higher level than other types of writing”. This can sometimes lead, she joked, to both exclusivity and triviality:

cynically [laughs] it keeps people in their jobs, and keeps people worrying about how many references and things, how many commas etc etc.

Students, she said, can perceive academic text as foreign and (thus) a threat to identity. Inflexible conventions signal an unattractive “foreign” identity to which students cannot and will not aspire:

I think it's mainly fear of the language and looking at examples and thinking I could never write like that.

Sometimes I think it's the models they see, of academic writing, erm...because they can seem very dry and uninteresting compared to other forms of writing ...so you think well I can't write because I want to be found interesting.

Sometimes it can be just worry that I'm not at this level therefore I can't write at this level (...)

Similarly, her experience of the conventions and expectations of academic writing was that it was often used to impress others, to “sound hifalutin’ or constitute a barrier to accepting that there are other types of writing which are better adapted to a particular community.

At first sight, these remarks about boundaries and identity-rejection imply that academic writing conventions express power relations of a unilateral, alienating sort. But for Odette,

the extent to which a writer is invested in these relations is important in defining their response to them. Teachers, for example, may have a vested interest in maintaining a particular identity by constructing a distance between themselves and their learners, particularly if they feel insecure professionally. Learners, too, may be invested in convention in different ways and to different extents. One can imagine a scale of investment between those who fully buy into conventions at one extreme, merging into those who mimic them or play the game for various reasons further down the scale. At the other extreme, these conventions are simply rejected as infantile because they presuppose a naive understanding of the space between people by a powerful “foreign” body. At this end of the scale, conventions are described as the demands of a foreign group with its own interests at heart and an identity which some students have no desire to copy. If an apprenticeship in writing skills adheres to a “community of practice” model (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the “peripheral” learners interviewed here seem to have no *desire* to move towards an “expert” community whose exclusivity, elitism and inflexibility are seen as unattractive and perhaps illegitimate.

Such an analysis, however, sees the spatial boundary as given, and such foreignness, while real, needs to be understood as more dynamic. Students are certainly challenged by conventions which are estranged from their own practices. But these practices are also estranging in their demands to develop a new identity in relation to them. Development in academic writing is thus a matter of xenolexia’s processual construction of a new body (without organs). Its development is a question of reciprocal affect, rather than psychologistic processes defined as the lack of some form of incorporeal Cartesian *cogito* or selfhood subjected to alienation. This move beyond writing as alienation is developed in the next interviewee’s account.

Bella

Following successful higher education in her home country, Bella has spent most of her life in England. She is an experienced teacher educator in HE. For Bella, academic writing means contextualising academic work, but also goes beyond this. Precisely because research and knowledge are spatially situated, she says, writing requires processes of “translation”, echoing the tendency to describe writing in linguistic terms:

It is for me it’s the translation of the body of knowledge that is out there into some kind sort of concise and, I suppose, contextualised form.

Already, Bella is describing knowledge in terms of a space to be negotiated or a language to be translated. Learning to do this, for Bella, is a matter of identity, since such translation is a

“legitimation of your own existence in the university.” This type of legitimation matters to Bella, who sees it as a key element of a contested form of professional identity.

This legitimation is also inseparable from her own language use, influencing her pedagogical choices. As a published but still developing writer, English has become her principal language, replacing her mother tongue. It is interesting therefore that she explicitly links questions of writing back to her own experience as a foreign language learner, outlining a pedagogy of linguistic engagement with text. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she compares her own development in a second language to that of students learning to write academic texts, thinking of the kinds of reading strategies that successful foreign language learners often use. These language learning strategies inform her own teaching of academic writing as something that she has learnt and that she advises her students to do: wide reading accompanied by close reading for stylistic features such as the common lexical chunks which help constitute a genre.

A particular stylistic feature that Bella appreciates in her own work and others is clarity, a common expectation which she links to academic voice. However, for her the reasons for this are once again spatially inflected. While it might seem obvious, rather than merely conventional, that writers should strive for clarity, Bella’s reasons for seeking it were as geographic as they were practical, since they were very much linked to a sense of place, her home country, and her ambivalence towards it:

I suppose culturally academic writing is seen as the voice of the educated, the voice of the elite. In Country X particularly, academic writing is seen as a demonstration of your position in the world, and there’s a right way and a wrong way of writing, (...) and people will tell you openly when you make a mistake, which is not something that is culturally accepted in England.

The ambivalence here is revealing. While critical of one aspect of convention, Bella accepts that it has contributed strongly to the development of her own writing. On one hand, the experience of learning in a new culture induced a sense of estrangement from her “home” culture. In her home country, for example, much stress had been placed on using a much wider range of vocabulary in writing. It was not simply a case of using well-known strategies such as lexical substitution to enhance textual cohesion and density (it was felt that “you can’t repeat certain words”). Instead, the academic text, being written to be assessed, must both recognise the reader’s authority and impress them with the writer’s command of both style and substance as inseparable features of writing.

On the other hand, she felt that conventions which identify simplicity with clarity, for example, can, in Anglo-Saxon contexts, seem infantilising when seen with a foreign eye, echoing student E above. So dealing with writing in a second language (English) from this perspective was something of a double battle for Bella, reflecting both unease with alienating practices and awareness of their impact on one's own development. Bella felt that the "fight against this" is a struggle against cultures or practices which, despite perhaps being "a false memory", were still "ingrained" and a very important part of her continuing development.

Bella's experiences qualify as xenolexia, not least because of her experiences of language and crosscultural learning. The desire to "amputate" a "foreign" experience or identity accompanies a parallel development of a more open writerly body. But xenolexia as an analytical tool is also useful in cases where this culture clash is less obvious. For example, by stressing the co-evolution of identity as teacher and learner, the pedagogical links between writing and language learning and the shifting nature of academic conventions all continue to affect one's developing perspective as writer. I want to suggest therefore that a number of wider and more positive conclusions can be drawn from this data about the teaching and learning of academic writing and the productive nature of xenolexia.

Findings: xenolexia and pedagogy

First and foremost, this data undermines the tendency of some master-apprentice pedagogical models which limit writing to its formal properties. Teaching by modelling the formal properties of text, for example, is not the best way to develop writing skills because an apprenticeship in writing involves more complex xenolexic relations of production. It's not just that the model of academic identity on offer may be less attractive to developing writers than some teachers would wish, although both teachers and learners insist on its importance. Both teachers and learners agreed, in this study, that writing conventions could infantilise, and criticised the sort of teaching which is "characterized by compliance and bereft of creativity" (Johnson, 2005, 179). If our models are to engage, rather than focus on form, they need to insist on the content of text and the creativity which results when we relate affectively to it. This means in particular the need for pedagogy to recognise that writing must contain actual ideas and creative thinking if it is to provide new knowledge, challenging learners on the level of content rather than as an exclusive "foreign language" or rite of passage into an exclusive community of formal compliance.

Second, it is important that we recognise the dynamism of academic writing as an essentially mobile phenomenon. Xenolexia is a useful tool of analysis for both teachers and learners, since terms such as alienation, I have argued, fuel a sense of rejection based on a one-dimensional, linear understanding of academic writing. This can justify the metaphors of progression, journeys or trajectories which encourage an overly comfortable relationship to text according to which the telos of the individual “journey” is already given (Boylan et al, 2015). A similar tendency exists in reverse in pedagogical techniques which help students to draw on past experience or the monologic “story-telling” alluded to by Odette. The affective engagement implied by xenolexia is therefore not to be confused with solipsistic self-reflection, which misconceives learning as a matter of individual psychology, amputating the learner of the very experience which forms (their) identity as a dynamic, affective body. This can result in self-obsession (see, for example, Brunila and Siivonen 2016) and feelings of alienation rather than an engagement with the heterogeneous world of ideas and writing. Once again, alienation here may be an effect, but it provides scant explanation for those interested in causes or functions.

Xenolexia, on the contrary, tells us that academic writing pedagogies must not preclude the essentially affective nature of experience as a relation with an outside. Pushing our understanding of pedagogy out of the reassuringly linear space of the journey and into more discomfiting spatial multiplicities means recognising that change is the result of qualitative, affective encounters rather than quantitative, cumulative stages in a journey. Spatializing practices of academic writing in this way helps because it recognises that academic writing is not psychologistic, but a reciprocal process of affect instead. It happens in heterogeneous spaces and involves much more than the development of formal skills or the reiteration of a product or a given identity. When we misrepresent xenolexia as alienation, we fail to encounter things and therefore lose their potential to affect us. We misrecognise the thresholds between ourselves and virtual and actual spaces where relations between the creative and productive affects of desire make us what we are. Amputating one’s relationship with academic conventions may bolster a restricted sense of identity, creating a phantom limb and the illusion of lack. But amputating oneself of the affectivity, reciprocity and heterogeneity of practice spaces is perhaps even more destructive (see for example Lea and Street, 1998; Wellington, 2010; Barnett, 2011). Academic literacy development can, to the contrary, only be a processual, continuous practice understood in an holistic way (Turner et al, 2014; Lindsay, 2015).

This study’s data reinforces this view, and indeed more optimistic students in this study were aware of the possibilities for reciprocal development which it opens up. Student G, for example, felt that:

I am engaging with it, in the hope that one day I can submit something different from the norm (...) and it still be considered and validated within that area.

A xenolexic analysis of this view suggests that the development of academic writing should in principle affect the reader with new ideas and possibilities for their own development. Writing, on this view, is not merely a linguistic practice, and its features reflect as much *where* one writes as *what* and *how*. Xenolexia draws our attention to the essentially spatial effects and affects of academic writing. As writers, we do not stand outside or above a space which alienates us, but rather define and are defined by our relations with it.

Conclusion

Feelings of alienation, linked to exclusion, elitism and inflexibility, can form a significant barrier to writers' development. But xenolexia challenges the view that they are simply imposed by a foreign Other or alienating master-apprentice view of learning. More complex, reciprocal relations function between space and text, and this relation suggests three conclusions for pedagogies of academic writing. First, it undermines the view that writing is a thing to be learnt through mimicry or reproduction, since any meaningful engagement with text is reciprocal and productive. Secondly, xenolexia provides a conceptual tool through which some writers' resistance to academic practices can be further investigated and understood as a necessary part of this reciprocal process. Third, it reinforces the necessity of engaging with the texts which seem to alienate but are, in fact, essential to academic identity. Entering the academy certainly involves "integration" by "bringing together of parts to make a whole" (Krause, 2001, 148), but xenolexia stresses the dynamic nature of these wholes. Practically speaking, pedagogies of academic writing should build, respect and encourage non-homogeneous xenolexic spaces where object and subjects of writing are not things to be copied but multiplicities to be encountered. Ultimately "everything is production" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b, 4).

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