

**UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND**  
**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

Conceptualisation and teaching of academic writing in an ESL  
context: a case study with first year university students

Thesis submitted by  
Innocent Twagilimana  
to the Faculty of Humanities, University  
of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in the fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Supervisor:** Professor Devika Naidoo

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## **Declaration**

I, Innocent Twagilimana (Student Number: 416571), declare that this thesis is my own original work and that where use has been made of the work of others, it has been duly acknowledged in the text. This thesis is being submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination, or to any other university.

Signature:

Date: 18th day of March, 2013

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My deep thanks go to the lecturers and students at the National University of Rwanda who participated in this research, and whose names cannot be mentioned here for ethical reasons. With them I hope that this thesis will contribute to improve practices used for teaching academic writing to first year university students.

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## **Abstract**

The present thesis is based on a Case Study of an academic writing course, the Written English I module, in the Rwandan context of English as Second Language. The study was motivated by reports about low academic writing abilities of Rwandan students, abilities which were likely to be worsened by the recent decision of switching to English as the medium of instruction for almost all levels of the Rwandan education system. The study was also particularly motivated by the existing paucity of research on L2 writing in the African context.

The study thus set out to investigate institutional discourses, conceptualisations, and teaching practices related to the module with focus on (a) the existing institutional discourse regarding academic literacy practices, (b) lecturers' understanding of academic literacy and expectations of students, and (c) the pedagogical and assessment practices used in the module.

The research was framed by pedagogic and academic literacy theories to understand conceptualisations and practices associated with the module under investigation. Indeed, the investigation was carried out with reference to recent developments in academic writing theories problematising the effectiveness of teaching approaches based on a series of decontextualised skills that students have to learn. The study was particularly underpinned by the view suggesting understanding students' difficulties based on their language background and the specificity of the sociolinguistic context in which they have evolved. That is, the social practices model of academic writing which has the advantage of being inherently hybrid incorporating both the technical skills and the discourse practices demanded in the social institution of HE.

The case study method was deemed appropriate as the focus was on understanding of the phenomenon in its natural setting with a particular attention to contextual conditions and experience of the participants (see Lacono, Brown, & Holtham,

2009). In terms of data collection methods, the study is based on a qualitative investigation using (i) analysis of documents such as handouts on 'essay' writing, assignment guidelines, samples of students' writing, (ii) observation of classes, and (iii) interview of lecturers and a sample of students.

With regard to findings, the research highlights challenges related to the dominance of an autonomous model – based on discrete skills – in teaching of academic writing in an ESL context, as is the case for the module investigated. Findings unveil a network of issues at institutional, conceptual and pedagogical levels. Analysis of the investigated teaching and learning process suggests the existence of a link between lecturers' conceptualisations of academic writing and the form of practices used for development of competences in this activity. In other words, the practices as described are at a certain extent underlain by lecturers' views of language and students, as well as what is involved in writing and learning to write. Further, through reflections on the practices in place for the Written English I module, findings of the study suggest paying attention to the approach consisting in viewing literacy as a social practice and problematisation of the autonomous model dominant in the investigated setting. Such an approach, used complementarily with technical skills addressing basic linguistic and structural skills of student-writers, is likely to facilitate novice-writers to find their own strategies to cope and adapt to the new practices and, on long-term, to constitute a new identity as members of academia.

That is why, as indicated in the concluding part of the thesis, an argument is made in favour of a hybrid approach to teaching academic writing in L2 context. Such an approach is presented as likely to help in addressing students' difficulties in terms of the linguistic rules as required by the writing conventions in use, but also in terms of meaning making in the complex disciplinary areas of HE.

Concerning the form of provision of academic writing course geared to first year university students such as the Written English I module, it is to be regarded as a positive move that the provision investigated is located in the main curriculum of the institution as a subject rather than a form of writing support. This leads to the

course being treated as a normal-status subject and mainstreamed in the academic activities to such a point that students take the course seriously. However, the course is not supposed to overlook particular requirements related to the context of learning or disciplinary areas of writing.

Recommendations have also been made for further research. These are related to the need of an exploration at the NUR and other Rwandan HE institutions to find out what the general patterns characterising teaching of academic writing in the Rwandan HE are. Research has also been suggested into the assessment and feedback practices fore-grounded in the Rwandan HE and their impact on students' engagement with the academic writing as well as the potential development of competences in that activity. Proposition of a study has also been made to examine how the critical issue of disciplinary writing is perceived and approached by lecturers in the Rwandan HE. This research, exploring lecturers' perspectives on hybrid discourses and disciplinary genres in the academic writing course, is seen as likely to help in better illuminating the issue of monolithic conceptions of academic discourse which often characterise classroom practices.

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## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

**AT:** Activity Theory

**CAD:** Computer-Assisted Classroom Discussion

**CALL:** Computer-Assisted Language Learning

**EAC:** English for Academic Purposes

**EFL:** English as Foreign Language

**ESL:** English as Second Language

**ESP:** English for Specific Purposes

**HE:** Higher Education

**IELTS:** International English Language Testing System

**LMS:** Learning Management System

**LO:** Learning outcomes

**MD:** Module Description

**MINEDUC:** Ministry of Education (i.e. French short form also used by Rwandans speaking English)

**NCHE:** National Council of Higher Education

**NES:** Native English-Speaker(s)

**NLS:** New Literacy Studies

**NNES:** Non-Native English-Speaker(s)

**NPLTH:** National Policy on Language Teaching in Higher Education

**SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

**TEFL:** Teaching English as Foreign Language

**TESOL:** Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

**UAE:** United Arab Emirates

**WAC:** Writing Across Curriculum

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The teaching of academic writing in Higher Education (HE) has for a long-time been dominated by autonomous and academic socialisation models that assume that students would learn how to write academically through immersion in academic practices and exposure to academic model texts (see Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006). The traditional approach has nevertheless recently benefited from new research-based evidence that problematised the effectiveness of such approaches with their implicit pedagogic criteria in enabling academic writing in the university (Russell et al., 2009). Recent developments include a series of practice-based research and writing theory that called for features of the academic discourse to be made more explicit to students (Hounsell, 1988; Ballard & Clanchy, 1988). This new research orientation emphasised the particular nature of conventions of the academic discourse and argued for student writing to be located within a broader and contested institutional perspective (see Lea, 1994; Lillis, 1997; Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998). Writing is then increasingly represented as “an ideological arena and a cultural activity by which writers position and reposition themselves in relation to their own and others’ subjectivities, discourses, practices, and institutions” (Trimbur, 1994, p. 109).

Thus, with this “social turn”<sup>1</sup> to writing and literacy theories, the current debate on literacy teaching and learning is mainly centred on two views of literacy, namely the ‘autonomous’ and the ‘ideological’ (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). The autonomous model sees literacy as a set of skills, a ‘technology of the mind’ (Street, 1984). In other words, literacy is regarded as a set of neutral skills that people should acquire regardless of the context. Pahl and Rowsell (ibid.) point out that “writing, in particular, can be viewed as an autonomous skill, which can be related to individual cognitive processes” (p.14). This view of literacy has acquired an important place in writing research and pedagogy over the last three decades (Cumming, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> For an elaboration about the “social turn” in academic writing theories, see chapter 3 of this thesis.

Indeed, writing is still taught according to an autonomous model in different parts of the world (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). In HE, issues of students' writing generally tend to be addressed in terms of a deficit in students' writing skills (Lillis & Turner, 2001). This implies a need for standardised skills "which students have to learn and which are then transferable to other contexts" (Lea & Street, 1998). However, in the postmodern world, this view of universality and essentialism is strongly contested (Lillis & Turner, 2001). Further, language is recognised to be in constant flux, and Bakhtin's view of heteroglossia or multi-voicedness has been influential in the field of literacy theory and academic writing (Ivanič, 1998).

Concerning the ideological view, it suggests that literacy is always and everywhere situated and inseparable from contextual practices (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). This view has mainly been upheld through the New Literacy Studies movement according to which "rhetorical organisation is highly significant, but also [...] socio-culturally situated and, hence, subject to change" (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p.65). With regard to the pedagogical approach to rely on, the New Literacy Studies propose a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies taking account of the "changing social environment facing students and teachers [...]" (The New London Group, 1996, abstract).

In fact, with the current trend towards educational democratisation, that new entrants to higher education come with their own uses and understandings of language is being increasingly recognised. They are generally unfamiliar with the requirements related to conventions of academic discourse. Thus, they are held to ransom by the normative 'discourse of transparency'<sup>2</sup> and a monoglossic assumption of what language use is (see Lillis & Turner, 2001).

Much is at stake in a Second Language (L2) context such as in Rwanda where the limited English proficiencies of students (see NCHE, 2007b) constitute a challenge to the "quality of higher education" so cherished by the Rwandan government<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> With reference to the echoed complaints about students' texts that generally do not match "the institutionally embedded socio-rhetorical norms of [western] scientific rationality" (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 65).

<sup>3</sup> Different sources, including the appraisal document of the Rwandan Education Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (MINEDUC, 2010), the IBRD/World Bank (2011), and a content analysis of some critical policy

Concerned authorities seem to be aware of the problem, and attempts are undertaken to address the language issue in higher education institutions. Thus, a national policy for language teaching has been established to help “every student swiftly bring his or her grasp of [English] up to the level where they can participate in academic activities and learn from lectures” (NCHE, 2007a, p. 1).

It is thus in application of this policy that students entering in first year at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) are given special literacy courses meant to prepare them for academic activities conducted in English. The Written English I module is specifically focused on academic writing<sup>4</sup>. In the current provision, the module is generic – not discipline-specific, and it is up to the teaching team to adapt the teaching content and approach to students. So, this may constitute a challenge for the teaching team as not only methodological competences but also updated knowledge of theoretical principles of academic literacy are needed to help students “reach the required standard” (NUR, 2009, p. 1). The present study is intended to explore the way in which this writing course is preparing students to overcome writing challenges they are likely to be confronted with during their degree studies at university.

### ***RESEARCH PROBLEM***

In contrast with certain contexts of ESL where English can no longer be regarded as the language of the colonizer, but the language that has been indigenised and locally owned (Kasanga, 2003a, Makalela, 2004), English in Rwanda is a language used by a very small proportion of the population (Euromonitor International, 2010). A recent study carried out by Euromonitor International (ibid.) suggests that the limitation in the diffusion of English in Rwanda can be explained by the dominance of Kinyarwanda which is the indigenous language “used by 98% of the population as the primary means of communication, with the remaining 2% using either French or

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documents related to the Rwandan education system (Baxter, 2010) have indicated a high priority given by the government to the issue of “quality of higher education”.

<sup>4</sup> Some other courses – such as the ‘Oral and Written Expressions in English’ – are only partially related to academic writing as a part of the content is rather oriented to oral expression.

English”<sup>5</sup> (p. 72). This linguistic unity often described as unusual in sub-Saharan Africa (see Samuelson & Freedman, 2010) may also, in part, explain the level of students’ proficiencies in English as mentioned above. Indeed, as has been shown by research (see Ellis, 1994), the more learners are exposed to the target language out of classroom activities, the easier will be acquisition of communicative competence in that language. The state of Rwandan students’ proficiency in English seems to reflect the consequences of the type of existing language use. This is highlighted by different studies which concluded that the level of Rwandan students’ proficiencies in English and French is very low, especially among rural students (Williams, 2003; Ntakirutimana, 2005; Mineduc, 2007).

Findings of the study of students’ reading proficiencies in French, English and Kinyarwanda conducted by Ntakirutimana (2005) in the Rwandan educational system are presented in the table 1.

Students who understand very little of the texts specified by the curriculum for their year without a lot of help (i.e. score below 49 per cent) were classified as *Poor readers*. *Dependent readers* refers to the students who understand the texts with some help (i.e. score of 50-65 per cent), and the category *Independent readers* implies that the students understand the texts without any help (i.e. score of 66-100 per cent).

**Table 1:** Language proficiencies in Rwanda: primary (P) and secondary (S) education

Level	Language	Poor readers %	Dependent readers %	Independent readers %	Total
P4	Kinyarwanda	12.26	15.71	72.03	100
	English	99.23	0.77	0.00	100
	French	96.55	3.45	0.00	100

<sup>5</sup> Other studies also reveal that high as 99.4% of the population can speak Kinyarwanda (Rosendal 2009) and that approximately 90% of Rwandans speak only Kinyarwanda (LeClerc 2008; Munyankesha 2004).



P6	Kinyarwanda	1.54	5.02	93.44	100
	English	96.91	2.32	0.77	100
	French	47.49	31.27	21.24	100
S4	Kinyarwanda	0.44	4.36	95.20	100
	English	52.40	27.95	19.65	100
	French	20.09	31.00	48.91	100
S6	Kinyarwanda	0.00	2.87	97.13	100
	English	53.58	20.10	26.32	100
	French	12.92	28.71	58.37	100

As illustrated by the figures in the table 1, the level of students' reading proficiencies in Kinyarwanda is very high, while the ability to read in other official languages is low, particularly in English, for both primary and secondary school students. This distribution of language proficiencies might be viewed, in a degree, as a reflection of the way in which languages are used by the Rwandan population. A report by the National Population Office and the United Nations Fund released in 1998 (see Rosendal, 2010) had found that 3.6 per cent of the total Rwandan population above the age of 6 spoke French, while 0.4 per cent spoke English.

In addition to the Rwandan sociolinguistic context which does not seem to facilitate development of communicative proficiencies in "imported" languages such as English, another challenge to the education system emanates from the recent decision of switching to English as the medium of instruction in the Rwandan education system. It is in fact in late 2008 that the government announced the decision to make English the sole medium of instruction at all levels of the national education (Gahigi, 2008; Euromonitor International, 2010). This change is significant because, prior to this decision, "nearly all schools in Rwanda used French, with only a small number already using English" (IPAR<sup>6</sup>, 2012, 22).

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<sup>6</sup> Institute of Policy Analysis and Research-Rwanda

The goal of the change is to address the challenges presented by the globalized world and to strengthen Rwanda's ties to its English speaking East African neighbours, including Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania with which it does much of its economic exchange (NCHE, 2007b). But, at pedagogical level, this abrupt change is likely to complicate the issue of language teaching. The early stage of this move has already encountered challenges related to the necessity of training all teachers to teach English properly, and the balance of evidence on the relevance of children to be taught in their mother tongue during the early stages of their schooling. Thus, the government decided that Kinyarwanda will be the language of instruction for the first three years of primary school, with English taught as a subject (IPAV, *ibid.*).

In a recent report on the Rwandan education sector programme, the British Department for International Development (UKaid, 2011) points to the delicacy of the abrupt shift in use of languages in the Rwandan education system. The report states the following:

The recent decision to use English as the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards poses a huge challenge for improving quality; less than 15% of teachers are currently proficient in English. (UKaid, 2011, p. 24)

The appraisal document of the Rwandan Education Strategic Plan 2010-2015 has also presented English language as a medium of instruction in the Rwandan education system as “an area of risk” because of, among others factors, the “teachers’ inadequate grasp of English language and teaching methodologies, and the absence of appropriate materials to support learning” (MINEDUC, 2010, p. 25). Thus, for the Rwandan education system whose priority is to ensure “equitable access to quality education that provides opportunities of livelihoods for all Rwandans” (UKaid, 2011, p. 12), appropriate steps need to be taken to ensure that aspects influencing educational quality such as the language proficiencies of students are adequately promoted.

In tertiary education, a language teaching policy meant to help students cope with the requirements of university in terms of adapting to the academic discourse is

already in place. According to the Rwandan National Council of Higher Education (NCHE), higher education institutions must “ensure that students’ language proficiency level is not a barrier to their studies and (...) assist students who have a weak language base” (NCHE, 2007, P.1).

Concerning writing skills, the NCHE has recommended a specific programme which emphasises the necessity of acquainting students with the basic skills they need for their specific activities as required for their degree studies. This includes, among other skills, the basic language structure, the reading of simple, general and field-specific texts, the writing of assignments, the use of conventions in academic writing and related requirements, the research skills including paraphrasing, synthesizing, quoting, referencing and note-taking (NCHE, 2007a).

However, despite availability of instructions concerning the implementation process of the new policy (e.g.: placement modalities, evaluation procedures, certification modes, etc.), the latter might face challenges in achievement of its objectives due especially to both the language background of learners and the specificity of the Rwandan sociolinguistic context. In fact, as suggested by research on the subject, literacy must be understood in the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which it is used (Street, 2003). Thus, the socio-linguistic context of Rwanda is likely to impede learners’ swift adaptation to a new medium of instruction. Such a concern is also perceptible in Rosendal’s (2010) comments about the implementation process of the new language policy at NUR:

Despite efforts to make the transition a smooth one, NUR experienced severe problems, which included the lack of teachers proficient in English, a lack of books and other materials in English, and problems with students who could not learn in a language they did not understand. p. 137

Thus, the abrupt shift in use of languages in the Rwandan education system does not seem to ease the already challenging situation. Instead, it may even contribute to a further complication of the task for the educators who, at least on a medium term, will need to address the needs of learners by providing them with support all along

their educational process<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, a successful implementation of a new language policy in a particular context of L2 such as that of Rwanda may need, as IBRD/World Bank suggests (2011), urgent training of staff and availability of adequate material support. The current research was thus intended as a field work-based case-study investigating the way in which the *Written English I module* is addressing challenges students are likely to be confronted with both during their degree studies at university and in their professional life.

### ***Brief historical background to the current context***

In addition to effects of the Rwandan socio-linguistic situation which is unique as described above, the existing problems of proficiencies in “imported” languages in the Rwandan education system can also be explained by a series of changes experienced by the system with important implications for the teaching and learning of languages. In 1977, a major reform of the education system was decided. It sought to ‘ruralize, vocationalize, democratize education’ (Obura, 2003, p. 39) with a special stress on a teaching realised in the local language (Kinyarwanda) and local culture. This reform put an end to a six-year primary cycle and introduced an eight-year primary cycle where the 2 last years attached a particular importance to vocational skills such as agriculture, home economics, crafts, etc. which were taught in Kinyarwanda.

In a context marked by poorly qualified teachers and short supply of material (Hayman, 2005), consequences of this intensive use of Kinyarwanda during the whole primary cycle were meant to be reflected in the Rwandan post-primary education where French was used as a medium of instruction for about 10% of primary leavers who managed to pass the bottle neck from primary to post-primary education by 1990 (see Gakuba, 1991, p. 8). Concerns related to students’ proficiencies in French as medium of instruction in secondary schools and even

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<sup>7</sup> Hence a need for exploring possibility and relevance of an approach based on Writing Across Curriculum (Bazerman, 2005).

university were at the centre of debates in the 1980s and early 1990s (Hayman, *ibid.*).

Another important reform of the education system was undertaken in 1991, re-establishing the pre-1977 system of six years primary, three year lower secondary (Tronc Commun) and three years streamed upper secondary. This reform planned a review of the curriculum with reference to insufficiencies found in the previous reform, a re-adaptation of learning materials and a re-organisation of teaching staff (Obura, 2003). However, all this plans coincided with a time where the country was sinking into a war which culminated with the genocide which took place in 1994.

After the war and the genocide, “ancient refugees” (i.e. those who had fled the country in the early 1960s) returned home in large numbers. This new socio-demographic situation resulted in a change in the official language policy from Kinyarwanda-French bilingualism to Kinyarwanda-French-English trilingualism. The three official languages found themselves in a position of linguistic competition (Rosendal, 2009).

Indeed, according to article 5 of the National Constitution (2003), “national language is Kinyarwanda; official languages are Kinyarwanda, French and English”. Thus, Kinyarwanda, which is one of the three official languages - but also the unique national language - “spoken by practically all Rwandans” (Rosendal, 2010), is dominant in communication at all levels. It is used in every sphere of activity, including official areas. The use of European languages such as French and English is limited to a small number of educated people. As per results of the national census of 1991 (Minecofin, 2005), French was spoken by 5%. English, which was not yet an official language, was spoken by 0.8% of the whole population. It was elevated to the level of an official language in 1996. Thus, the decision of 2008 to adopt English as the national teaching language carries additional challenges that need to be addressed (Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 24).

With regard to HE, it is worth noting that almost all students who enter HE institutions in Rwanda today have English as an additional language (Nyiratunga, 2007). Most of them are Kinyarwanda speakers, and a small number of them have a relative grasp of English as they were born and spent part of their young lives in neighbouring English speaking countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. However, both those who were be exposed to English outside the classroom during their young age, and those who were not, do not have the academic writing skills needed to cope with academic writing requirements at university. Thus, they are faced with the great challenge of successfully accessing what Lillis (2001) termed “the privileged symbolic resources of higher education” (p.166), with reference to the mastery of writing within essayist literacy conventions.

### ***AIMS OF RESEARCH***

The aim of the study was to investigate conceptualisations and teaching practices related to the Written English I module which is intended to prepare first year university students for the academic writing tasks they are expected to carry out during their studies at NUR. This was done by investigating (a) the existing policy and institutional discourse regarding academic writing practices, (b) lecturers’ understandings and expectations of teaching and learning academic writing, and (c) the pedagogical and assessment practices used in the module.

### ***RESEARCH QUESTIONS***

The study will attempt to find answers to the following questions:

- What is the policy and institutional discourse regarding the teaching and learning of academic writing?
- What are the lecturers’ understandings and expectations of teaching and learning academic writing?
- What are the pedagogical and assessment practices used by lecturers in the *Written English I* module?

## ***RATIONALE***

Interest in this study has been triggered by an initial investigation carried out by the author in 2006 into the ways in which writing was taught in Rwandan schools. The investigation concluded that writing activities were not conducted in productive ways. The rare attempts to establish instructional activities around writing were primarily based on a linear teaching process with priority given to surface language correction, to the detriment of aspects that are critical to the abilities of meaning making in the student texts such as coherence and logic, presentation of arguments, etc. (Twagilimana, 2006). The impact of such a situation on learners' competences seems to be reflected in the poor learning outcomes – evident in the scripts analysed and the constant complaints expressed by teachers.

As similar problems about students' writing abilities are reported in Rwandan higher education institutions (Rosendal, 2010; NCHE, 2007b)<sup>8</sup>, as well as internationally (Angelil-Carter, 1998; Lillis & Turner, 2001), the author seeks, in the framework of the present thesis, to investigate lecturers' conceptualisations and teaching practices related to academic writing at one of the higher education institutions in Rwanda. Thus, the study was motivated by both different statements about students' literacy abilities in the Rwandan education system and the global complaints about students' writing ability which is increasingly pointed to as problematic (Lea & Street, 1998). Indeed, in comparison with oral conversation whereby "both parties assume some common knowledge and take advantage of verbal and nonverbal communication" (Myles, 2002), writing is a cognitively complex and demanding activity especially for inexperienced writers who are writing in second language.

In the academic context, teachers generally describe students' writing as very poor (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Turner, 2001) whereas students themselves affirm not to understand what tutors' expectations are with regard to 'good writing' (Lillis &

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<sup>8</sup> This is also corroborated by statements in the press and informal lecturers' talk.

Turner, 2001). According to Lillis & Turner (ibid.), confusion exists about what is required in academic writing, as academic writing conventions are innumerable and various suggestions are at the same time provided to novice writers regarding, for example, how to write an introduction and/or conclusion, how to write in one's own words, etc. First sessions of writing class at university will be characterized, for example, by instructions calling for avoiding plagiarism, emphasizing the necessity to cite authorities and sources, etc.

Yet, writing activity is of paramount importance for the success of academic endeavour. Langer & Applebee (2007) state the following:

Written language does indeed make a contribution to content learning and it can support the more complex kind of reasoning that is increasingly necessary for successful performance in our complex technological and information-based culture. It becomes essential, then, to make clear and effective writing, in all school subjects a central objective of the school curriculum. p. 151

It is thus essential for students entering university to be provided with relevant opportunities to be prepared not only to effectively perform in the academic writing tasks expected of them, but also to be able to think critically and learn in maximum from the subject matter they are engaged in. The intended study is an attempt to cast light on challenges encountered in the context of ESL in which the above-mentioned module is implemented. Findings of the study are also expected to inform initiatives carried out in similar contexts.

### ***Structure of the thesis***

The present thesis is made of eight chapters. It opens with an introductory chapter outlining the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The introductory chapter then identifies the research site, and presents the research problem and the research questions. It also provides a brief historical background of the issue under investigation before closing with presentation of the structure of the thesis.



The second chapter presents an analytical definition of the key concepts used in the study with the aim of a better understanding of the theoretical constructs embedded in each concept. A highlight is given to the relationships between key concepts used in the study, as well as to the meaning of each concept in relation to the research undertaken. The chapter ends with a note on emerging challenges in the field and eventual contribution of the present research.

The third chapter is devoted to the methodological framework. It discusses the adopted research design, as well as the methods and techniques used for data collection and data analysis. Issues related to validity of data and ethical considerations are also discussed in the fourth chapter.

As for the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters, they are related to data presentation with respect to the three research questions: policy and institutional discourse about academic writing, lecturers' understandings and expectations of teaching and learning academic writing, as well as the pedagogical and assessment practices used in the module under investigation.

The seventh chapter provides a critical review of the main findings of the study. It examines the relevance of the findings to the research objective as well as their relationship with the global academic debate. The chapter also presents potential research and pedagogical implications of the study.

The thesis closes with concluding remarks which, in the eighth chapter, present an overall assessment of the research conducted and reaffirm the contribution of the study to the global academic community. In this chapter are also included recommendations and further research perspectives.

## **CHAPTER 2: Theoretical and empirical perspectives on academic writing**

Academic writing in HE was, for a certain historical period, viewed in terms of technical skills. From a pedagogical point of view, academic writing was regarded as a tool, not as a discipline worth of being taught. It was thus taken for granted, and difficulties faced by students with regard to their written assignments were often regarded as “a fault of their language instruction or the weakness of the students themselves” (Bazerman et al, 2005, p. 7).

This reductive model of the development and use of academic writing changed over time, and the efforts to improve students writing and the debate on the issue have eventually given rise to different models of academic writing. The current chapter is an attempt to present different theoretical perspectives related to academic writing and, hence, discusses various conceptions attached to each orientation.

### ***2.1. Theoretical perspectives***

#### **2.1.1. Academic writing in Higher Education**

As an activity at the centre of teaching and learning in HE, a simple definition of academic writing may be hard to provide because this concept refers to writing done for different purposes and in different contexts. Academic writing is also used in many different forms. With reference to Coffin et al. (2003, p. 2), purposes fulfilled by academic writing in HE include the following:

- *Assessment*, which is often a major purpose for student writing. Students are required to produce essays, written examinations, or laboratory reports whose main purpose is to demonstrate their mastery of disciplinary course content. In assessing such writing, lecturers focus on both the content and the form of the writing, that is the language used, the text structure, the construction of argument, grammar and punctuation.

- *Learning*, which can help students grapple with disciplinary knowledge as well as develop more general abilities to reason and critique. Separately from or simultaneously with writing for assessment, students may also be asked to write texts that trace their reflections on the learning process itself, as with journals where they record thoughts, questions, problems, and ideas about readings, lectures, and applied practice.
- *Entering particular disciplinary communities*, whose communication norms are the primary means by which academics transmit and evaluate ideas (Prior, 1998). As they progress through the university, students are often expected to produce texts that increasingly approximate the norms and conventions of their chosen disciplines, with this expectation peaking at the level of postgraduate study.

The importance of academic writing in HE is thus based on the fact that academic writing is regarded as the tool by which students consolidate their understanding of subject areas, as well as the means that allows lecturers to gauge the extent and nature of individual students' understanding (Lillis, 2001). However, academic writing is also viewed as fulfilling a function of gate-keeping in HE in the sense that students' success or failure in university courses are determined by "the ways in which they respond to, and engage in, academic writing tasks" (Lillis, *ibid.*, p. 20).

Regarding the form(s) of writing privileged in academic writing, this may vary according to the kind of task required of students: essay writing, laboratory reports, project reports, case study, reflective journals, etc. However, as a result of the fact that essay writing is the main type of writing that students produce (Coffin et al., 2003; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001), the literacy practice of HE is often associated with what is termed 'essayist literacy' whose features are portrayed by Lillis (2001)<sup>9</sup> as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> On basis of what is presented by Gee (1990) as "a model of literacy, based on the value of essayist prose style, that is highly compatible with modern consciousness" (p. 63).

Such writing (or talking based on similar practices) is linear, it values a particular type of explicitness, it has one central point, theme, character or event at any one time, it is in the standard version of a language. It is a type of writing which aims to inform rather than to entertain. Important relationships are those between sentence and sentence, not between speakers, nor between sentence and speaker. The reader has to constantly monitor grammatical and lexical information and, as such, there is a need for the writer to be explicit about logical implications. There is a fictionalisation of both writer and reader, the reader being an idealisation, 'a rational mind formed by the rational body of knowledge of which the essay is part'. The author is a fiction 'since the process of writing and editing essayist texts leads to an effacement of individual and idiosyncratic identity'. (p. 38)

Thus, as suggested by critiques of the overarching literacy practice of HE (Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001, Lea & Street, 1998), the evaluative meta-language as described in the quotation above reflects the discourse of transparency whereby writing conventions are "treated as if they were 'common sense' and communicated through wordings as if these were transparently meaningful" (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58). Indeed, the discourse of transparency foregrounded in the academic writing of HE appears to find its origin in a particular historical context. That is, the one of the Enlightenment Age where 'socio-rhetorical norms' based on the value "of universality, of certainty, and rational and epistemic clarity" (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 65) constituted a great aspiration for the scholarly community of the time. It would then be of relevance to locate such a practice within a broader historical and epistemological framework.

This particular historical context may also explain the constant effort to achieve what is viewed as 'scientific rigour' whose implications are reflected not only in science, but also on how language is conceptualised and used. Lillis and Turner (2001) remark that conceptualisations of language inherited from the above mentioned historical period "have embedded themselves so deeply in western academic culture that they have created an ideology of clarity for the

interrelationship between language and thought which continues to fuel the discourse of transparency” (p. 63). Lillis and Turner also draw attention to what may be seen as a consequence of such a tradition where students who “are unfamiliar with the rhetorical conventions of academic discourse are (...) held to ransom by the discourse of transparency” (p. 63).

In fact, student academic writing appears as a particular type of literacy practice which is promoted by working tradition of a particular social institution of HE. The way in which conventions governing the practice of academic writing are kept implicit constitutes a big challenge for students who need to have access to this practice, and contributes to maintaining the role of academic writing as a gate-keeping practice in HE. From a pedagogical point of view, the mark of a particular tradition – that of the socio-rhetorical norms of western rationality – requires a shift of analysis perspective from a technical skill at student level to the level of epistemology and knowledge construction.

Speaking with a rather radical tone about the South African context, Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjebo (2006) remark that “Higher Education institutional cultures continue to privilege western symbols, rituals and behaviours imposed as a result of epistemicide” (p. 69). According to these authors, the academic mimetism characterising the post-apartheid South African HE institutions “is a function of the failure to cut the intellectual cord from the western epistemological paradigm and move away from borrowed discourses” (p. 69).

### **2.1.2. Skills approaches**

Policy and practice in literacy education have been often underlain by a belief that writing consists of applying knowledge of a set of linguistic patterns and other structural rules related to effective text (Reder & Davila, 2005; Ivanič, 2004). This belief is itself based on the conception of language as a ‘transferable skill’ which can be transmitted from one person to another, no matter what the context is. Thus, this transferability-based view of language signals an implicit separation of language, user and context (Lillis, 2001). What counts as a good writing in this view is

determined by the correctness of form aspects of language such as “the letter, word, sentence, and text formation” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 227). To this belief is associated a view that learning to write involves learning how to realise a combination of letters to represent words, to apply the standard rules of syntactic patterns to form what is viewed as good sentences, good paragraphs and, eventually, good texts.

With regard to the teaching of writing, these beliefs ultimately lead to ‘skills approaches’, which focus on discrete linguistic skills such as spelling, punctuation, a cluster of features known as ‘grammar’ and some of the most visible academic writing conventions such as presentation of introduction and conclusion, citation of authorities and sources, etc. A great deal of the teaching in the skills approaches is explicit whereby students are for example taught spelling and punctuation patterns, rules determining correct sentences or correct paragraphs, etc. In some institutional contexts, this explicit teaching of discrete language features is the main characteristic of additional provisions of ‘basic writing’ courses aimed at students identified as facing difficulties in relation to Standard English. These provisions are generally organised as part of what is often termed ‘study skills’ approach which exists for the most of time “in the form of foundation or introductory module in specific discipline areas, in which first-year undergraduate students may be offered guidance on essay writing as one of the several ‘study skills’ they need for HE” (Lillis, 2001, p. 22). Further specification about the concept of study skills is provided by Ivanič (2004) who makes reference to an explanation provided by Lea and Street (1998) and reminds that “the study skills approach to academic writing instruction (...) is to a large extent a ‘skills approach’ in that it focuses on correct usage and adherence to conventions for the formal features of academic writing” (p. 228).

Concerning the fundamental conception that underpins the pedagogical enactment of the ‘skills approaches’, it has three prominent characteristics as presented by Lillis (2001). First, both the writing problem and its solution are perceived as principally textual. In other words, they are perceived as located in the written text that students produce, and are not to be found for example at the level of contexts,

participants or practices. This, as suggested by Lillis, is reflected in the widespread pedagogical practice aimed at 'writing skills' or 'good academic writing' in a form of stand-alone provisions and not within particular disciplinary courses. The second characteristic is the discourse of transparency implicitly promoted within institutional practices related to writing. That is, while the writing of students is explicitly dissected and problematised, the writing conventions governing the discipline and the ways of accessing these conventions generally remain invisible. Thirdly, given the textual bias accompanying 'skills approaches', both the 'problem' and the 'solution', while they often constitute a headache for students, are conceived as being relatively straightforward to identify and resolve.

One of the existing assumptions, particularly in the increasing use of web pages, as reported by Lillis (2001), is that "it is quick and easy to produce a simple set [of guidelines] on essay writing" (p. 23). In other words, academic writing is conceived as easily accessible via a simplistic formula transmitted directly from an expert 'trainer' to a 'learner' in deficit of skills. Thus, Lillis remarks the following:

Thus, advice, in the form of 'handy tips' in booklets and on web pages, is the order of the day. In some institutions, students write what is termed a 'diagnostic essay' in their first semester of study, on the basis of which tutors are expected to diagnose errors and, presumably, provide a quick 'cure'. (p. 23)

In skills approaches, the focus on discrete linguistic skills rather than on the characteristics and requirements of the social context in which the writing activity is being used leads to a fragmented teaching process whereby 'writing' is treated as a separate 'skill' from 'reading', and curriculum documents have often separate sections devoted to each (Ivanič, 2004). As Ivanič (ibid.) suggests, the problem is not about teaching the specific language skills such as 'spelling patterns', conventional punctuation or a body of features known as grammar which constitute an important aspect of the teaching and learning package in relation to academic writing. The question may rather be raised with regard to "the primacy of this knowledge in

relation to other aspects of writing, the way in which such knowledge is best developed, and the place of explicit teaching in this” (p. 228).

As a matter of fact, a substantial proportion of writing curricula is founded on the belief that learning to write consist of learning a set of linguistic skills (Ivanič, 2004). However, research demonstrated that skills approaches do not facilitate access to the literacy practice of academia, as students are generally confused about the nature of the academic literacy conventions they are required to write and make meaning within (Lillis, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998). Thus, alternative or complementary responses to skills approaches with regard to teaching and learning academic appears as a great imperative in different institutional contexts of HE.

### **2.1.3. Process approaches**

The research and pedagogical movement known as ‘process approach(es)’ in academic writing emerged in the late 1960s and the early 1970s in response to the dominance of a product-oriented and teacher-centred pedagogy (Ivanič, 2004; Matsuda, 2003; Atkinson, 2003). The product-oriented pedagogy, which will also be known as ‘current traditional rhetoric’<sup>10</sup>, was based on “a loosely connected set of un-theorised practices claiming origins in rhetorical theory, religious reading instruction, and study of classical language” (Miller, 1991, p. 115). Thus, according to a popular narrative reported by Matsuda (2003), product-based teaching of writing consisted in a series of sessions where “students learned modes of discourse and applied them to write their five-paragraph themes on topics assigned by the teacher, which were then graded without the opportunity to receive feedback or to revise” (p. 67). Reformists opposed to the product-oriented pedagogy then started to advocate for a shift of attention from the product to the process(es) of writing. Research founded on experimental studies of cognitive psychology or psycholinguistics also exerted an influence, and the writing activity was generally presented in terms of mental processes and recursive operations (Becker, 2006).

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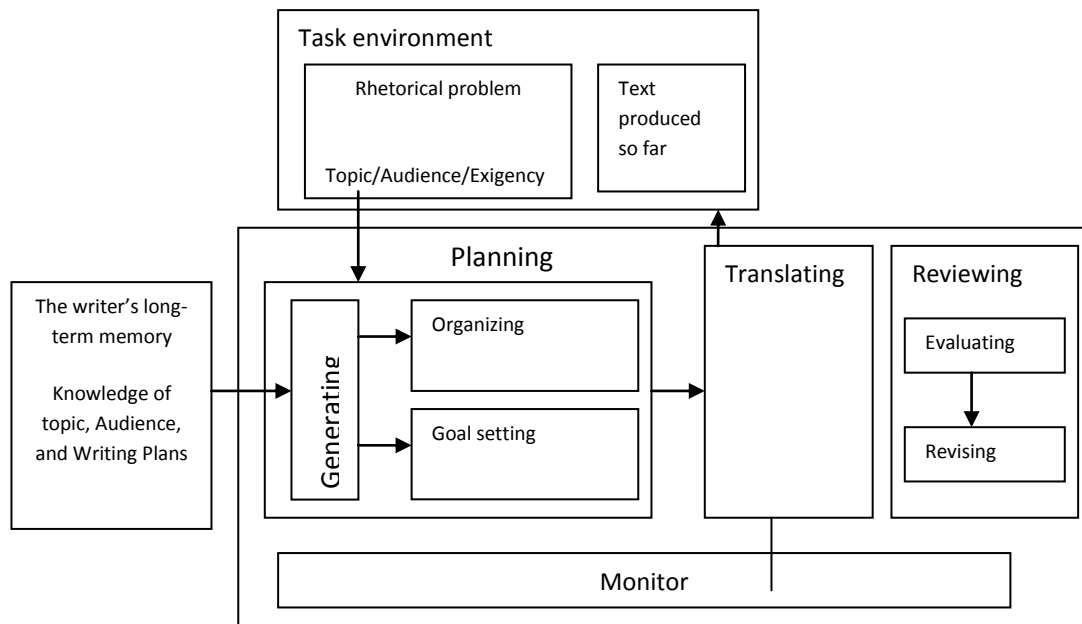
<sup>10</sup> For a detailed description of the ‘current traditional rhetoric’, see Connors (1997).



Studies related to the writing processes were essentially informed by the model produced by Hayes and Flower in 1980 and 1981 (for the initial version) which can be regarded as a basic cognitive model placing cognitive actions in a hierarchical format that reflects the recursive nature of writing. Thus, the model was made of three central elements (i.e. planning, translating and revising), and two factors which interact with these: the writer's long-term memory and the task environment (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

The figure below presents the Flower and Hayes's (1981) model of writing processes in its initial version:

**Figure 1:** Flower and Hayes Model of cognitive processes



Source: Flower and Hayes (1981, p.370).

As presented by the figure, the components of the model may be described as follows:

1. The *task environment* includes all external factors likely to impact on the writing activity. These are for example the writing topic, the audience/recipients, the exigency (or motivation for the writing

- task)...External factors may also comprise the text produced, as its specific nature can have impact on the activity undertaken;
2. The *writer's long-term memory* (or writer's knowledge) involving: *conceptual and strategic knowledge* (information about the content, operating rules for the language used, attitudes or personality traits implying problem-solving strategies ("I very often forget grammatical agreement, I must therefore reread my text...")); *audience awareness* implying reflection such as "I know that my recipients are too young, I must therefore explain scientific terms..."; and *in-memory planning* which involves instinctive reflections such as "I know that the plan of an explicative text first requires problem statement for the topic to dissert on, then tackling of the problem presented before developing a conclusion";
  3. The *writing processes* are also involved in the activity, and they include *planning* (i.e. decisions about what to tell and how to tell it), *translating* which implies transformation of the planning into written text. They also include *reviewing* (evaluation and revision) aimed at improving the text produced, as well as the *monitor* which controls the functioning of the three preceding processes.

At the core of the cognitive model is the view that writing is a "non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, p. 165). It seeks to represent cognitive processes of what writers do as they write, with an emphasis on the complexity of planning, the influence of task, and the importance of raising awareness of learners about adequate procedures through teacher's facilitations. The conceptualisation of writing based on the cognitive theory helped inform the teaching of writing and value the role of the learner in the process. As a result of theoretical research on the processes of writing, teachers of writing began to re-organise their classes in a purpose of establishing learning activities with "more attention to the practical processes of planning, drafting and revising writing than to the characteristics of the product" (Ivanič, 2004, p. 231).

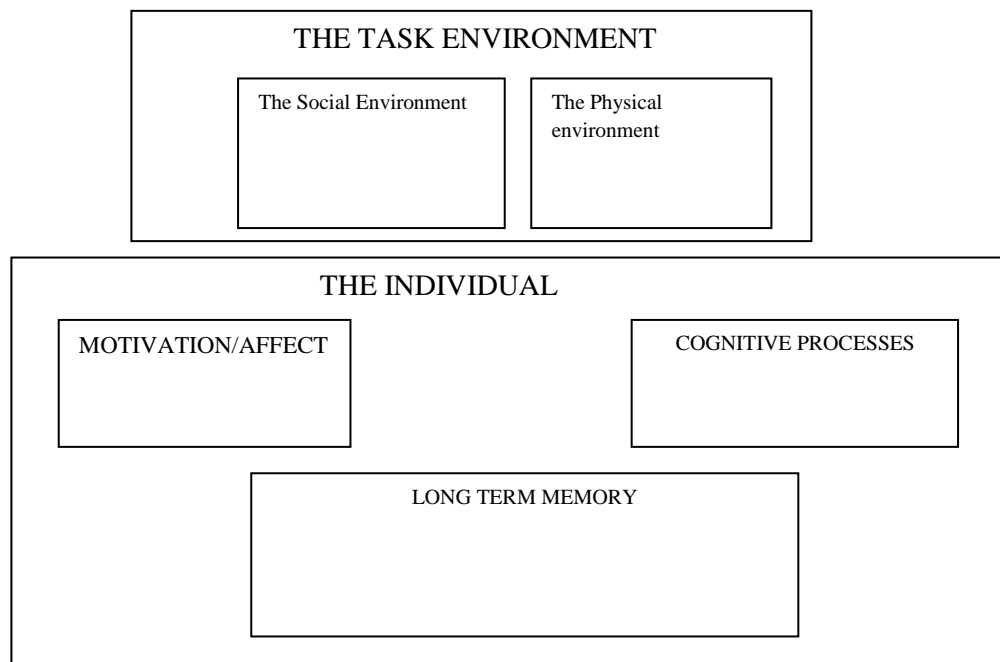
It is nevertheless worth noting that, despite the success and dominance of the process movement in the discourse practice of composition studies in the 1970s and the 1980s, research highlights a lack of consensus as to what constitutes the process model paradigm (Miller, 1991; Harris, 1997; Matsuda, 2003). Indeed, as shown by the existing publications theorising or critiquing the process approach, differing theories of process have been produced, of which three major views are noticeable: cognitive processes view, expressive view and social view. The initial version of Flower and Hayes (1981) cognitive model regarded as representing writing as “a decontextualized skill by foregrounding the writer as an isolated individual struggling to express personal meanings” (Hyland, 2003, p. 18) has been criticised for example for neglecting the public and social issues that necessarily affect the actual processes of language use (Bizzell, 1992; Hyland, 2003).

Critiques of the cognitive processes model thus paved the way for the ‘social turn’ to process. In a review made of a number of publications on the subject, Trimbur (1994) refers to what has come to be known as the ‘social turn’ to the cognitive processes in the following terms:

[The publications] reflect and enact what has come to be called the ‘social turn’ ..., a post-process, post-cognitivist theory and pedagogy that represent literacy as an ideological arena and composition as a cultural activity by which writers position and reposition themselves in relation to their own and others’ subjectivities, discourses, practices, and institutions. (p. 109)

In fact, the cognitive process model of writing found itself besieged by studies viewing writing – and literacy in general – as function of the social and physical environment in which the activity is taking place. As the initial version of Hayes and Flower’s model of cognitive processes had been criticised for not taking enough account of the motivational and social dimensions of the writing activity, the authors undertook a new revision introducing the social dimension (Hayes, 1995); the criticism was taken into account in the new version as illustrated by the figure below:

**Figure 2:** General view of the cognitive processes model as modified



Source: Hayes (1995).

According to the figure above, the new model comprises two main components:

- The component “task environment” including the dimension related to the ‘social environment’ represented by teachers, audience, employees, etc., as well as the dimension “physical environment” involving the text produced so far, the physical writing support such as ‘word processing’, or a pen and scratch-pad;
- The component “individual” likely to be affected by ‘motivation’ for the writing task, by ‘cognitive processes’ and even by ‘knowledge of the writing topic’, knowledge of the language code, knowledge of the audience, etc.

As a matter of fact, there are differences between the former and the new model, and they are mainly in two categories as the author himself indicated (Hayes, 1995):

- The first and most important difference lies in the fact that cognitive processes are integrated into the aspects ‘motivation’ and ‘affect’;

- The second difference is that the component 'cognitive processes' of the former model has been reorganized as follows: 'revision' was replaced by 'reading', 'planning' was integrated into a more general category – problem fixing – and translating itself was integrated into a more general process termed language production.

Thus, as revised, the cognitive processes model becomes less cognitive than individual-environmental and can hence be viewed as connected to the social contextual models advocating for building on individual's cultural and linguistic capital (Nystrand, 1989; Cumming, 2001; Hyland, 2003; Lei, 2008).

Nevertheless, despite the current influence of the socio-contextual views of writing and learning to write, the model of writing based on cognitive processes which "did achieve the status of dominance by the early 1980s (...)" (Matsuda, 2003, p. 69) still exerts its influence on research and pedagogical practices as "it is still embraced by huge numbers of classroom teachers" (Tobin, in Matsuda, 2003, p. 69). Ivanič (2004) reckons for example that the process approaches – based on both the cognitive and practical processes – 'are very attractive to teachers and policy makers, because they translate into a set of elements which can be taught explicitly and which have an inherent sequence" (p. 231).

#### **2.1.4. Genre approaches**

##### **2.1.4.1. A genre view of writing and learning to write**

Genre theory emerged and was often promoted in respect to process-based view of writing and learning to write (Hyland, 2003, 2007; Matsuda, 2003; Atkinson, 2003) which has been critiqued as focusing "on strategies for writing rather than on the linguistic resources [learners] need to express themselves effectively" (Hyland, 2007, p. 150). In that sense, genre theory can be regarded as focusing on the written text, but with a particular attention to the way in which the written product is shaped by social factors in the writing context. Thus, in contrast to the perspective on written text as reflected in the skills-based model, proponents of genre

approaches are of the view that ‘good writing is not just correct writing, but writing which is linguistically appropriate to the purpose it is serving’ (Ivanič, 2004, p. 233). The notion of ‘appropriateness’ is important in the genre discourse of writing as it pre-supposes adaptation of the written text to the audience and the purpose<sup>11</sup>.

This view of the nature of writing, as Ivanič (2004) suggests, has as implication for learning to write that “learners need to learn linguistic characteristics of different text-types in order to be able to reproduce them appropriately to serve specific purposes in specific contexts” (p. 233). In other words, genre-based perspective to writing suggests that the writing ability is best learnt on basis of explicit instruction of textual features. It is however worth cautioning against possible deterministic interpretations of the quotation above as it seems to suggest practices based on reproduction of typical characteristics of different text-types. With reference to Fairclough (1992), it is important not to take a typological approach to language variety because there is not a fixed one-to-one relationship between context and language. The author makes clear that any attempt to make a typology or prescribe appropriate use is misleading because “the matching of language to context is characterised by indeterminacy, heterogeneity and struggle” (p. 42).

In fact, Fairclough’s position consolidates the idea of existence of a variety of language uses according to particular communication situations. The same idea has particularly been championed by the Academic Literacies movement which, as will be seen in the sections below, emphasises that any writing is situated and inscribed in broader social practices (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998). So, such a view in relation to genre implies that the latter refers to linguistic and rhetorical choices that writers draw on to respond to writing tasks in accordance to contextual specificities.

Thus, according to this variation-based view of genre, writing is dialogic (Bakhtin, 1986), both because it pre-supposes ‘interaction’ with an active audience, and it involves a diversity of voices through relations to other texts. The diversity of voices

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<sup>11</sup> The purpose of an academic essay written with the intention to develop an argument is different from that of a laboratory report or of a poem written for entertainment.

also evokes the notions of 'intertextuality' and 'interdiscursivity' which have been very influential in genre theory (Hyland, 2003). As suggested by Ivanič (1998) who refers to Fairclough, 'actual intertextuality' involves "parts of texts which can be traced to an actual source in another text" (p. 47). This type of intertextuality can be explicitly signalled through discourse representation in the forms of quotation, paraphrase, copy, etc., but is also sometimes implicitly represented through different ways of incorporating, responding to, or anticipating other texts of utterances. As for 'interdiscursivity', it refers to an echo in text "not of another specific text, but of a recognisable, abstract text type, or set of conventions: a pattern or template of language use, rather than a sample of it"<sup>12</sup> (Ivanič, 1998, p. 48). Genre research thus goes beyond texts to the sites where social interactions can facilitate and constrain writing, and to the discourse communities where texts are used and judged (Hyland, 2000).

The concept of discourse community governed by a range of norms and conventions is central to genre views of writing. It led to writing pedagogies based on the identification of powerful discursive conventions and genres likely to be explicitly taught to students entering the university (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Swales, 1990). Although the use of the discourse community metaphor has been criticised as static and monolithic, "the notion of discourse community foregrounds the socially situated nature of genre and helps illuminate something of what writers and readers bring to a text, implying a certain degree of intercommunity diversity and intra-community homogeneity in generic forms" (Hyland, 2003, p. 23). In other words, despite the dismissal of the idea that certain characteristics are discourse-specific in any fixed way, the concept of 'discourse community' seems to help even the critical genre theory of variety in accounting for the existence of "particular discourse characteristics (...) shaped by the current interests, values, beliefs and practices of particular social groups" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 45). Thus, any particular choice of words and structure by a writer may reflect their alignment with other

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<sup>12</sup> The linguistic phenomena listed by Fairclough as such patterns are: genres, discourses, styles and activity types (Ivanič, 1998, p. 48).

writers who use similar words and structures and hence, as Ivanič suggests, assert their identity in their written production.

From a genre theory perspective, genre can be regarded as a matter of balance between the inter-community diversity (i.e. the internal heterogeneity of genres) and the intra-community homogeneity of generic forms. The balance seems however to swing in favour of the intra-community homogeneity because “the fact that language users routinely and unreflectively recognise similarities and differences between texts with sufficient agreement to successfully negotiate and interpret meanings is itself highly significant” (Hyland, 2003a, p. 23).

#### **2.1.4.2. Genre-based pedagogies**

Genre approaches to teaching writing emerged as a complement to process models which were regarded as limited from a social perspective (Hyland, 2003a). Indeed, in contrast to process models, genre-based pedagogies seek to build their action on how language works in human interactions. That is, the learning activities are basically organised around a contextual writing framework which foreground meanings and text-types based on social purposes. As social purposes of everyday life are hard to realise in classroom settings, the target text-types and meanings at stake may have to be artificially specified. Ivanič (2004) describes typical procedures related to genre-based pedagogies as follows:

The ‘target’ text-types are modelled, linguistic terminology is taught in order to generalise about the nature of such texts, and learners are encouraged to use this information to construct (rather than ‘compose’) their own texts in the same genre. There is special emphasis on teaching the features of what are thought to be ‘powerful genres’ – the text-types which are associated with success in educational and bureaucratic contexts; text-types which rely on a good deal of nominalisation and packing of nouns into phrases to compact meanings. (p. 233)

Methods used are then expected to offer novice-writers an explicit understanding of how texts in target genres are structured and why they are written in the way they



are. It goes without saying for example that a well structured and effective text requires the writer to have knowledge of the lexico-grammatical patterns which are typically used in different stages of writing. Thus, the teacher will have to help students acquire this kind of ability through development of awareness of target genres and explicit conditions for linguistic choices. Providing novice writers with a particular writing ability such as use of 'tenses', citations, reporting verbs, etc. leads to a shift of pedagogic method from the implicit and exploratory to explicit instruction based on a conscious manipulation of language and choices (Hyland, 2003a).

In a classroom setting based on genre, a range of methods are used. Hyland (2003a) provides examples of these methods which include "investigating the texts and contexts of students' target situations, encouraging reflection on writing practices, exploiting genre sets, and creating mixed-genre portfolios" (p. 26). In approaches to genre based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)<sup>13</sup>, the leading principle is based on the view that language is a resource for making meaning in a particular context of use rather than as a set of fixed rules and structures (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999; Martin & Rose, 2008). Thus, the learning process of writing will be envisaged as "a cycle which takes writers through modelling, joint negotiation, and independent construction, allowing students different points of entry and enabling teachers to systematically expand the meanings students can create" (Hyland, 2003, p. 23). It is in fact, as suggested by Hyland (ibid.), a "visible pedagogy in which what is to be learnt and assessed is made clear to students, as opposed to the invisible pedagogy of the process approaches" (p.26).

The theoretical underpinning of the approach in question corresponds to the process of scaffolding whereby the teacher actively guides the learners' participation in knowledge-making as this is suggested by Vygotsky and neo-Vygotskians (see Bruner, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). According to the process of scaffolding, as described by Coffin et al. (2003), "a more advanced 'expert' or teacher is seen as helping less experience student to learn to do a particular task so that the

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<sup>13</sup> Known in the United States as the "Sydney School".

learner can replicate the process alone at some point in the future” (p. 12). This scaffolding process is thus most relevant at the early stages of learning a genre whereby the teacher progressively help the learners get used to the practices.

In the learner-centred classroom, this teacher’s intervention is expected to occur with regard to how students respond to writing. The emphasis is on construction of meaning through language and rhetorical organisation: the way in which different texts are codified and meaning constructed in terms of purposes, audience and content (Machen-Horarik, 2002). This type of support is expected to diminish as students progress, until the stage where the acquired knowledge and skills allow them to operate independently. This approach meant to support students with an explicit pedagogy is also viewed by some as relevant for L2 writing where learners have little (or no) prior understanding of cultural practices (Hyland, 2003a).

Genre approaches are in fact presented as qualified to effectively allow teachers to advise their students for the writing tasks. Genre pedagogies assume that writing instruction is more likely to be successful if students are aware of the language and rhetorical characteristics of the target text-types. But, this reproductive dimension attracted criticism that the explicit teaching of genres imposes restrictive formulae which can hinder creativity through conformity and prescriptivism; that teaching genres tends to be envisaged as moulds into which content is poured, rather than as ways of making meanings (e.g. Dixon, 1987; Raimes, 1991). Indeed, as suggested by Hyland (2003a) who plays down such a criticism, there is necessity to reckon that some danger exists of reifying genres with a text-intensive focus through recognition of variation and choice, and application of “a recipe theory of genre” which leads students to see genres as result of application of fixed formulae. Hyland (ibid.) advises that the existing dangers of a static, decontextualised pedagogy must be guarded against and, as he assures, “there is nothing inherently prescriptive in a genre approach” (p. 27).

Indeed, genre-based models have the merits of promoting learners’ understanding of the necessary relationship between the communicative purpose and the features of text at every discourse level (Johns, 1997). Genre-based pedagogies can also help

novice writers become aware that texts are shaped for different types of audience as responses to particular social situations. Nevertheless, fear of the above-described dangers seems to persist, as reflected in different critiques of genre pedagogies, and it probably contributes to justify the relevance of academic literacies models which, as will be seen in the sections below, seek to approach the academic discourse not as static or monolithic, but as essentially dynamic and contested.

### **2.1.5. The academic literacies model(s)**

Academic literacies is a line of research that has been developing over the last two decades. This research, originating in England in the early 1990s (Russell et al., 2009), is closely linked to the New Literacy Studies (NLS) which represent a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy. Indeed, research in the NLS challenges the belief that literacy is concerned with the ‘acquisition’ of skills as in dominant approaches<sup>14</sup>, and suggests focusing on what it means to think of reading and writing as cultural and social practices which vary from one context to another (Street, 1984; Lea & Street, 1998). In other words, NLS promotes “recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power” (Street, 2003, p. 77). Research in the field of Academic Literacies – mainly based on qualitative and ethnographic methods – suggests “to move students from reproductive, static approaches to ones that enable them to engage meaningfully with texts, within the contexts in which those texts are produced and interpreted, and to negotiate successful identities for themselves as writers”<sup>15</sup> (Starfield, 2007, p. 884). The ethnographic research is complemented by theory focusing on the nature of written text not just as linguistic substance but also as multimodal, including visual and material characteristics (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Ormerod & Ivanič, 2002; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

In fact, academic literacies research has developed as an eclectic field of study that draws on various disciplinary fields such as applied linguistics, sociolinguistics,

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<sup>14</sup> Lillis (2001) characterises Academic Literacies (and/or Critical Language Awareness) models as oppositional, both for their capacity to make visible the remaining (skills-oriented) models, and their potential to offer an alternative frame for re-imagining writing pedagogy.

<sup>15</sup> A tendency to uncritical reproduction of monolithic rules of the powerful genres has been one of the criticisms levelled against some versions of genres-based practices (Hyland, 2003, 2007).

anthropology, socio-cultural theories of learning, discourse studies, etc. In 1998, Lea and Street published an article that set out an academic literacies framework for understanding student writing in higher education. This framework challenges the dominant deficit model and is viewed as applicable to understanding the provision of teaching of writing in a range of contexts (see Starfield, 2007). Lea and Street argue that approaches to student writing and literacy at university could be conceptualised through the use of three overlapping perspectives or models: (a) study skills, (b) academic socialisation, and (c) academic literacies.

The first, the study skills perspective, assures that literacy is “a set of atomised skills which students have to learn and which are then transferable to other contexts” (p. 2). According to the two authors, the focus is on attempts for fixing problems with students learning, “which are treated as a kind of pathology” (p. 2). The study skills perspective is also described as conceptualising student writing as technical and instrumental. From the pedagogical point of view, this perspective focuses on the surface features of language from and assumes that students can easily transfer their knowledge of writing and literacy from one communication context to another. The second, the ‘academic socialisation’, is a product of the refinement of the study skills model with reference to the “meaning of the skills involved and attention to broader issues of learning and social context” (p. 3). Within the academic socialisation perspective, the task of the teacher is about induction (or acculturation) of students into disciplinary and subject-based discourses and genres. Students acquire the ways of talking, writing, thinking, and using literacy that characterise members of a disciplinary or subject area community. The focus is then on student orientation to learning and interpretation of learning tasks, through conceptualisation, for instance, of a distinction between ‘deep’, ‘surface’ and ‘strategic’ approaches to learning (Marton & Säljö, 1997).

Lea and Street (1998) point out that this perspective has been inspired by social psychology, anthropology and constructivist education. Although more sensitive both to the student as learner and to the cultural context, the authors remark that the academic socialisation approach could be criticized for having assumed for

example that “the academy is a relatively homogeneous culture, whose norms and practices have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution” (p.3). Likewise, despite the fact that contextual factors in student writing are recognised as important, “the approach tends to treat writing as a transparent medium of [meaning] representation and so fails to address the deep language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the institutional production and representation of meaning (Lea & Street, *ibid*, p.3).

Within the perspective of academic socialisation, educational research has striven to concentrate on “ways in which students can be helped to adapt their practices to those of the university” (Gibbs, quoted by Lea & Street, 1998, p.1). But, the main issue is that codes and conventions of academic writing are still treated as given. Problems concerning the formal aspects of a written text are for example referred to “in a generic sense, including attention to syntax, punctuation and layout, and to such apparently evident components of rational essay writing as ‘structure’, ‘argument’, and ‘clarity’” (Lea & Street, 1998, p.6). Moreover, contrasting conceptual understandings have been noticed within these requirements expressed through tutors’ feedback. There is for example “less certainty when it came to describing what underlay a well-argued or well-structured piece of work” (Lea & Street, 1998, p.7).

As for the third perspective, ‘academic literacies’, it sees ‘literacies’ as social practices. Within the academic literacies framework, student writing and learning are viewed as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialization. Institutions in which academic practices take place are also viewed as “constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power” (Lea & Street, *ibid*, p.3). Literacy pedagogy is then seen as involving a set of communicative practices, including genres, disciplinary areas, etc. In fact, as described by Lea and Street (2007), the academic literacies model is “concerned with meaning making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular academic context” (p. 368).

These three phases are presented in a hierarchical perspective as, according to the authors, “each model successively encapsulates the other” (p.2). The academic literacies model is for example presented as incorporating both of the other models into “a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities” (ibid, p.2). But, as the authors implicitly suggested it, the first two models – the study skills and the academic socialization - still dominate the academic writing practices which are therefore widely based on an autonomous view of literacy. In higher education, this includes a series of rhetorical conventions of academic discourse, respect of which appears as a leitmotiv by tutors who constantly call for clarity of expression, structure, argument, definition, and other concepts “deemed transparent and, therefore, not explicated” (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 64).

Furthermore, a growing body of literature based on ‘academic literacies’ approach (as reported in Lea & Street, 1998) suggests that “one explanation for problems in student writing might be the gaps between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing” (p.3). Students continue to face confusion about what is required in their academic writing. They generally have difficulties to know for example when they have successfully achieved requirements of academic writing conventions in a piece of writing (Lea & Street, 1998). Besides, “this confusion [is] compounded by the move towards multidisciplinary courses at degree level and the modular system [...]” (Lea & Street, 1998, p.6).

In fact, what it means to become academically literate is still blurred, as meanings are still contested among parts involved. Even on the side of academic staff, the same conflict is noticed as “everybody seems to want something different” (Lea & Street, 1998, p.8). That is, modes of writing vary across disciplines and fields of study, as writing requirements vary according to disciplines, fields of study, and individual tutors. Lea and Street (1998) remark that even the higher education policy documents reflect a normative approach instead of emphasising the role of language use.

Apart from these conflicting and contrasting requirements for writing on different courses, another reason for students' confusion is that these requirements are frequently left implicit (Lillis & Turner, 2001). As Lillis and Turner (2001) remark, "much advice in study skill texts/guidelines and tutor comments not only uses wordings to denote conventions as if they were transparently meaningful but works with the metaphor of language itself as ideally transparent" (p.58). For the authors, some typical exhortations ("state clearly, spell it out, be explicit, express your ideas clearly, say exactly what you mean") reflect the notion of language as ideally transparent, and can have different meanings according to the context.

A tactic of last resort for students, as Lea and Street (1998) point out, "is often to switch between diverse writing requirements knowing that their task is to unpack what kind of writing any particular assignment might require" (p.8). Students are also said to adopt a tactic consisting in masking their own opinions in their written texts, "in a sense mimicking some implicit or even explicit convention" (Lea & Street, 1998, p.9). As a consequence, students who are generally not familiar with the disciplinary underpinnings of faculty feedback will be held to ransom by this discourse of transparency whereby language is treated as ideally transparent and autonomous (Lillis & Turner, 2001).

The fact is, as Lea and Street (1998) remark, "there is a dynamic within the feedback genre, for instance, which works both to construct academic knowledge and to maintain relationships of power and authority between novice students and experienced academic" (p.13). Assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge may be inferred by analysing feedback. As demonstrated, disciplinary assumptions about the nature of knowledge/academic discipline often affect the meaning given to the describing categories such as 'structure' and 'argument'. Thus, since these assumptions vary with context, it is allowed to share Fairclough's opinion (in Lea & Street, 1998) that "it is not valid to suggest that such concepts are generic and transferrable, or represent 'common sense way of knowing'" (p.7). If meanings are contested from one context to another, taking account of particular content,

discipline or study field/module is to be recommended. That is, academic writing curricula are not to be designed in only generic format for example.

One can also note with Lea and Street (1998) that in practice, what makes a piece of student writing 'appropriate' has more to do with issues of epistemology than with the surface features of form to which staff often have recourse when describing their students' writing. Lea and Street (ibid.) remark that analysis of written feedback can raise "questions about the relationship between feedback and epistemological issues of knowledge construction" (p.15). According to these authors, writing in the university is to be considered "as an 'institutional' issue and not just a matter of particular participants" (p.15).

Indeed, in this time of 'multimodal information environments', with an increasing prevalence of technology in our communication systems, "students bring to classrooms complex, multiple and blended background knowledge, identity and discourses" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.xii). Thus, a gap may be noticed between the way in which literacy is taught in school and the complex set of language practices outside school. Proponents of the New Literacy Studies suggest "to bring students literacy practices into the classroom, because, they add, by acknowledging [...] students identities in their literacy practices, we can come to support and sustain their engagement with schooling" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.1).

One of the criticisms to the academic literacies model has been its apparent lack of attention to pedagogy, limiting its focus on the description of practices and their theoretical understanding (Russell et al., 2009; Lillis, 2003; Kress, 1998). Lillis (2003) for example suggests that the academic literacies model, unlike the other two models – study skills and academic socialisation, needs to be developed as a design frame, with a clear stand toward pedagogy. She states the following:

Whilst powerful as an oppositional frame, that is as a critique of current conceptualisations and practices surrounding student writing, academic literacies has yet to be developed as a *design* frame (Kress, 1997, 2000)



which can actively contribute to student writing pedagogy as both theory and practice. (p. 192)

Following criticisms, the academic literacies model is entering into new prospects as a design frame. Lea and Street (2006), for example, attempt a demonstration of how understandings generated by research based on the academic literacies model can be used to realise curricular and instructional design. They suggest that “these understandings, when made explicit, provide greater opportunities for teaching and learning, as well as for examining how such literacy practices are related to epistemological issues” (pp. 375-376).

In overall, the academic literacies model has among other merits to have demonstrated that students are not easily and unproblematically acculturated into the academic community through engaging with the established discourses and practices of academia (see Lea, 2004). The highlight, made by research on academic literacies, of the complexity of student relationship to the dominant literacy practices also contributed to creating initiatives for empowering students through flexibility with regard to the genres or assignment types used for their assessment (see Russell et al., 2009, Lillis, 2006; Catt & Gregory, 2006).

### **2.1.6. Autonomous and ideological models of literacies**

Debates around the nature of literacy are often centred on the distinction between ‘autonomous’ and ‘ideological’ models of literacy. This distinction is traced back to Street’s work (1984, 1988) which deals with the notion of literacy as social practice, makes a distinction between literacy events and literacy practices, and draws a contrast between ‘autonomous’ and ‘ideological’ models of literacy. This contrast itself was a reaction to influential debates at the time about the ways in which the ‘social practice’ model was developed as a challenge to the ‘Great Divide’ theories (Brandt & Clinton, 2002).

‘Great Divide’ theories in fact suggest that alphabetic literacy contributes to “higher order” thinking and cognitive skills which automatically set differences between literate and non-literate societies or, in some cases, between oral and written

discourse. A certain version of these theories also postulates cognitive differences among individuals of varying literacy statuses within literate societies (see Olson, 1994; Olson & Torrance, 1991). Brandt and Clinton describe conceptualisation of literacy by 'Great Divide' theorists as follows:

Literacy per se was seen to induce or at least carried the potential to develop abstraction, depersonalization, syllogistic reasoning, even, in some formulations, modern orientations and democratic inclinations, while a reliance on orality tended toward context dependence, associative thinking, and homeostasis. The oral-literate contrast fell neatly in line with other dichotomies of some cultural influence at the time (e.g., primitive vs. civilized, myth vs. science, even home vs. school), helping to entrench its grip on the ways that literacy and its attendant social problems could be thought about and discussed. (p. 339)

These 'Great Divide' or 'autonomous' theories, which treat literacy as decontextualised and decontextualising technology imparting unique differences on human culture and cognition (Gee, 1990; Street, 1984), came under attack by the early 1980s. They were criticised for being too simplistic and for exaggerating differences to create unfounded dichotomies between types of societies, modes of thought, and use of language (Reder & Davila, 2005). Empirical studies from various research fields challenged assumptions and interpretations of Great Divide theorists. Among these studies, the work by Scribner and Cole (1981) challenged the existence of broad differences in cognition that could uniquely be attributed to literacy. Scribner and Cole's (ibid.) work also introduced the concept of literacy practices, and literacy was reframed as "a set of socially organised practices (conceptually parallel to religious practices, childrearing practices, etc.) in which individuals engaged" (Reder & Davila, 2005, p. 172).

The conception of literacy as social practice spread rapidly among social scientists and educators, and it was applied by authors who described literacy as one of the exclusionary devices used by powerful groups to serve their socio-economic interests. New Literacy Studies researchers such as Street (1984) and Gee (1988),

reported in Reder and Davila (2005), remark that “literacy often functions restrictively and hegemonically in societies to implement social controls and maintain social hierarchies” (p. 172). As empirical studies of literacy practices and critiques of the ‘Great Divide’ theories accumulated during the 1980s, researchers began to systematise new ways of understanding literacy. Thus, a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy – the ‘New Literacy Studies’ – emerged, placing context at the centre of understandings about literacy.

#### **2.1.6.1. Distinction between autonomous and ideological views of literacy**

As alluded to in the section above, proponents of the autonomous view of literacy such as Havelock (1963), Ong (1982), McLuhan (1962), Goody (1968, 1977), Goody and Watt (1963), suggested that writing was historically responsible for the evolution of new forms of discourse, narrative fiction and logical prose being some examples, that reflected a new approach or understanding of language and a new, more subjective and reflective frame of mind. These authors also argued that literacy had been responsible in part for new forms of social organisation, of states (rather than tribes), and of reading publics rather than oral contact groups. In other words, the advocates of the autonomous view of literacy sustained that literacy had historically transformed mind and society and that the acquisition of literacy was a major factor in intellectual, linguistic, and social development. Furthermore, the upholders of the autonomous view presented literacy as the route to “modernity”, a route that could be passed on to underdeveloped societies aspiring to that modernity.

One of the most influential theorists of the ‘autonomous’ model is the social anthropologist Goody (1968, 1977). He replaces the theory of a ‘great divide’ between ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ culture, which was used in earlier anthropological theory, with the opposition between ‘literate’ and ‘non-literate’. He seems to present (alphabetic) literacy as a real technology of the mind. Based on what he sees as the inherent qualities of the written word (such as the way writing makes the relationship between a word and its referent more general and abstract), Goody contends that the distinction between ‘literate’ and ‘non-literate’ is similar to, but

more useful than, that traditionally made between 'logical' and 'pre-logical'. Thus, writing is seen as carrying the potential to 'foster', or even enforce, the development of 'logic', the distinction of myth from history, the elaboration of bureaucracy, the shift from 'little community' to complex cultures, the emergence of scientific thought and institutions, and even the growth of democratic political processes.

Furthermore, the adherents of the autonomous view of literacy contend that writing is less closely connected with the contingencies of time and place than is the language of oral communication. They hold a 'universalist' view of literacy assuming for example that a written document contains an independent meaning that can be recovered and transferred regardless of the contexts in which the text is written or used. As described by Street (2003, 2006), the standard view of the autonomous theory in many fields, including schooling and development programmes, is based on the assumption that literacy per se will result in change of other social and cognitive practices. Thus, introduction of literacy to poor, illiterate people, and other marginalised categories in society "will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their 'illiteracy' in first place" (Street, 2006, p. 1).

The 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS) movement thus takes as social practice perspective on literacy and challenges the 'autonomous' model of literacy. The NLS contends that "in practice literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another and so, therefore, do the effects of the different literacies in different conditions" (Street, 2006, p. 1). Street (1984) who is an early and vociferous critic of the 'autonomous' model, expresses his disagreement with the heavy causation attributed to literacy and to the suggestion that literate people were more cognitively and culturally advanced than non-literate people. He takes an issue with the ethnocentrism of the autonomous model which he views as claiming for all of literacy what is actually idealised versions of textual practices and world views of Western academics. He also dismisses the ideological neutrality that the

'Great Divide' theorists ascribe to the technology of literacy. He argues that literacy cannot be separated from structures of power from which it operates.

Thus, an alternative theory proposed by NLS is the ideological model of literacy based on a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. Street (2006) describes the ideological model of literacy as follows:

This model starts from different premises than the autonomous model – it posits instead that literacy is as social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skills; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being. It is also always embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts. (p. 2)

In the view of NLS, engaging with literacy is always a social act which necessarily reflects the socio-contextual characteristics involved. For example, the form of classroom interaction teachers and students engage in (i.e. monologic, dialogic, etc.) will affect the learning results and hence the way literacy is perceived by the participants. Further, given possible interests at stake in the distribution of the distinctive literacy capital which is so valued by the academic community, literacy is object of contestation, both in its meanings and its practices. Particular versions of it are also always partisan and rooted in a particular world-view and a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and marginalise others (see Gee, 1990; Besnier & Street, 1994).

#### **2.1.6.2. Critiques of the ideological model of literacy**

The conceptions around literacy give rise to some theoretical tensions. Such tensions are mainly centred on the distinction between conception of literacy as situated and conception of literacy as decontextualised. Brandt and Clinton (2002),

for example, raise their concerns about the adequacy of theories, particularly from NLS, emphasising the 'nature' of literacy as locally situated social practices. The two authors contend that literacy cannot be fully understood just by looking through the lens of the local context in which a literacy event takes places. They acknowledge the fundamental importance of the social practice perspective but express their dissatisfaction with the formulation of literacy practices, in NLS, as simply a reflection of the local context. They state the following:

We wonder if the new paradigm sometimes veers too far in a reactive direction, exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and meanings that literacy takes. Literate practices are not typically invented by their practitioners. Nor are they independently chosen or sustained by them. Literacy in use more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises that play out away from the immediate scene. (p. 338)

Brandt and Clinton emphasise the fact that the local contexts expect more from outside than they rely on local practices. This is illustrated by, among other facts, the important and powerful role of technologies – generally from outside – whose abrupt transformations can destabilise the functions, uses, values, and meanings of literacy anywhere. Brandt and Clinton express their concern about possibilities of losing something “where we ascribe to local contexts responses to pressures that originate in distant decisions, especially when seemingly local appropriations of literacy may in fact be culminations of literate designs originating elsewhere” (p. 338).

The two authors are in fact of the view that the local is overemphasised on in some NLS accounts. In contrast with the paradigm proposed by NLS where separation between the local and the global is assumed, Brandt and Clinton suggest that the local and global contexts are not two separate entities (literacy being viewed not as an outcome or accomplishment of local practices but as a participant in them). In a bid “to rehabilitate certain ‘autonomous’ aspects of literacy without appealing to repudiated ‘autonomous models’ of literacy” (p. 339), the two authors invoke

literacy's transcontextualised and transcontextualising potentials, and propose analytical concepts: localising moves and globalising connects. The concept of localising moves refers to the work people do when they shape literacy practices to meet personal needs and to match local social structures. A globalising connect refers to a local literacy practice that has far-reaching implications and uses outside of the local context.

These analytical concepts are meant to help formalise the everyday conversation between the local and remote literacy events. Thus, while emphasising the limits of the local contexts which they see as necessarily under influences of remote forces or literacy as a technology, Brandt and Clinton also recognise that the technology of literacy does not carry its own domination no matter where it goes. They rather envisage the distant influences as integral part of local literacy events. According to them "literacy as a technology – as a collection of things and mediums – does not exist free of human contexts and ideological designs" (p. 354). In sum, the two authors suggest a hybrid nature of literacy practices. This hybridity seems indeed of relevancy particularly in academic contexts where development of students' literacy abilities requires an appropriate reconciliation between the students' background in terms of literacy practices and the orthodoxy of literacy practices as privileged by academia.

### **2.1.7. Assessment practices surrounding academic writing**

Assessment practices around academic activities are expected to encompass a formative function<sup>16</sup> meant to provide feedback to students to help the lecturer achieve his/her goal in terms of improvement of students' abilities in the target discipline. Indeed, formative assessment, as opposed to summative assessment, has been pointed out as the way to go for improvement of students' abilities as "it has a teaching function, to help students improve their work rather than just measure their achievements" (Coffin et al., 2003, p. 76). Formative assessment may also help

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<sup>16</sup> As opposed to summative assessment which is meant to be graded to contribute to the marks for a module, year or degree (Brown et al., 1997).

ensure a quality teaching in the sense it can help the lecturer get a clear idea of students' difficulties and the type of assistance they need.

However, as has been pointed out by research, assessment practices related to academic writing are often unclear to students (see Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999). This is particularly true with students whose native language is not the language of instruction – English, in the case of the current study - who are least likely to be familiar with the conventions of academic writing in English (Coffin et al., 2003; Zamel, 1998). In HE, this group is generally made of students who may have experience of different forms of written assessment and, hence, have different expectations from those of their teachers or evaluators.

Students of this category are indeed faced with particular challenges which can affect the overall outcomes of their university studies. Thus, given the role of assessment methods in influencing styles of learning and, hence, the outcomes expected of the learning/teaching process (see Brown et al., 1997), adequate strategies must be established in order for the assessment of students' writing to be meaningful to them. These strategies will particularly concern assessment criteria, guidance on assignment task, and feedback to students' work.

#### **a. Assessment criteria**

Criteria generally refer to “dimensions of an assignment that are assessed such as organisation, style, use of evidence” (Brown et al., 1997, p. 42). With regard to writing, dimensions with which the quality of students' text is judged need to be established in relation to the assessment task and the outcomes expected of the learning/teaching process. To such an end, lecturers need to have a clear idea of learning outcome(s) expected as well as the specific requirements of the assessment methods that will be used. While it is possible for lecturers to use criteria without showing them to students, Coffin et al. (2003) suggest that assessment criteria should be made transparent and presented to students ahead of their writing task. The authors remind that there are several ways in which criteria may be related to



marking. They provide an example of broad marking criteria devised for essays written on English language course:

Example of marking criteria on academic essay in English:

- Your tutor will primarily make use of the following criteria in deciding what mark to give your assignment: *the relevance of your answer to the question as set.*
- Your tutor will look for evidence that you have clearly understood the question and directed your answer accordingly: *your knowledge and understanding of the course material.*
- Your tutor will look for evidence that you have understood and can draw effectively on research evidence, ideas, concepts and arguments that are central to the course: *your ability to discuss and evaluate alternative explanations and arguments.*
- Researchers and other commentators may provide different (and sometimes competing) explanations for linguistic events and processes. Your tutor will look to see whether you are able to discuss these, and evaluate any arguments put forward in support of a particular viewpoint: *the ability to present and pursue an argument.*
- Your tutor will examine the structure of your answer to assess how well you can bring together the material you use to sustain and support an argument: *the ability to express yourself clearly using academic conventions as appropriate.*
- Your tutor will look for clarity in your work, in the way you make your points, present research finding and make critical comments. You are not expected to make extensive use of technical vocabulary, but you should be able to refer to key terms and concepts from the course materials. You should also acknowledge clearly any sources you have drawn on.

The example of criteria above, which are relatively open, appears relevant for an academic essay which is generally regarded as a high-level practical task. Indeed, as suggested by Brown et al. (1997), detailed criteria are rather useful for research than teaching purposes. The use of detailed lists of criteria is too demanding in terms of time consumption, and needs a good level of mastery on the part of the assessor if the marks allocated to students' writing are to be valid. The use of broad and relatively open criteria has the advantage of ensuring flexibility in allocating marks to students' essays whose various aspects cannot be assessed without involvement of 'judgment and a certain degree of 'impression marking' (Coffin et al., 2003). This use of open criteria in fact constitutes a further reason for ensuring a common understanding with students ahead of the writing task in relation to what will be valued in their texts.

#### **b. Guidance on assignment task**

Writing assignments to students can be accompanied with not only assessment criteria but also with overall instructions (or guidance) meant to help students better understand the kind of writing they are expected to produce. As Coffin et al. (2003) point out, guidance may be limited to the description of the length and format required of the assignment (e.g. word count, page numbering, student's name, etc.). Guidance can also be made of "more detailed and specific, and may include indications of the writing style considered appropriate, referencing conventions, the use of sources (including personal and anecdotal experience), checklists and so on" (p. 81).

All these details are in principle meant to support students' understanding of the required task. They are also intended to help in assessment of the work carried out. However, the expected understanding can be undermined by a series of factors such as the forms of wording or phrasing used by the assessor(s). Key terms used in the assessment questions may for example be vague and not precise enough to provide guidance on what is required. Terms such as 'discuss', 'analyse', 'critique' may encompass meanings which are not necessarily shared between students and lecturers: students with little familiarity with English may have difficulty to make a

distinction for example between 'criticise' and 'critique'; they are also likely to confuse terms such as 'give an account of' (i.e. describe and analyse a series of events) and 'account for' (i.e. explain).

Thus, there is necessity not only for students to examine assignment questions carefully before engaging with writing, but also for lecturers to ensure that assessment tasks proposed are made clear enough to students. It is worth reminding that guidance is expected to be provided "either as written handouts or in the form of structures group exercises of informal discussion about [the assessors'] expectations" (Coffin et al., 2003, p. 80). In other words, any form of supporting procedure may be used provided the guidance is clear enough to support the specific purpose set by the lecturer.

### **c. Feedback on students' writing**

Provision of feedback to students' work is one of the central pedagogic practices at all level of education. Feedback - generally made of comments produced on student work in order to help them improve their learning - is often regarded as part of the evaluating process (Lillis, 2003). Feedback is also object of attention on the part of bodies in charge of quality assurance in different universities where principles governing provision of feedback on assessed work are sometimes outlined as a strategy of optimising students' benefit from feedback. This is for example the case for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK (Coffin et al., 2003).

While one of the qualities of feedback is to be meaningful and acceptable to the receiver (Brown et al., 1997), research on feedback suggests that it is a complex process that needs to be undertaken with attention in order to reach the expected objective which is to encourage the receiver to think and, if necessary, to change. Coffin et al. (2003, p. 103) present points of broad consensus, from a range of research studies, in relation to the challenges the endeavour of providing feedback to students' work is often confronted with:

- the purposes of feedback are often mixed and left unstated;

- there is often a mismatch between lecturers' and students' understanding about what is required in academic writing;
- students may find lecturers' comments unclear, confusing, vague;
- students may meet with different (and inconsistent) comments from different lecturers on similar pieces of writing;
- the kinds of feedback lecturers provide, and the way this is expressed, are informed by lecturers' disciplinary backgrounds, personal interests and values;
- feedback does not always correspond to published guidelines or criteria;
- feedback is often not as helpful as either lecturers or students would like it to be;
- giving and receiving feedback is an emotional, as well as a rational activity.

There are in fact continuing debates over important issues surrounding feedback: what kind of feedback is most useful to students? Do students make use of feedback comments or are they primarily interested in grade? What is the most effective way of wording comments on students' work? Etc. The fact is that students' understanding of feedback is surrounded with much confusion (Coffin et al., 2003). So, it is important to keep aligned with the main purpose of assessment and the comments to be made on students' assignment.

It is also important to consider the relevant way of communicating feedback to students because, as suggested by Coffin et al. (2003), "particular ways of communicating feedback contribute (...) to students' understanding of the comments they receive; to what they feel about these comments; and to the establishment of a particular kind of relationship between lecturer and students, or, more generally, those who give and receive feedback" (p. 111). Positive comments are for example important in the sense that students need to be aware of their strengths in addition to their awareness of the aspects to be improved in their

writing. The language of feedback may also constitute a critical factor in the establishment of positive or negative power relations between lecturers and students: it can contribute in the building of a relatively hierarchical and didactic relationship with emphasis on the power differential between lecturer and students; or a more collegial relationship in which “students’ sense of membership of the academic community” is established (Ivanič, 2000, p. 61).

### **2.1.8. Student writing in English as Second Language**

Categories of English as Second Language (ESL) writers have been often described with reference to the contexts of North America and the U.K. where ESL writers are constituted of international students who come to study with the aim of returning home, immigrant-students who come to stay, and resident bilinguals who are in the country all the time (Leki, Cumming & Silva, 1997). In the U.S., ESL students mainly comprise a group of students commonly referred to as “Generation 1.5” (Doolan & Miller, 2012, Matsuda et al., 2003). This group is specifically made of long-term immigrant-students who, from the literacy skills point of view, are distinct from L1 students or more recently arriving international students<sup>17</sup>. Generation 1.5 students are thus faced with challenges relating to academic literacy. But, as most of them are exclusively educated in English, “their literacy abilities are often more developed in English than their native language” (Matsuda et al., 2003, p. 153).

Beyond this predominantly native English-speaking context of North America and the U.K., the question of challenges in ESL student writing also reverberates in the contexts such as Africa and Asia where English is taught and has got a more or less important status (Nayar, 1997). In these contexts, the issue of students’ negotiation of writing in English is sometimes raised in terms of ideology and conflict of socio-political values (Kubota & Lehmen, 2004; Nayar, 1997; Matsuda, 1997, Allison, 1994).

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<sup>17</sup> According to most empirical research, Generation 1.5 students are commonly described as students who: (a) have been in the US educational system for more than 4 years, (b) regularly speak a language other than English at home, (c) have relatively strong English speaking and listening skills, and (d) are younger than 25 years old (Doolan & Miller, 2012).

### **2.1.2.1. Context of student writing in English as Second Writing**

Authors have pointed to a certain referential fuzziness and overlap in the use of the terms English as Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) (Nayar, 1997). As noted by Nayar (*ibid.*), the term ESL which is conveniently accepted in reference to the situation of polyglot immigrants in native-English-speaking countries of North America and the U.K., does not necessarily refer to a language that is second for the speaker concerned. In fact, the situation related to English language use and learning that was felt to be different from the native one and that was geographically outside the native-speaking countries was initially referred to through the use of the expression “English as a Foreign Language” (West, 1927, reported by Nayar, 1997, p. 10). With the breakup of the British Empire, the new independent countries created were multilingual for most of them, and English was vitally needed in addition to their own native languages. So, given the historical relations and the relevance of English as a lingua franca<sup>18</sup>, English became an essential element of their educational systems and, “in deference to the ethno-nationalist rights of the indigenous languages, it was given the status of ‘second’ language” (Nayar, 1997, p. 11). An identity of ESL as opposed to EFL was thus created.

Another interpretation of the term “ESL” is related to the sociolinguistic situation created by the post-war immigration policy in North America. As the U.S. made English literacy a requirement for naturalisation after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war (Conklin & Lourie, 1983), new immigrant had to learn English. Thus, this language of their adoptive country could no longer be regarded as “foreign” (Nayar, 1997). It was conveniently labelled as their “second language”, although it may have been the third or fourth in order of acquisition. The term was then meant to be disseminated and established in the sense in which it is commonly used in North America and other predominantly native English-speaking countries.

The distinction between ESL and EFL is now well established (Harclau, 2000; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Nayar, 1997). But, the fact of the matter is that, in comparison with

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<sup>18</sup> A link language between speakers of different local languages.

EFL which refers to a language that is foreigner<sup>19</sup>, the label ESL is less transparent and more complex (Nayar, 1997). ESL is generically “applied to a wide variety of different populations, institutional goals, and students’ needs, and some of these populations are more researched than others” (Harklau, 2000, p. 35). From the pedagogical point of view, education practitioners need to be aware of the specific needs of the category of ESL student-writers they are dealing with.

In fact, as pointed out by Nayar (1997), the context of ESL writing and attitudes towards English language for students situated in the “native acquisition environment” of North America are different from those of students located in one of the former British colonies where English is not the mother tongue of any group in the country<sup>20</sup>. The learning environment will still be different for example in Scandinavian countries where English has “a high enough profile in education” without enjoying any official status or “intranational use” (Nayar, 1997, p. 18) similar to that in the above-mentioned categories of environment. Thus, those in charge of curricula design and implementation need to be aware of different specificities of contexts and subsequent needs of students in order to appropriately help them make transition between their “home” literacy and the literacy of their formal education.

### **2.1.2.2. Characteristics of L2 writers and their texts**

With regard to the composing processes and the features of written texts, research studies conducted on the subject suggest similarities between L1 and L2 writings (See Silva, 1993; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). For example, “both L1 and L2 writers employ a recursive composing process, involving planning, writing, and revising, to develop their ideas and find the appropriate rhetorical and linguistic means to express them” (Silva, 1993, p. 657). The assumption of similarities between L1 and

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<sup>19</sup> Nayar (1997) notes however the lack of shared definition criteria for EFL between a native English speaker and a speaker of many other languages. This author points out the widespread view of EFL as referring to “the role of English in countries where it is taught as a subject in schools but where it has no recognised status or function” (p. 13).

<sup>20</sup> Nayar (1997) mentions, among other favourable factors, “the crucialness of environmental support and the need of accessing the privilege of admittance into and full participation in the target society, for socioeconomic respectability and upward mobility” (p. 18) for ESL students in North America.

L2 writing might probably explain the fact that, at theoretical level, there have not been many attempts to establish a coherent and comprehensive theory of L2 writing (Cumming & Riazi, 2000), and L2 writing specialists have often relied on almost exclusively on L1 composition theories (Silva, 1993). These L1 composition theories are presented as “largely monolingual, monocultural, ethnocentric, and fixated on the writing of native English-speakers undergraduates in North American colleges and universities” (Silva, *ibid.*, p. 669).

However, despite similarities at the level of the general outlining, researchers point out that, on closer examination, important differences characterise these two contexts of writing as L2 students’ writing is often more difficult and less effective than that of their NES counterparts (Silva, 1997). In other words, L2 writers, who are not writing in their native language, seem to encounter constraints in their writing processes. In relation to the constraints encountered by ESL writers, Silva (1997) notes the following:

ESL writers may plan less, write with more difficulty owing to a lack of lexical resources, reread what they write less, and exhibit less ability to revise in an intuitive manner – on the basis of what ‘sounds’ right”. p. 359-360.

Differences are also reported regarding written text features including fluency, accuracy, quality, and structure. L2 writing is for example a less fluent process as it gives place to shorter texts (Cumming, 1990; Benson, Deming, Denzer, & Valeri-Gold, 1992). With regard to accuracy, L2 writers make more errors overall (Silva, 1997; Benson et al., 1992; Frodesen, 1991). Difficulties of L2 writers in relation to textual accuracy are described by Silva (1997) as follows:

In terms of lower level linguistic concerns, ESL writers’ texts typically exhibit a style of writing that is simpler than that of NES writers. ESL writers’ sentences often include more coordination, less subordination, less noun modification, and fewer passives. As language learners, ESL writers usually use shorter words and generally manifest less lexical variety and sophistication. p. 360



In addition to these differences mainly based on writing processes, it is worth noting that ESL student-writers are different from their native English-speaking (NES) counterparts in different ways, including cultures, rhetorical traditions, and linguistic backgrounds. Understanding these differences is crucial for addressing ESL writers' particular needs.

### **2.1.8.3. Pedagogical issues related to L2 writing**

As suggested above, ESL student-writers are confronted with literacy problems due particularly to factors such as clashes between cultural expectations around academic discourse, different national rhetorics, approaches to authority and tradition, etc. (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). These challenges related rather to a lack of familiarity with a set of cultural norms shared by native speakers of English, are often cause of remedial stigma with regard to teaching of writing to ESL students (Matsuda et al., 2003). In other words, following a perception that writing skills of students from non-English speaking background are poor<sup>21</sup>, teaching of academic writing is sometimes organised around special and intensive support programmes meant to equip these students with “key skills” they need to overcome their writing difficulties. Such programmes are often generic and isolated from other disciplines. They do not pay attention to issues of genre in every discipline, or provide advice that might always be in accord with the academic context concerned<sup>22</sup>.

With regard to ESL student writing, the remedial stigma and the deficit approaches to teaching ESL writing associated to it are viewed as serving a certain purpose or ideology (Kubota & Lehner, 2004). In other words, the deficit-based practices tend to reinforce the argument that the main goal of teaching writing is acculturating writers so that they become faithful members of a community that has a presumed set of linguistic and rhetorical conventions (Purves, 1986; Purves & Purves, 1986). Indeed, as demonstrated through the analysis of colonial discourse, “colonialism draws a binary distinction between the logical superior Self and the illogical

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<sup>21</sup> Poverty of ESL student-writers is sometimes perceived by tutors as a manifestation of cognitive or educational deficiencies (Silva, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> For details on this model of writing instruction, see Skillen (2006).

backward Other, legitimating unequal power relations” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 18).

Further, the deficit approaches reflect the cultural deficit theory based on the argument expressed by Kaplan (1988) that ESL students lack competence in discourse-level writing in English because of cultural differences, even though they may be competent speakers of the language (see Kutz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993). The colonialist construct of culture is also relayed by assimilationist approaches to teaching writing such as the traditional contrastive rhetoric which, although not necessarily developed with the intention of serving colonialist biases regarding ESL writers’ cognitive abilities, “has served to legitimate and reinforce asymmetrical relations of power” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 18).

Indeed, the contrastive rhetoric perspective was developed with the purpose of associating ESL students’ writing in English with their cultural or cognitive style rather than their cognitive abilities (Purves, 1988). It has focused on investigating cultural differences in written discourse patterns or rhetorical conventions that might negatively affect writing in a second language (Connor, 1996). Thus, studies were conducted on rhetorical characteristics of important genres in different languages, and the effect of these characteristics on ESL writing has been described. For example, English and Japanese expository discourse patterns were contrasted, and English was typically described as linear, direct, deductive, and logical while Japanese was presented while Japanese was presented as inductive, indirect, and non-linear (e.g. Hinds, 1990). English was also described as writer-responsible whereas many Asian languages were described as reader-responsible, suggesting that English writers assume the responsibility to make their statements clear and precise while Asian language writers use indirect strategies, leaving interpretations up to the readers (Hinds, 1987).

At pedagogical level, the uncritical acculturation into the Western discourse conventions creates cultural and linguistic stereotypes which may have repercussions on the teaching and learning of ESL writing (Kubota & Lehner, 2004).

The negative effects caused on ESL teachers and researchers by the obsession with English have been lamented by Kubota and Lahner (2004) as follows:

An English-Only approach is particularly limiting in an ESL classroom where groups of students often share the same language background and could otherwise engage in a deeper dialogue in their L1 about their positionings in relation to L1 and L2 writing based on their shared and individual experiences. In an EFL classroom, such reflexive engagement becomes more transparently possible and desirable. p. 19

The quotation mainly highlights damage likely to be caused by unbalanced power relations between English as a language of instruction and the native languages of ESL writers, as teachers are averted from taking account of the literacy experience acquired by student-writers in their native languages.

In relation to the imperialistic agenda involved in the teaching of English and the promotion of the Western mode of communication, critics problematised the assimilationist discourse of colonialism, but also raised ‘the question of how the colonised internalise this discourse and form their subjugated identity’ (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 19). Kubota and Lehner (ibid.) note that language plays an important role in the process of subjugation. They point out the testimony provided by Fanon (1967) about how “the colonial conception of the Creole language as inferior to French is internalised in the colonised subject, compelling them to speak the language of power and condemning their native language” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 19). A similar attitude seems to be pervasive in the context of ESL writing where student-writers believe that English is more logical or advanced than their native languages (Nayar, 1997; Allison, 1994).

With regard to the general conditions surrounding the teaching and learning of ESL writing, research studies have shown that English is today a powerful language used as a medium of instruction (Leibowitz, 2005), along with a western worldview and set of beliefs (Shumba, 1999), and middle-class norms and attitudes (Bernstein, 1996; Geisler, 1994). Indeed, studies have demonstrated that the hindrance is not

necessarily the fact of learning in ESL, but the general conditions around the learning process, including “students’ attitudes toward learning and literacy, as well as their level of exposure to the dominant language” (Leibowitz, 2005, p. 665). In a study conducted in South Africa, the South African Department of Education (2000) demonstrates, on basis of examples, that the issue associated with learning in ESL have been compounded in many South African schools by the way in which English has been taught. That is, students were not afforded an adequate transition between their “home” literacy and the literacy developed in English as language of their formal education.

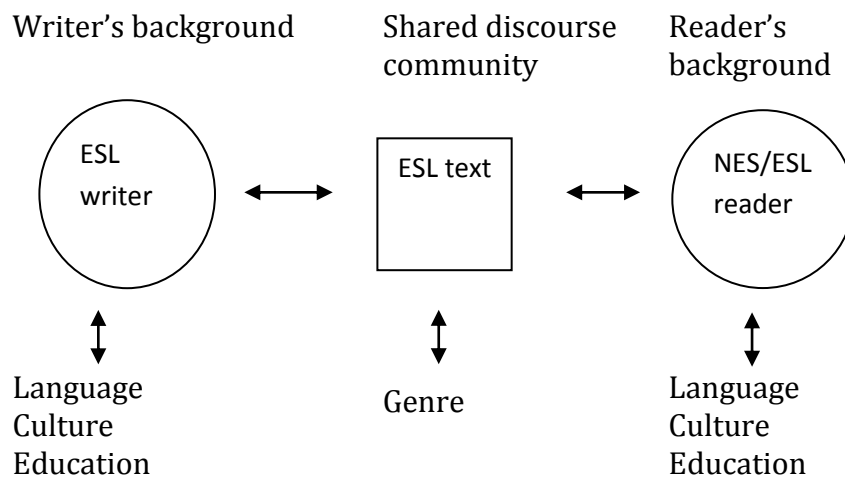
For alleviation of the negative effect of the hegemonic power relations characterising the teaching of ESL writing, some scholars have called for more attention to plurality, complexity, and hybridity of discourse patterns within one language, as well as similarities among languages or cultures (Zamel, 1997; Spack, 1997b; Leki, 1997). Zamel (1997) critiqued the deterministic and static views of the culture and students uphold by the contrastive rhetoric-based approaches. This author called for more attention to variability, complexity and unprectability pertaining to ESL writing contexts. Spack (1997b) highlighted the existence of multiple writer identities and suggested to view students as individuals rather than members of a generalised cultural group. Leki (1997) argued for the recognition of similarities between English and the language and culture of ESL writers as a basis for valuing the experience that writers bring with them to the act of writing.

In fact, recognition of the importance of student-writers’ agency in the act of writing seems critical for the success of the teaching and learning process of ESL writing. That is, ESL student-writers need to be recognised as unique individuals with their own relevant background, “not as blank slates for teachers to inscribe their opinions” (Silva, 1997, p. 361) or their worldview. Certain openness toward the ESL writers’ linguistic and cultural background will then play an important role.

However, as pointed out by Matsuda (1997), the learning of the organisation of ESL written text is not solely determined by the writer’s cultural, linguistic, or educational backgrounds. The organisation of a written text is a product of a

complex “process of decision making that writers go through as they respond to their own perception of the particular context of writing” (p. 52). The context of writing appears very significant here as it involves both the ESL writer and the NES/ESL reader along with their backgrounds. In a dynamic model of ESL writing proposed by Matsuda (ibid.), writing is considered to take place in its own dynamic context, which is created as a result of the interaction between the writer and the reader – an interaction mediated through the text. The dynamic model of ESL writing proposed by Matsuda is represented in the figure below:

**Figure 3: A dynamic model of ESL writing**



Key features of the dynamic model of ESL writing are (a) the writer’s and the reader’s background, (b) shared discourse community, and (c) the interaction of the elements of L2 writing within the dynamic context. In the model, the context of writing is defined as the dynamic environment surrounding the encounter between the writer and the reader through the text in a particular writing situation.

As suggested by the author, this dynamic model of ESL writing may constitute an alternative to the assimilationist approaches commonly used in the teaching of ESL

writing. Indeed, the dynamic model of ESL writing provides an insightful and realistic conceptualisation of the writing context which includes both the writer's and the reader's backgrounds. Further, the writing context is not necessarily limited to the writer's and the reader's backgrounds in a broad sense (e.g. language, culture and education). It is also regarded as comprising other factors which may influence the writer's decisions such as "variations within his or her native language (i.e. dialect) and culture (i.e. socioeconomic class), his or her knowledge of the subject matter, past interactions with the reader, and the writer's membership to various L1 and L2 discourse communities" (Matsuda, 1997, p. 53).

Thus, a dynamic model of ESL writing can be useful in complex sociolinguistic contexts such as Rwanda as it has the advantage of paying attention to variability and complexity within language communities. It may also help accommodate specific needs of individual students and avoid a prescriptive orientation mainly based on "style manuals and textbooks" (Kubota & Lehner, 2004) in the teaching of ESL writing.

## ***2.2. Orientation of research on L2 writing and instruction***

Even though most research on L2 writing always bears a pedagogical significance, L2 writing instruction is viewed as an area which has been traditionally underrepresented (Jun, 2008) as most of studies were directed to L2 text features and the impact of L1 or L2 proficiency on L2 writing. Among studies that directed their attention to discussing teaching matters for L2 writing, teaching models and writing feedback appear as the most investigated areas. Studies on the use of portfolios have also surfaced.

### **a. Teaching models**

Starting from the late 1960s until the early 1990s, empirical research on academic writing was dominated by investigation on processes approaches which had arisen in reaction to the dominance of a product-centred pedagogy (Matsuda, 2003). Thus, the focus of attention shifted from the text as a finished product to the whole process of writing. A number of studies on L2 writing took interest in comparing the

advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches (Han, 2001; Zhang & Zhou, 2002; Chen, 2005). In a study conducted by Chen (2005), it was found that the product approach was suitable to students with a lower L2 proficiency, and the process(es) approach appropriate for students with a higher L2 proficiency. Chen suggests that students' L2 proficiency has to be taken into account before deciding the instruction approach to be applied.

Research also showed interest in task-based ESL instruction. It has for example been argued that linguistic structures are not acquired separately and linearly, but rather subconsciously in meaningful situation when the learner's attention is not focused on linguistic elements but on meaning and task completion (Long & Crookes, 1992, p. 35).

Recent research studies have also taken interest in examination of the situational contexts and challenges experienced by students when writing in second language (see different reviews realised by Tony Silva and colleagues in the *Journal of Second Language Writing*). Genre-based pedagogies have been presented for example as a response to process-based models of teaching (Hyland, 2003). But few of these studies have attempted to present a field-based investigation of actual enactments of what has been described as social practices models.

### **b. Ways of assessing L2 writing**

A certain proportion of research on L2 writing instruction has been dedicated to teachers' practices for assessment, particularly the techniques used to provide feedback to students' writing. Ferris (1997) had deplored the scarcity of research on feedback to students' work "despite the importance of teacher response" (p. 315). Noting that some reports of research on teacher commentary lack precision about the analytical methods used or the procedures of data collection, Ferris (ibid.) suggests that "relevant contextual factors may include (but are not limited to) the constraints of individual assignments, the point in the term at which the feedback is provided, the knowledge shared by instructor and students as the course progresses..." (pp. 315-316). It is then in an attempt to address the existing gaps in

the literature that the author examined over 1600 marginal and end comments written on 110 papers of 47 university ESL students. She assessed the impact of the first-draft commentary on the students' revision and the paper in general. The findings suggested that a significant proportion of the comments led to substantive student revision, but that particular types and forms of commentary are more helpful than others. The study appeared as having implication for L2 writing instruction and called for further studies "on a vital but surprisingly neglected topic" (p. 315).

A number of studies focused attention on error correction techniques (Ferris, 2002; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts & McKee, 2000). Among different types of error feedback identified (direct correction, underlining, and underlining with description), Ferris et al. (2000, reported in Ferris 2002) suggest that direct correction of errors by the teacher led to more correct revisions (88%) than indirect types of feedback (77%)<sup>23</sup>. But, as this study has not been published, Ferris (2002) discussed the findings and adds further details: "However, over the course of semester, students who received primarily indirect feedback reduced their error frequency ratios substantially more than the students who received mostly direct feedback" (p. 20). In other words, indirect feedback on students' errors is viewed as more likely to bring more benefits to long-term writing development than direct correction for example.

Apart from studies on teacher corrective feedback, two other forms of feedback investigated are peer feedback and self-feedback. In a study conducted by Carson and Nelson (1996), they examined Chinese students revision related to the quality and the grammatical accuracy of the final draft. The results suggested that Chinese students demonstrated resistance in particular areas: they were reluctant to criticise their peers' drafts, to disagree with peers, and to claim authority. They also showed strong feelings of vulnerability. In other words, Chinese students were not

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<sup>23</sup> Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005, p. 193) describe direct or explicit feedback as referring to the case where "the teacher identifies an error and provides the correct form". They present indirect feedback strategies as evoking "situations when the teacher indicates that an error has been made but does not provide a correction, thereby leaving the student to diagnose and correct it".



willing to provide feedback to their peers because they believed that their observations would be ineffective. Studies directed to L2 students' views on teacher feedback have also been carried out such that by Nelson and Carson (1998) who found that students preferred negative comments that showed them where their problems were<sup>24</sup>. According to Ferris and Roberts (2001), the most popular type of feedback was underlining with description, followed by direct correction, and underlining was third. With regard to studies directed to self-feedback, few studies have been conducted on that aspect. Some authors have even worried about the effectiveness of self-assessment and peer assessment, arguing that poor learners would be incapable of critically evaluate their own or their peers' written work (Liu et al., 2003). In a study conducted by Wei and Chen (2003), they describe how Chinese learners of English were guided through the process of assessing their own compositions on basis of particular techniques meant to help them look critically and analytically at their writing. Research results suggest that "guided self-assessment is useful, not only for improving the writer's writing skills, but also for reducing the teacher's workload" (p. 11).

A considerable amount of studies on self-assessment in L2 writing has been conducted on the use of portfolios in ESL writing classes. Many of these studies presented portfolios as likely to help students "gain some control over the assessment process, to demonstrate more completely and in their own terms what they could do, and to set their own goals" (Liu, 2003, p. 23). Coombe and Barlow (2004) investigated the planning and implementation of two portfolio assessment initiatives at two tertiary institutions in the UAE. The two authors argued in favour of using reflective portfolios as an alternative assessment of writing ability. They reckon that "Implemented appropriately, portfolio assessment with a reflective element is a type of assessment that is continuous, collaborative, multidimensional, grounded in knowledge, and authentic" (p. 7).

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<sup>24</sup> Carroll and Swain (1993) defined explicit negative feedback as "any feedback that overtly states that a learner's output was not part of the language-to-be-learned" (p. 361). This type of feedback does not necessarily include corrections, confirmation checks or requests for clarification.

In recent years, a number of studies have been directed to the use of electronic portfolio (as a medium for self-assessment) in L2 writing. It has been argued for example that due to the fact that Internet-based electronic portfolios are not constrained by time, “they can enhance peer and teacher feedback, two major components of portfolio assessment” (Hung, 2009, p. 132). In a study conducted by Yancey (2001), it has been suggested that learning management systems (LMS) facilitated sharing of portfolios between learners as well as with the instructor while the process of peer review benefited from structured electronic portfolios with preset requirements and online assessment tools available for giving feedback to peers. Gibson (2006) who reviewed the opportunities and constraints of electronic portfolios found that, on the one hand, electronic portfolios facilitated access to media resources and digital libraries, interactivity with varied audiences, links to an archive of artefacts that can be stored for future needs, and opportunities to link to social networking sites. On the other hand, he noted the limitations of technology for this type of assessment where the subtleties of face-to-face interactions are not well captured for example. This author nevertheless concluded that the creation of electronic portfolios “will cause new types of thinking, reflection, and expression” (p. 144).

Although the studies presented above are far from representing the whole research conducted on L2 writing, the quick overview realised can serve as evidence that, through a rich body of research conducted in various cultural, institutional, and disciplinary contexts, the field of L2 writing has grown and matured into an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. However, given the exploratory nature of most of studies conducted on L2 writing, there seems to be a need for more analytical studies because, as suggested by Matsuda et al. (2003), we probably have “to learn from the several case studies to form generalisations regarding effective practices and productive strategies” (p. 159).

### ***2. 3. Emerging challenges and eventual contribution of the present research***

With reference to the characteristics of L2 writers and their texts as presented in the section 2.1.2.2, there is considerable information describing how people compose in L2, the features of the texts produced for isolated writing tasks, etc., but, as suggested by Cumming and Riazi (2000), “We have very little information on how people actually learn to write in second languages or how teaching might influence this” (p. 57). Indeed, research in academic writing over the last two decades, in response to theoretical developments in social sciences, has been moving from corpus or functional views of the texts to views that “focus on the complex micro-contexts in which academic literacies are negotiated and renegotiated in terms of power relations between the participants” (Starfield, 2007, p. 875).

With regard to writing in L2, the trend looking at that complex social, institutional and interpersonal context of the writing activity has also been adopted. An amount of research conducted reflects now the influence of social practices models as is the case for a number of studies focusing on what happens when individual writers are working on texts in particular social environments such as academic disciplines (Paxton, Arend, Van Pletzen, Chihota & Archer, 2009; Archer, 2006; van Pletzen, 2006).

In fact, as suggested by Cumming and Riazi (2000), “research within educational programmes is necessary not only to account realistically for what occurs in learning and teaching practices but also to help to explain them” (p. 57). However, on observation of what has been done in terms of research on academic writing in English in different parts of the world, a gap still exists. Neither academic literacies nor writing across curriculum (WAC) models have managed to develop a dialogue with the global EAP or ESP community of second language research and teaching (Starfield, 2007; Cumming & Riazi, 2000) in order to enlighten the pervasive use of traditional models (i.e. skills approaches or deficit models) which may not represent the textual worlds students encounter on a daily basis (Lillis, 2001).

With regard to L2 writing research in the African context, as suggested by Asfaha, Beckman, Kurvers and Kroon (2009), there is “a notable lack of [L2 literacy] research carried out in the African context” (p. 351). These authors also note that in Africa issues of access to adequate resources in reading and second language acquisition are conspicuous while “L2 reading is particularly relevant in many African countries where the main language of education is English, often being the L2 or L3 of the students” (p. 351). The paucity of L2 literacy research in Africa has also been confirmed by Paran and Williams (2007) who noted a dearth of research on L2 literacy in African ex-colonial countries. Paran and Williams (ibid.) further remarked that the few studies conducted on the subject showed a low level of literacy proficiency as the “vast majority of primary school pupils were not able to read adequately in English, the sole or dominant language of instruction” (p. 3).

The current research is thus conceived with the objective of at least casting light on the literacy practices that are undertaken in the particular Rwandan ESL context where, as described in chapter 1, the limited English proficiencies of students together with the recent change in language policy constitute a big challenge to the intended development of academic writing in English. Results of the study conducted in such a complex ESL context will also help in exploring possibilities of an adapted dialogue between views of language and literacy as technology (based on specific linguistic and textual skills that students need) and views of language and literacy as social practices (focusing on how to help students negotiate their voice as authors in the complex interdisciplinary contexts in which their academic activities are conducted).

## **CHAPTER 3: Research methodology and design**

As stated by Yin (1989), “a research design is the logic that links the data to be collected to the initial questions of a study” (p.27). Thus, the research design for this study is the action plan for getting from the initial research questions to the data representing answers to the questions. Between the questions and the answers, a number of steps may be found, like the piloting of research instruments, the collection and analysis of data, etc. The logical sequence of the research design helps the researcher to ensure that the data collected constitute an adequate response to the initial questions (Yin, 1998). Further, “choosing a study design requires understanding the philosophical foundations underlying the type of research and your personality, attributes and skills, and becoming informed as to the design choices available to you in your paradigm” (Merriam, 1998, p. 1).

Thus, the research design for this study is envisaged in terms of the following:

- research strategy;
- data collection methods;
- data collection instruments and process;
- data sources;
- pilot study;
- timing in terms of when the instruments are administered;
- data analysis process;
- Trustworthiness/Validity of the data.

### ***3.1. Research strategy – A Qualitative Case Study***

Saunders et al. (2000) suggest that a research strategy is “a general plan of how you will go about answering the research question(s) you have set” (p.92). The research strategy undertaken for the current research is based on a qualitative case study. In fact, qualitative research is described as “inquiry in which researchers collect data in

face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.315).

Qualitative designs use methods that are distinct from those used in quantitative designs. Yet, this does not mean that qualitative designs are to be regarded as less systematic than quantitative designs. One of the basic differences between the two is that qualitative designs emphasise gathering data on naturally occurring phenomena which are generally interpreted in terms of the meanings that people assign to the concerned phenomena<sup>25</sup>. Most of data from qualitative design are also presented in the form of words rather than numbers and, in general, the researcher has to use a variety of methods which help achieve a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. This is the reason why various methods are used for the present study.

As for a qualitative case study, Merriam (1998) defines the latter as “an intensive holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 27). According to Merriam (ibid.), such a qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning in context. Thus, in the framework of the present study, an in-depth description is given of a single phenomenon – teaching of *the Written English I* module – in a specific higher education institution. Such a description is meant to facilitate insight into the nature of the phenomenon being explored. Moreover, ‘meaning in context’ is relevant to this study as the outcomes will particular concern the specific context investigated.

Thus, the researcher played the role of participant observer. That is, an observer who changes his/her role from that of an outsider to that of an active participant in the process under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Jorgensen, 1989). The researcher created classroom roles for the sole purpose of data collection. Besides, it is worth noting that the participant observation as conducted was eventually a combination of particular data collection strategies: limited participation as the researcher took field notes by spending more time as an observer than a participant, field

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<sup>25</sup> “Qualitative research is first concerned with understanding social phenomena from participants’ perspectives” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.315).

observation, interviewing, and document collection. The researcher's hope was that the participant observation would enable him to obtain "people's perceptions of events and processes expressed in their actions and expressed as feelings, thoughts, and beliefs" (McMillan & Schumacher 2006, p.347). Further, participant observation technique was deemed relevant following the fact that it "allows corroboration between what individuals think they are doing and what the researcher thinks they are doing based on data" (McMillan & Schumacher, *ibid.*, p. 348).

With regard to the unit(s) of analysis, Miles and Huberman (2001) remark that "By contrast [with a quantitative 'case'], a qualitative 'case' may range widely in definition from individuals to roles, groups, organizations, programmes and cultures" (p.29). This means for example that a process of qualitative inquiry can apply to an individual, a group or even a programme. The conceptualisations and pedagogical practices to be investigated in this study apply to a specific academic programme at NUR - the Written English I Module - which consequently constitutes the main unit of analysis.

Concerning the research context, the latter is related to a single-site study in which the object to be explored constitutes a "bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). As Stake (in McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 27) points out, "a case can be selected because of its uniqueness or used to illustrate an issue". McMillan and Schumacher (*ibid.*) remark that selection of a particular case allows the research problem to be focused on a particular context. So, the present study has not been designed to generalise results to different populations. The case study methodology used was decided rather to illustrate the issue of teaching academic writing to first year university students in a particular context of English as second language. It is indeed a study inscribed within an illustrative perspective regarding the way academic literacy is understood and taught. Thus, findings are expected to highlight the meaning of the case and, hence, the learning about the issue investigated.

### **3.1.1. Pilot study at the University of the Witwatersrand**

The term pilot study usually refers to a preliminary study constituting a “small scale version, or trial run, done in preparation for the major study” (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001, p. 467). A pilot study can also be the pre-testing or ‘trying out’ of the research instruments with the purpose of improving them (Baker, 1994). The latter was the main purpose of a pilot study conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) between August and September 2010 with intention of checking the appropriateness of the data collection procedures envisioned. The exercise was at the same time viewed as an opportunity for additional insights likely to lead to improvement of the research process in general. It consisted in administering the research instruments with participants made of students and lecturers from Wits University.

In fact, the main study was due to be conducted in Rwanda and directed to the teaching of academic writing to first year university students. However, as similar activities are carried out at Wits (see Nyiratunga, 2007), it was judged useful to conduct a pilot study with lecturers and students from Wits University. As meant to be the case in the main study, the pilot study was based on a qualitative approach but was limited to classroom observation and interviews<sup>26</sup>.

#### **3.1.1.1. Classroom observation**

Classroom observation was intended to check out feasibility of such an activity (i.e. classroom observation) with regard to potential constraints that may affect the process such as participants’ reactions/attitudes, logistical problems, etc. Thus, two classroom observation sessions were arranged with two volunteer lecturers. The sessions consisted in participation of the researcher in classroom activities where he could take notes and record participants’ interactions on a voice recorder.

The first observation session was conducted on 03 August 2010 in a class of 42 students who were working on presentation of written research report. The second

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<sup>26</sup> The document analysis technique was not conducted as it seemed to require too much time and likely to raise some more complicated ethical issues.



observation session took place on 16 August 2010. It was in the continuity with the previous one, and coincided with presentations of research projects by different groups of students. Even though the class activity was not directly oriented to writing, the researcher could observe certain realities likely to inform further steps of the research envisioned. This is for example some attitudes and declarations uncovering conceptualisations on student academic writing by the lecturer and students. The session was also a valuable assessment of the researcher's ability of note-taking while, at the same time, observing events and interactions in classroom.

In short, the two observation sessions gave place to further knowledge with regard to field work. The researcher got awareness for example of the fact that a skilful behaviour is needed to gain trust and confidentiality from participants as students participants seemed to adopt a reserved attitude at the sight of an observer who was taking (field-) notes. Further, some missing details on the session observed at the end of the first observation helped the researcher to become aware of the necessity to acquire details regarding participants, activities or events involved in order to gain a sense of the actual context, which would also help for data analysis.

Some details regarding logistics were also judged important as some technical problems related to operation of the voice recording device occurred. This was mainly due to time management which did not allow a timely availability of the device.

The pilot study also allowed the researcher to know that arrangement of contact with principal actors in advance is necessary as it allows information on identities, routines and social system of the site. This said, access to the site is not a guarantee of access to information as one lecturer who had accepted to be observed changed her mind at the last minute for personal conveniences. The same problem occurred with regard to student participants some of whom decided otherwise after saying yes to an interview.

### 3.1.1.2. Interviews

Interview sessions organized at Wits were primarily aimed at checking appropriateness of the interview questions designed. As is the case for the main study, the interviews were geared to lecturers and students involved in the teaching and learning of academic writing. So, the questionnaires had to be administered to pilot study participants in the same way as they would be administered in the main study, apart from the fact that they were applied to a limited number of participants.

Indeed, while the two members of academic staff contacted participated in the interviews, a sampling operation was necessary for students who had to participate in the interviews. So, as a limited number of students was needed, student participants were to be selected with reference to different characteristics regarded as likely to explain student's performances in academic writing. These characteristics were mainly socio-linguistic background and academic background (Lei, 2008). Selection based on such categories led to a purposeful sampling of student participants for the interview<sup>27</sup>. So, four students representing different profiles in terms of socio-linguistic background and academic background were selected and interviewed.

Participants were briefed about all aspects of the research before participation. They were requested to answer the interview questions as designed and, at the end of every interview session, to provide feedback regarding ambiguities and/or possible difficult questions. This is what was done especially with regard to the draft interview questions geared to lecturers where comments from one of the two lecturer-participants led to a re-wording and change of order for some questions. Further, the researcher endeavoured to transcribe the interview answers, and a reading through the transcripts of interviews helped to have an insight into the level of clarity of questions and, particularly, into the way of using interview technique

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<sup>27</sup> For richness of information to be obtained, the researcher managed to make sure that all student profiles (with regard to the socio-linguistic background) were represented in the chosen sample. Willingness to participate in an in-depth interview was also an important consideration in identifying student participants.

such as to listen carefully to the interviewee's answers in order to be able to place probes that are needed and at the right moment.

Thus, some problems were revealed. For example, one of the questions in the draft interview for students was judged not to be clear enough. This was the question "Can you understand when you have successfully achieved the writing requirements in a piece of writing? If yes, describe. If not, why?" Different answers referring rather to the "understanding" of marker's feedback demonstrated the necessity for the researcher to specify the stage of the writing process concerned. It then became clear that the interviewee needed to know that the question was referring to the early stage of the writing process when the student is still working on his/her draft. Thus, additional explanations to the question (in a form of 'probes' or sub-questions) were judged necessary to guide the interviewees who, as planned, are comprised of first year students.

In general, the pilot study conducted at Wits provided additional knowledge likely to improve the whole research process. This was also extended to methodological aspects of the study. For example, from student participants' answers to the interview questions, the researcher became aware that, in addition to the geographical area of origin or the social background, the student' academic orientation in previous schooling may be an important factor for success or difficulty in academic writing. Such a point was seen as meant to have an impact on the data collection process, and was taken into account for sampling of student participants in the main study whereby student participants were selected on basis of both their socio-linguistic and educational backgrounds. The pilot study also seemed to confirm an initial assumption that the student's socio-linguistic background can explain performances and/or easiness in academic writing, as student participants from advantaged schooling background tended to be more satisfied with the writing course investigated and its outcomes.

Some other lessons have also been learned from the pilot study. The list below provides examples:

- To strive to build trust with participants right from the start of the process, as some student participants seemed reluctant to openly voice their problems for fear of appearing judgmental toward their lecturers;
- To ask for the participant's personal details before the actual interview session;
- To hold the voice recorder close to the interviewee in order to ensure quality for the recording;
- To clearly introduce the interview topic/issue to every interviewee;
- To ask a question clearly in order to avoid untimely disruptions of the interviewee;
- To have a full mastery of the interview content in order to know how and when to introduce necessary sub-questions and/or probes...;
- To immediately write down reflections and commentary on issues which emerge during the field-work process.

### **3.1.2. Access to the research site and establishment of first contacts**

Obtaining permission to use the research site was not an easy task. The process started with the procedure of applying for a permission from the National University of Rwanda to have access to the research site. The first application addressed to the Vice-Rectorate in charge of academic affairs was referred to the Research Commission of the university to be examined. In response, the latter required not only the respect of its 'Ethics Operational Guidelines and Procedures' but also a considerable amount of money as remuneration for the members of a special committee in charge of examining the application. All this process and the bureaucracy entailed led the researcher to miss one week of the planned classroom observation period.

Once the permission granted, the first 3 days of the first week<sup>28</sup> on the site were related to the establishment of rapport and trust, and the building of reciprocal relations with the group to be observed. The researcher then managed to obtain basic information related to the course to be investigated such as the timeline for the teaching process, a copy of the Module Description document, an idea of which lecturer was in charge of which component of the course, etc. The interviewing and recording procedures were also adjusted to the site and the persons involved. This period also allowed the researcher to negotiate which would be his role in the classroom as observer, and to gain a sense of the context for purposeful sampling with student participants.

### **3.1.3. Sampling**

Concerning the sample size, it is worth keeping in mind that this is a qualitative case study and, as McMillan and Schumacher (2006) point out, “the insights generated from qualitative inquiry depend more on the information richness of the cases and the analytical capabilities of the researcher than on the sample size” (p.322). The study used a purposeful sampling strategy which, in contrast to probabilistic sampling such as simple random or stratified sampling, “is selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth” (Patton, 2002, p.242). The researcher looked in fact for information-rich key participants who were selected according to the information likely to be obtained from them.

As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p.319), ‘probability sampling procedures such as simple random or stratified sampling may be inappropriate when (a) generalisability of the findings is not the purpose; (b) only one or two sub-units of a population are relevant to the research problem; (c) the researchers have no access to the whole group from which they wish to sample; or (d) statistical sampling is precluded because of logistical and ethical reasons’ (p.319). So, as generalisability of the findings is not the purpose in the present study, the purposeful sampling strategy was applied to the site selection as well as to the selection of the students who took part in the interviews. As for lecturer-

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<sup>28</sup> The course took place every Thursday.

participants, all three members of the teaching team participated in the investigation. The limited number of the lecturers was compensated by a prolonged time spent on the field by the researcher. That is, the researcher was continually returning to the same participants with the purpose of 'checking veracity' for the information collected.

Concerning the site selected, the choice was made according to the suitability of the case for the research problem and purpose which are related to the analysis of lecturers' conceptualisations and practices regarding teaching of academic writing in the ESL Rwandan context. Then, the site selected is one in which these aspects are likely to be significant because of the typicality of NUR for HE institutions in Rwanda. In fact, NUR as a HE institution is the oldest, the largest, and the most diversified in terms of possibilities of academic options in Rwanda. It is then the most likely to stand as a valid representative of what is going on in the national system of HE. It is also worth noting that some reasons related to feasibility for the researcher's resources of time and mobility contributed to motivate the choice for the site.

### ***Selection of participants***

As the module was offered by a team of lecturers, three members of the FAMSS academic staff in charge of the module were the main focus of investigation. A group of 86 first year students, to whom the module was geared for the academic year 2011, also participated in the study for the purposes of triangulation of the data obtained from the lecturers.

Thus, due to the limitation in number of the academic staff members involved in the study, all the three lecturers in charge of the module took part in the investigation which involved also the Director of Quality Unit at NUR. As for the student participants, the socio-linguistic or educational backgrounds, as well as the willingness to participate, were the primary considerations in identifying participants for the interviews.

As for the researcher's dual role as participant and researcher, it helped him to build an empathising social relationship with the participants. Indeed, the researcher who had initially adopted a role of mere observer was progressively involved in the classroom activities. He was for example initiated in the actual classroom activities through distributing teaching handouts to students. He was also led to participate in the classroom interactions following lecturers' induction as he was sometimes asked to give testimony on academic literacy practices based on his personal experience. Such limited roles manifestly helped to create an atmosphere of trust and, over time, one could really feel that both the lecturers and students became more and more accustomed to being observed. This type of posture acquired by the researcher led the participants to feel in their natural context and, therefore, to be less affected by the presence of an outsider observer.

#### **3.1.4. Data collection methods and instruments**

Merriam (1998) suggests that "Interviewing, observation and analysing [...] are central to qualitative research" (p.2). In the present study, the data collection process used document analysis, classroom observations, and interviews as data collection methods. As qualitative research is interactive (i.e. a face-to-face research) which requires a relatively extensive amount of time to systematically observe, interview, and record processes as they occur naturally, such a condition was met through the process of data collection conducted throughout the course. Indeed, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) remark that data collection is "meant to continue until the logical termination of a naturalistic event or until the situation changes so dramatically that the site is not relevant for the research focus" (p.347). So, for the present study, the time duration for data collection was the entire three-month period (from February to April 2011) during which the Written English I Module was taught for the academic year 2011 in the Faculty of Arts, Media and Social Sciences of NUR.

Data collection strategies<sup>29</sup> focused on understanding of the experience under investigation with a particular attention to what it meant to participants. Further, in order to increase validity of findings, the researcher used a multi-method strategy assuming that “any data can be corroborated during data collection” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 340). Indeed, as McMillan and Schumacher (ibid.) suggest, “the core of seeking and corroborating different perceptions lies in obtaining data from multiple data sources – different persons in different contexts at various times” (p.348). That is why, without necessarily interfering as field worker, the researcher strove to seek different views about the process from a number of participants for accuracy and for confirmation.

#### **3.1.4.1. Document analysis**

Documents are part of artefacts constituting tangible manifestations of people’s experience, actions, and values. Thus, an analysis of different documents related to the design and the daily management of the module was undertaken. These documents included institutional and administrative documents (i.e. policy and guidelines) regarding student writing and literacy practices in general. Samples of students’ writing, written feedback on students’ work, handouts on ‘essay’ writing, assignment guidelines, anecdotal comments from lecturers, etc. were also collected and analysed.

Analysis of this kind of documents provided information related to the institutional discourse on student writing, and the ways in which the pedagogical ‘regulation’ works with regard to the process of meaning making through student texts (i.e. writing viewed as a ‘skill’ or as a social practice.). Thus, the researcher was acquainted with the type of assumptions underpinning the existing texts, the nature of the pedagogical mediation suggested (e.g. remedial stigma or not, based on social practices or not), the degree of openness (or clarity) of working instructions/guidance, the status of the assessment criteria, the type of feedback,

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<sup>29</sup> The term ‘strategies’ is opposite to procedures, and is referring to “sampling and data collection techniques that are continuously being refined throughout the data collection process to increase data validity” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 340).



etc. Typical documents obtained were analysed according to the technique of content analysis (Neuman, 2006). Indeed, this technique suggests a systematic record and analysis of a document content taking account of the context of its production and conditions in which it has been produced. This was applied to the students' scripts, for example, and could inform the researcher about what was the feedback genre used by lecturers or what have been the student writer's identity/status, and the relationships between him/her and the lecturer. Handouts prepared for teaching sessions could, for example, provide evidence of 'conceptualisations' of different lecturers involved in the module according to the subject area they teach in<sup>30</sup>. The same kind of analysis was applied to documents related to the institutional policy and/or procedures on academic literacy, and it provided information on the institutional interpretations and, hence, potential implications on academic writing practices.

#### **3.1.4.2. Observation of the teaching and learning process**

The primary interest of the present study was based on participant observation which, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), implies "a combination of particular data collection strategies: limited participation, field observation, interviewing, and artefact collection" (p. 346). Participation was, as pointed out previously, limited to the necessary interaction with participants for the researcher to systematically obtain data without being obtrusive. The researcher made use of field observation<sup>31</sup>, and interviewing in this context was conducted in a form of informal conversations with some participants<sup>32</sup>. As for artefact collection, they were particularly related to documents that were continuously collected during the whole period of the researcher's presence in the site. Thus, informal conversations and artefact gathering served as corroborative data collection strategies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 332).

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<sup>30</sup> According to the modular system adopted at NUR, every module has been subdivided into different subject areas (or disciplinary contexts), and a specific lecturer is assigned to every area.

<sup>31</sup> With reference to the "technique of directly observing and recording without interaction" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.346).

<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that focus group sessions were also organised with students.

The observation process took the form of classroom ethnography. That is, where the field work involves “extended observations of the group [...] in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants” (Creswell, 2003, p. 68). Such a process was meant to allow the researcher to have an insight into the nature of pedagogical and assessment practices. Although the interactive classroom context is complex for one to observe or record everything, the researcher strove to capture the maximum he could during his stay in the field. He also relied on the prolonged presence in the field. The observation process was mainly guided by the research problem, the conceptual framework, and the contextual features of the interactions.

Thus, data were recorded as field notes or observations of what occurred in the teaching and learning context during the period the researcher was in the field. The observation sessions conducted allowed the researcher to identify, for example, what kind of interactions were established (i.e. knowledge display approach, normative instructions, collaborative creation of power, etc.); what kind of pedagogical mediation was undertaken and, hence, how the meaning making was enabled to take place (i.e. degree of authenticity or availability of meaningful practices), and through what procedure in terms of pacing<sup>33</sup>, sequencing, etc.; to what extent rules and conventions related to academic writing were made explicit to students; how lecturers developed opportunities in which students could demonstrate new practices embedded in their own goals and values (i.e. student empowerment through respect of his/her identity and ownership of his/her written text); etc.

### **3.1.4.3. Interviews**

For both teaching staff and students, qualitative interviews essentially based on interview guide approach were privileged. That is, “topics are selected in advance, but the researcher decides the sequence and wording of the questions during the

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<sup>33</sup> In some institutions, special sessions are organised in order to diagnose errors and provide a quick ‘cure’ through “a simple set [of guidelines] on essay writing” (Lillis, 2001, p.23).

interview” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.351). In other words, there was no standardised format for questions. The researcher counted rather on a conversational tone - characterised by probes<sup>34</sup> and pauses – to ensure the naturalness and relevancy of the response.

Conversational and situational interviews are indeed likely to foster valid interview data. As Mason (2002) states, qualitative interviews allow for social argument to construct “depth, nuance, complexity and roundness in data” (p.65). The use of open-ended questions thus created possibility of alternative views and access to data that would not be accessible in other ways. Information obtained from observation sessions could also be verified. Two types of data collection instruments were used for the interviews: an interview guide (a semi-structured interview) and post-observation session discussions between the researcher and the participants. These discussions were mainly based on clarifications about certain teaching episodes or activities observed, and were conducted in a form of informal conversations.

For the teaching staff, an individual interview was conducted with the lecturer, every time it was possible after each teaching session, for further explanations about what had been noticed during the observation process. The interviews appeared as complements to the information obtained during the classroom observation, but also allowed the researcher to know what the lecturers’ beliefs were with regard to student writing and academic literacy. Lecturers’ perceptions concerning teaching writing and related practices were, for example, investigated: what they believe is entailed in the teaching of academic writing to first year university students (in terms of skills and, hence, teaching and assessment strategies involved).

For the students interviewed, sampling was based on the richness of information to be obtained. Thus, the researcher strove to make sure that all categories of students

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<sup>34</sup> “Interview probes elicit elaboration of detail, further explanations, and clarification of responses” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 354).

(in terms of socio-linguistic and/or educational background) were represented in the sample selected. Indeed, as already mentioned, the Rwandan sociolinguistic context following the massive return in the country of 'ancient' refugees gave place to what has been termed 'bilingual' educational system where Francophone schools existed alongside Anglophone schools. This created a quite tricky situation at university where, since the adoption in 2008 of English as the only medium of instruction at all levels of education, students with a French speaking background merged with classmates with an English speaking background. The criterion related to the language background was of interest for the researcher and it was taken into account for research sampling.

Thus, for the whole group of 86 students, 20% of student participants (i.e. 16 students) were purposefully selected<sup>35</sup> and interviewed. They were composed as follows:

- 8 students with a French speaking school background;
- 8 students with an English speaking school background.

It is worth mentioning that for the composition of each of the two groups above, another variable related to students' academic performances was taken into account. That is, with the help from the lecturers involved in the module, half of student-participants in each group were taken from the category of students considered as strong performers while another half were from the category considered as poor performers.

The interviews with students allowed the researcher to be acquainted with students' working strategies: whether they understand when they have successfully achieved the writing requirements in a piece of writing; the extent to which they are empowered to bring their own identity into their essays; possibility of a gap between academic staff expectations and students' interpretations of what is involved in student writing, etc.

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<sup>35</sup> Willingness to participate in an in-depth interview was also an important consideration in identifying student participants.

In addition, answers to the interview questions provided an insight into the teaching practices related to the module investigated, because, as suggested by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), "the individuals' perceptions and interpretations of their own experience can provide explanations for behaviour". Students' accounts based on self-report helped, for example, to elicit "evidence for differences between staff and students' understanding of the writing process at levels of epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge rather than at level of technical skill..." (Lea & Street, 1998, p.3).

The interview sessions were audio-recorded, but the researcher was also taking notes which helped him formulate questions and probes. Nonverbal communications (such as hesitations, sarcastic or ironic comments...) were also noted to facilitate data analysis. Immediately after interview sessions, the researcher endeavoured to complete the handwritten notes and to transcribe the audio-tape. Initial insights and comments were also established to enhance the search for meanings.

In general, the researcher strove to write an elaboration of each interview session – the interviewee's reactions, additional information, extensions of interview meanings, etc. In general, for every 30 minutes of interviewing, the researcher tried to allow around one hour of further work to produce the final record or transcript and the additional elaborations. This was indeed a critical time for the researcher to undertake a process of self-reflections on his role and his relations with participants in order to ensure validity of the information collected.

The table below represents a summary of the research design for the study.

**Table 2: Summary of the research design**

Research Strategy	Qualitative Case Study			
	Document analysis	Observation	Interview	
<i>Data collection instruments/process</i>	Content analysis process	Audio-recorder;  Observation	Interview sheet;  Audio-recorder	Post-observation session

		report/notes		discussions
<b>Data source</b>	Institutional & administrative documents; students' written work; lecturers' written feedback; handouts; assignment guidelines, etc.	Lecturer-student interaction	Academic staff; Students	Academic staff
<b>When administered</b>	Beginning before the period of observation sessions	During classroom activities (and for the entire teaching term)	Before and during the period of observation sessions	After every observation session
<b>Trustworthiness/Validity</b>	Concrete evidence allowing check against biases	The observer's presence as authentication for the findings	Triangulation	Peer examination

### 3.1.5. Handling and organisation of data collected

For the purpose of data organization, collected data, such as participant observation field notes, interview transcripts, and researcher's notes about official documents, were dated and provided with details related to the context of occurrence (such as the classroom scene, teaching episode, participants, etc.).

Regarding description of data, the researcher strives to make a narrative description of at least four elements as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p.62): (a) participants described as individuals who display different physical, emotional, and intellectual characteristics in various situations; (b) incidents which form a narration about 'social' scenes, similar to telling story; (c) language<sup>36</sup> used by participants (during their interaction with both the social environment and the investigator). For instance, participants' words to name incidents, locations, objects,

<sup>36</sup> Language is referring to different types of communication such as verbal and nonverbal expressions, drawings, symbols, etc.

special events and processes; and (d) participants' 'meanings' which are people's views of reality or how they understand their world. These meanings are perceived through communication when someone gives explanations about a particular event.

### **3.1.6. Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is described as "a process of interim analysis, coding and categorising, and pattern seeking for plausible explanations" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.364). Interim analysis was realised during data collection and mainly served (a) to make data collection decisions and (b) to identify recurring themes. During the data collection period, some strategies were undertaken including the following:

- To write reflective comments in the field notes and interview notes to identify possible themes, interpretations, further questions, etc.
- To write summaries of observation and of interviews after each visit, in relation to what has been learnt about the research problem, to the important details that may be related to the emerging themes, etc.

In fact, regular interim analyses were realised throughout the data collection period to keep track of changes in data collection strategies and emerging information.

Thus, the following analytical techniques were used:

- Scrutinising the data collected at every step for whatever possible ideas that they may contain. The main purpose here was to describe what was happening or what participants were saying;
- Looking for recurring ideas or meanings that may become themes. It is worth reminding that themes were expected to come from conversation with participants, as well as from recurring activities, feelings, etc. Research commentaries noted during the observation sessions and interview elaborations were also used for identifying themes.

Data collected through document analysis, classroom observation and interviews were described and categorized in terms of typical patterns or recurrent

characteristics identified such as the “form features of the written text”, a “deficit-driven view of student academic writing”, “skills approach” in teaching, etc. Results were interpreted with reference to existing literature and the theoretical framework established. In fact, “what an [analyst] using a case study to support an argument does is to show how general principles deriving from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of particular circumstances” (Lea & Street, 1998, p.3).

Thus, the analytical criteria, likely to inspire initial codes or categories, were derived from the concepts informing the study, as reflected by the research questions and, at a certain level, by the interview guides. The institutional discourse regarding the teaching and learning of academic writing was analysed, for example, with reference to the critiques of the structures and practices that govern literacy activities in HE institutions (see Ivanič, 2004; Street, 2001; Cumming, 2001; Lillis, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998). Lecturers’ understandings and expectations of what is involved in academic writing were looked at through the lens of the theoretical perspectives focusing on how rhetorical conventions of academic discourse are perceived and interpreted by lecturers and students (Lillis, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998). Likewise, the theoretical perspectives or models on how the meaning making is enabled to take place (see Lillis, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998; NLG, 1996) helped to critically analyse the pedagogical strategies used by lecturers. The results of analysis also benefited from a triangulation with students’ accounts of their experience with academic writing tasks.

### **3.1.6.1. Organising, coding and categorizing**

To facilitate the readers’ understanding of the research results, the latter are presented descriptively. Thus, a detailed description of the case studied and its context is made. The researcher has identified relevant information as obtained through the data collection process. He worked to transcribe data, to code, categorise, and to establish patterns<sup>37</sup> among the emerging themes. Categories were tentative and flexible in the beginning as they were meant to be refined throughout

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<sup>37</sup> A pattern is a relationship among categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.373).



the process of analysis. As the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to make general statements about relationships among categories, these relationships were established through examining the data in various ways. Thus, the researcher engaged in a thorough search among codes, categories, and provisional patterns for confirmation. An inductive mode of thinking was used whereby the researcher endeavoured to work back and forth between the themes and the rough data to determine how well the data could illuminate the research problem.

In fact, as Mcmillan and Schumacher (2006) suggest, “It is almost impossible to interpret data unless one is also organising them” (p.367). Thus, information from the coding phase were organised into a “coding paradigm” (see Creswell, 2003, p. 161) with reference to the existing theories on academic writing. That is, with reference to the themes, concepts, and categories broached by theoretical models and research in the field. These categories are indeed suggested in the section related to research problem; they were also, at a certain extent, embedded in the research questions, as well as in the research instruments.

Ultimately, conclusions about conceptualisations and teaching practices were drawn in terms of patterns and how they compare and contrast with the existing literature. A ‘pattern matching technique’ (Neuman, 2006) was applied. This means that in order to clarify or characterize the case observed, the researcher has been matching the information obtained with the patterns or concepts derived from the existing literature. Thus, conceptualisations and teaching practices investigated are examined in terms of not only the themes identified throughout the data but also what is missing with reference to the theoretical framework established.

### **3.1.6.2. Techniques of pattern seeking used**

To illuminate the existing patterns, some strategies were used, and they include the following ones:

- a. Enhancing data trustworthiness

In order to seek patterns among existing categories, the researcher endeavoured to take into account the solicited versus unsolicited character of data. Solicited data are

obtained as the result of a specific request for information or as the result of an action undertaken by the researcher. These were for example made of information obtained through interviews with participants where the researcher had to try his utmost to gain participant's confidence for the sake of data reliability. The researcher also tried to assess factors likely to exert an influence on participants in the surrounding (e.g.: organisation of a focus group interview for students, waiting for a suitable moment to interview a member of the academic staff who did not seem to be willing to be interviewed). The influence of the presence of an outsider inquirer on the field was also to be taken into consideration. This is why the researcher endeavoured to take on some role in the classroom for the sake of trust from participants. Unsolicited data were those obtained without any action from the researcher. They could be recorded as an event or an incidental piece of information when the researcher managed to catch an interesting pronouncement from a participant or come across interesting documents during his stay on the field.

#### b. Triangulation

To find regularities in the data, the researcher used triangulation. The latter is defined as "the cross-validation among data source, data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical scheme" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.374). Thus, different sources, situations, and methods were compared to check constancy of patterns. For example, themes found during field observation were compared with data from interviews and documents analysis.

#### c. Use of discrepant and negative evidence

Regularity of patterns was also checked out by searching for discrepant and negative evidence among data sources. While a "Negative evidence comprises a situation, a social scene, or a participant's view that contradicts a pattern", discrepant evidence refers to a variation of a pattern (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.374). Thus, once a pattern was identified, the researcher endeavoured to find possible evidence that might contradict or present its variation. This was intended to check out some particular characteristics of the process investigated.

This type of check out of patterns was also realised through discussion of preliminary findings with knowledgeable people particularly during the different PhD weekend presentations organised by the Wits School of Education.

### ***3.2. Validity of the data collected***

As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2006), "Claims of validity rest on data collection and analysis techniques (...) and refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world (p. 324). According to the authors, validity addresses these questions: do researchers actually observe what they think they see? Do inquirers actually hear the meanings that they think they hear? In other words, validity of qualitative designs is the degree to which the interpretations have the same meaning for both participants and the researcher. Thus, the researcher and the participants come to a common agreement on the description or composition of events, and especially the meanings of these events. In addition, it is obvious that validity of data can be ensured when events unfold naturally and the participants act in typical fashion in the researcher's presence. Because the research role affects the type of data collected, the primary role and the various roles assumed in data collection are to be stated in the study.

This is the reason why, the researcher's role was negotiated with the participants before he was allowed into the classroom. The researcher talked with the lecturers about what was to be his role during the whole period of observation. The role of participant observer was agreed upon between both sides, and the lecturers expressed their willingness to consider the researcher as a collaborator and colleague.

Further, other strategies were considered to enhance validity of the study. These include the use of different data collection techniques (document analysis, direct and audio-tape observations, and interviews). The combination of all these techniques permitted information obtained through one technique to benefit from a

process of validation through the other techniques. Data collected through interviews were for example compared with data obtained through observation and document analysis.

In addition, participants' verbatim accounts were also analysed: from the interview with participants, the content of their discourse was systematically described and analysed according to the technique of content analysis mentioned above. This allowed availability of some informative indicators such as consistency or contradiction between what an individual (or a group of individuals) could state and what his/her real behaviour is according to direct observation. Recurrence of some information also helped the researcher to have an accurate idea of what was really happening.

The researcher relied as well on participants' review of data syntheses. That is, after a series of interviews with participants, interview's recordings were heard by the researcher, and participants were asked to make comments, additions or precisions on the data obtained from them. Then, the data obtained from each interviewee were analysed for a comprehensive integration of findings.

It is also worth mentioning other strategies undertaken to enhance reflexivity during the field-work period. These include a field research journal for keeping the researcher's ideas and personal reflections during the field work. This field research journal kept chronological record of any event and persons involved in the field work. It also served to document any decision made and assessment of trustworthiness of each data set. Beside notes taken on a continuous basis in field work, the records mainly consisted in assessment of the quality of the data, and suggesting questions and tentative interpretations. This field research journal helped ensuring a form of audibility for the data analysis as the data management and decision making process was continuously recorded.

Techniques to enhance quality of the research instruments included also interview transcripts critiques by some experienced interviewers at Wits School of Education. A series of discussions held with the research supervisor may also be mentioned as a link in the chain of data validity enhancement. It is also in the same purpose of enhancing quality of data collection instruments that “a field testing” of the research instruments, in a form of pilot study, had been carried out at the University of Witwatersrand where writing courses similar to Written English I are conducted.

### ***3.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS***

Anyone conducting research has responsibility, especially when dealing with human beings, to weigh benefits related to a certain scientific satisfaction and some ethical and legal considerations involving “affronts to human dignity and/or infringement on rights and welfare of the subjects” (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.142). The study thus strove to take into account principles of most concern to educators such as:

- **To secure informed consent from the participants:** explicit consent to carry out the study was obtained from the academic authority concerned. Then, a complete explanation about the intended use of data was provided and participants were required to give informed consent indicating that they would like to participate in the research.
- **To inform the participants of all aspects of the research before participation:** the researcher informed for example the participants that they had to be observed as well as what the observation objectives were. He made sure that the research report did not single out individuals. The researcher also informed the participants that the data obtained from the document analysis, observation and interviews were to be treated with anonymity.
- **To create a protected environment that allows for freedom of speech and sharing of open and honest views:** a preparation period was set for the researcher to establish such an environment among all parts involved in

the study. The researcher's familiarity with the academic unit concerned and a number of its staff helped to such an end.

- **To hold anonymous information obtained about the participants:** Researcher strove to ensure protection of the individual's confidences from other persons in the setting as well as protection of participants from the general reading public. Thus, participants were told before they participate who will see the data. Anonymity was guaranteed by the fact of not directly linking data to individual subjects names; data were linked to participants by a secret code (a number or a letter).
- **To consider potential misinterpretations and misuses of the research:** results were subject to exchange and communication at various opportunities (e.g.: PhD weekends) in order to optimize their utilization and minimize any misunderstanding.

## **CHAPTER 4: Policy and institutional discourse about academic writing**

This chapter presents an analysis of the policy documents relating to language teaching in the Rwandan HE in general and the teaching of academic writing at NUR in particular. The analysis is intended to highlight discourses about academic writing as manifested in the policy documents concerned. Thus, a particular focus is on the *National Policy on Language Teaching in Higher Education* (NCHE, 2007a, henceforth NPLTHE), the *Policy on Language Teaching for the National University of Rwanda* (NUR, 2009), and the *Modules Description: Faculty of Arts and Humanities* (NUR, 2008, henceforth MD). References will also be made to other relevant texts such as the *General Academic Regulations* adopted by the NUR senate in 2008 for new undergraduate and master's programmes (NUR, 2009), the *National Qualification Framework for Higher Education Institutions* (NCHE, 2007c), and texts or public pronouncements published in the media.

In fact, as suggested by theorists of policy analysis, assumptions embodied in policy documents or proposals are rarely spelled out (see Hogwood, 2001; Hogwood & Gunn, 1984). That is why “analysis seeks to tease out those assumptions and examine the extent to which there is evidence to support them and the internal consistency of assumptions, as well as what appears to be missed out” (Hogwood, 2001, p. 61). In relation to the discourses of academic writing represented in policy documents, the analysis of language of policy can help uncover underpinning assumptions regarding (a) the view of literacy expressed, (b) the beliefs or assumptions about writing and learning to write – therefore the writing competence expected of students, and (c) the teaching approach(es) suggested in the documents<sup>38</sup>. Thus, the analysis undertaken attempts to make clear these three aspects with a special emphasis on the discourses of writing and learning to write

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<sup>38</sup> The terminology used in the analysis is borrowed from Ivanič (2004) who has proposed a framework which “can be used for identifying discourses of writing in data such as policy documents, teaching and learning materials, recording of pedagogic practice, interviews and focus groups with teachers and learners ...” (p. 220).

deployed in the official documents availed for the implementation of the Written English I module. The analysis also leads to a discussion about the existing gaps in the texts and possible alternatives to these gaps.

#### ***4.1. Discourses about academic writing represented in the NPLTHE***

As stated by the Rwandan National Council of Higher Education (NCHE, 2007a), the NPLTHE was devised with among other purposes to “bridge the Francophone-Anglophone divide and move towards a unified and reconciled nation” (p. 1). So, the version of the document available so far was mainly meant to address the issue of a bilingual education (French-English) in public institutions. But, as a government decision of late 2008 made English the only medium of instruction, the guidelines included in the document remain the only up-to-date references on the policy of language teaching in higher education and, therefore, are now only valid for English as medium of instruction. The NPLTHE is used as reference in the Rwandan public HE institutions, including at NUR where an adapted document of *Policy on Language Teaching for the National University of Rwanda* (NUR, 2009) has been approved by the university senate in 2009.

As stated in the NPLTHE, the policy aims “to ensure that students gain the language skills they need, and the languages are taught in the context of the academic disciplines and in parallel with subject study” (NCHE, 2007a, p. 1). Further, the NPLTHE emphasises the necessity of ensuring that students’ language proficiency is pushed to the level required not only for the expected academic tasks but also for the labour market. The NPLTHE states the following:

It is important that every student swiftly brings his or her grasp of [English] up to the level where they can participate in academic activities and learn from lectures. It is also important that graduates can be relied on to be at least competent at writing, reading and speaking [English] when they take up employment. (NCHE, 2007a, p.1)



Thus, one may not bypass a certain pragmatism the statement above is tinged with as it suggests to base the learning requirements on the demands of the academic activities students are invited to take on during their degree studies. This detail on learning target is important as it helps avoid the thoughtless tendency to call for development of competence of *Standard English* as is especially the case for some English-speaking contexts (see Sealey, 1999; Nayar, 1994). One of the pitfalls of prescriptions related to the priority to Standard English is that they emphasise explicit teaching of linguistic features of the target language to the detriment of the specific needs of the learners for whom Standard English is hard to achieve<sup>39</sup>.

Further, the statement is emphasising the necessity to provide learners with literacy they need for their future professional life. This is a typical view concerned with context and purpose for writing. With regard to the underpinning assumption about writing, this view draws a particular attention to the complex social interactions in what Ivanič (2004) calls the 'communicative event'. In fact, "the view that language is a matter of general social concern which education should address dates back to at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century" (Sealey, 1999, p. 84). But the issue of implications of the socio-cultural context for writing is particularly acute in today's world considered as a global village with an increasingly important local diversity.

According to Ivanič (2004), "the emphasis on the social practices in which the writing event is embedded means that this view of writing is also concerned with the broader socio-cultural context of writing: the social meanings and values of writing, and issues of power" (p. 234). Then, for a writing programme in English as 2<sup>nd</sup> language geared to students of higher education, it appears important to relate the pedagogical activities to the requirements of the social writing practices. As for

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<sup>39</sup> Note that Standard English, which is often presented as the common linguistic frame of reference for English language, is not necessarily an objectively selected form of English. The contested and elusive nature of what is commonly viewed as Standard English has been highlighted by Widdowson (1994) who pointed out that "the authority to maintain the standard language is (...) claimed by a minority of people who have the power to impose it" (p. 379). For this author, "The custodians of Standard English are self-elected members of a rather exclusive club" (p. 379).

the issue of power relations, it is very significant for the success of any writing class but may be delicate to address because, as pointed out by Lillis and Turner (2001), the literacy practices of higher education need to be located within a broader historical and epistemological framework as they reflect and enact “a powerful tradition relating to knowledge making and language” (p. 62). Evidence of this tradition is shown by Olson quoted by Lillis and Turner (2001):

The bias of written language towards providing definitions, making all assumptions and premises explicit, and observing the formal rules of logic produces an instrument of considerable power for building an abstract and coherent theory of reality. The development of this explicit, formal system accounts for the predominant features of Western culture and for our distinctive ways of using language and our distinctive modes of thought. (p. 62)

Thus, by its emphasis on students’ contextual needs in terms of academic disciplines, the goal set by the policy document appears as a response to the necessity for a language course to facilitate students’ ability of adapting their writing to specific requirements of the disciplinary contexts within which they need to produce their texts. Development of students’ abilities of meaning-making in fact gains from occurring in a disciplinary context because, as suggested by Halliday and Hassan (1989), “words ... get their meaning from activities in which they are embedded, which again are social activities with social agencies and goals” (p.5).

Although the overarching literacy practice of higher education, known as ‘essayist literacy’ (see Lillis, 2001) and based on a particular configuration of conventions, often makes it difficult for students to assume the authorship of their writing<sup>40</sup>, students need to be effectively involved in activities allowing them to develop their abilities of meaning making in their texts.

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<sup>40</sup> Through an assertion of their voice and identity.

However, matter of concern regarding the NPLTHE is the way in which the realistic targets set by the policy are not operationalised accordingly as discrepancies are perceptible between the goal set by the NPLTHE and the specific objectives presented in the document. This claim will be elaborated following three aspects: the views of language expressed in the NPLTHE, assumptions about writing and learning to write expressed in the NPLTHE, and the approaches to the teaching of writing reflected in the NPLTHE.

#### **a. Views of language expressed in the NPLTHE**

As already mentioned, some authors (see Fairclough, 1992; Ivanič, 1998) subscribed to a comprehensive view of language suggesting the existence of different dimensions or views of language which are differently involved or dealt with by any activity of text writing. These views are related to (a) the linguistic substance of language, or the ‘text’, including visual and material as well as linguistic characteristics of written text”, (b) the ‘cognitive processes and strategies’, and (c) the ‘social aspects of language production and reception’ which include the observable characteristics of the immediate social context (= event), and the socio-culturally available resources for communication (Ivanič, 2004, p.223-224). Ivanič (ibid.) presents a version of the above-mentioned dimensions in four layers which she regards as “salient for identifying discourses of writing and learning to write” (p. 222). These dimensions of language viewed as underpinning the activity of producing and understanding language are also supposed to be represented more or less explicitly in a policy text related to learning and teaching language, as is going to be demonstrated with regard to the NPLTHE.

The NPLTHE makes clear its aim to impart language skills needed by students, and to ensure that languages are taught within the disciplinary context. The idea of language skills needed by students can indeed mean different things to different people including in the case of students entering the Rwandan higher education where language skills needed may be viewed as depending on every generation of students because cohorts are constantly changing. But, with the second part of the statement which suggests to take account of the disciplinary context or the actual

purposes of language use, things get explicit. The main idea is that the teaching endeavour may be informed by various language practices, discourses and genres which characterise the academic context within which the teaching is taking place. Pedagogical choices responding to the requirements of the immediate social context and situation are to be called into action here. However, the NPLTHE does not seem to be entirely consistent with such logic as demonstrated in the lines below.

Under the provision for Level One<sup>41</sup>, the NPLTHE recommends to higher education institutions to establish specific programmes to help students develop abilities in:

- the basic language structure, so as to enable them develop an understanding<sup>42</sup> of spoken and written speech (sic);
- the use of the language in a variety of situations inside and outside the classroom;
- the use of conventions in academic writing and related requirements, and
- research skills, including paraphrasing, synthesizing, quoting, referencing and note-taking. (NPLTHE, p.3)

This is in fact a list of objectives which, in a certain way, is specifying the policy goal presented above. So, with the specificity as set out, the users can have a sense of what may constitute the learning and teaching content within the framework of each disciplinary context. On examination of the above-presented abilities, a 'skills-discourse' is fore-grounded. This is shown by the majority of the abilities proposed. Apart from the ability Nr 2 which is oriented to the use of the language in a variety of situations hence opening possibilities for different forms of pedagogical exploitation, the rest of the abilities suggested are directed to a series of discrete skills about language and particularly about writing.

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<sup>41</sup> Level 1 is the common level intended for all first year students with the purpose of implementing the National Language Policy.

<sup>42</sup> On assumption that, in terms of discourse features to be learned, what serves in textual comprehension (i.e. understanding) can also serve in textual production (i.e. writing).

One of the salient points brought to our knowledge is the mention of the 'basic language structure' which is inherently understood as based on a set of linguistic skills and rules for sound-symbol relationships and sentence construction (Ivanič, 2004). There is also the reference to the mastery of academic writing conventions (ability Nr 3) and research skills (ability Nr 4) which, as exemplified, are no more than a special emphasis on the writing conventions already mentioned as ability Nr 3. All this serves as a clear indication that the policy is making a special note about the skills approach focusing on "correct usage and adherence to conventions for the formal features of academic [language]" (Ivanič, 2004, p.228).

### **b. Assumptions about writing and learning to write expressed in the NPLTHE**

While the preceding section is related to the views of language embedded in the NPLTHE, the current section is related to assumptions about writing and learning to write as reflected in the NPLTHE. In fact, it is not always clear to find out what assumption on writing is reflected by a document whose objective is just to provide orientation about teaching of general language skills as is the case for the NPLTHE. So, the latter document is looked at, but specific beliefs about writing and learning to write are to be uncovered in the MD document which is particularly dealing with writing.

On examination of the NPLTHE, it is delicate to infer what assumption is represented in the document with regard to writing and learning to write. This is, as already said, because the document is just dealing with the policy of 'language' teaching and does not make specifications related to different areas of linguistic competences such as writing. Indeed, references to writing have been made for example where the authors talk about the "...aims to help students develop abilities in (...) the basic language structure, so as to enable them develop an understanding<sup>43</sup> of spoken and written speech (sic)" (NPLTHE, p.3). The perceptible assumption here is that the ability to (appropriately) decode a spoken and/or written text depends

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<sup>43</sup> On assumption that, in terms of discourse features to be learned, what serves in textual comprehension (i.e. understanding) can also serve in textual production (i.e. writing).

on possession of knowledge pertaining to language structure. With reference to the theoretical framework established for the current study, an inference can also be made that writing consists of “applying knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and syntactic patterns to construct a text” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 225). Then, the corresponding assumption about *learning* to write is also that “learning to write involves learning sound-symbol relationships and syntactic patterns” (Ivanič, *ibid.*).

Another instance where an assumption about writing and learning to write can be inferred is related to the learning objective presented as geared to helping students develop abilities in “*research skills*, including paraphrasing, synthesizing, quoting, referencing and note-taking”. As per the component parts exemplified for what is above-referred to as ‘research skills’ (i.e. paraphrasing, synthesizing, quoting, referencing and note-taking), the targeted skills just correspond to what is usually known as ‘academic writing abilities’ based on classical codes and conventions. Thus, given the activities suggested without mention of context of application or reference text type, an inference can be directly made that the authors are suggesting development of writing abilities through, among others, conventions related to “linguistic patterns and rules for sound-symbol relationships and sentence construction” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 227).

In fact, there is no doubt that the above-mentioned conventions are part of the required abilities for text writing, but it is worth noting that the suggestions of the NPLTHE are limited to mention of surface features which can, at the most, be perceived as extendable to mental and practical processes involved in composing text. There is no indication of the assumption that writing is a process of meaning construction or that the composed text may be located in the social context of its production: development of student ability to write texts which are appropriate to their disciplinary subjects for example.

With regard to the assumptions about writing and learning to write, these assumptions are not made clear enough in the NPLTHE. To get a sense of the underlying assumptions about writing and learning to write, one has to rely on what is suggested by some indirect statements made in the document as is the case for

the above-described perspective on language according to which language and literacy are regarded as autonomous skills which can be related to individual cognitive processes. This perspective is close to the assumption that writing is a matter of conveying ideas into words, and learning to write as a matter of learning discrete elements of language. Therefore, the writing problem and solution are envisaged as located at textual level.

### **c. Approaches to the teaching of writing reflected in the NPLTHE**

In contrast to the analysis made of the views of language and assumptions about writing and learning to write, this part related to approaches to the teaching of writing reflected in the policy documents is looking at the representational evidence of these approaches with a different lens. Thus, instead of focusing on any item or statement that seem to be consonant with a certain pedagogical discourse, the analysis is exploring particular clues availed in the document with the purpose of indicating the direction to be followed by the users in terms of pedagogical undertaking.

As indicated in chapter 3, approaches to student writing in higher education has been theorised by different authors (Lea & Street, 1998; Ivanič, 1998, 2004; Lillis, 2001, 2003). Thus, the general trend consists in establishing different teaching perspectives based on either the theories of language they encapsulate (see Ivanič, 1999) or their status within higher education and their relation to the official literacy discourse of higher education (see Lillis, 2001, 2003).

As for the Written English I module, its initiation was motivated by, among other reasons, the challenge based on the particular socio-linguistic context of Rwanda. Thus, a certain consistency can be expected between the teaching programme set out for the Written English I module and the NPLTHE which is supposed to have been designed on basis of the contextual requirements in terms of language proficiency for students entering into the Rwandan higher education institutions.

With reference to the goal of the NPLTHE in terms of learning requirements, the announced intention is to establish programmes meant to help students cope not

only with their 'academic activities' but also with the requirements of their professional life. Consequently, any pedagogical response is also expected to take into account the requirements of both the academic practices and professional activities after studies.

However, as demonstrated above, it is worth noting that whilst the policy goal emphasises a response to the requirements of the academic activities and personal development, statement of the learning objectives appears to restrict the act of learning to write to a series of skills pertaining to the abilities of using 'conventions of academic writing' and related skills such as 'quoting', 'referencing', 'paraphrasing'... That is, the NPLTHE seems to overlook the fact that learners will hardly develop writing competences they need for their academic and professional lives unless they are helped to develop their abilities of meaning making through practical and targeted activities based on production of various texts.

Thus, the 'skills discourse', as upheld by the NPLTHE emphasising "abilities in (...) the use of conventions in academic writing and related requirements" evokes a questionable orientation with regard to academic writing. Yet, the mastery of conventions of academic writing is an important capital for success in the academic activities expected of students, but access to the literacy practices of higher education and related requirements by the new university entrants requires a more pragmatic pedagogy involving practising writing activities based on a purpose-driven communication in a contextualised setting. Thus, the policy goal is faced with a great challenge with regard to its implementation at institutional level where, for an effective achievement, a certain awareness of what is at play is expected. This is going to be examined through an analysis of an institutional document, the *Modules Description: Faculty of Arts and Humanities* (henceforth MD), which is supposed to reflect specific beliefs about writing and learning to write, and approaches to teaching and assessment of academic writing.



## ***4.2. Discourses about academic writing represented in the MD***

Analysis of the current curricular version of Written English I would also entail an attempt to look at the relationship between the curriculum in question and the NPLTHE. Indeed, as the analysis of the NPLTHE identified a lack of consistency between the goal set by the policy and the specific objectives or abilities proposed by way of operationalising the policy goal, the examination of the MD also leads to noticing a discrepancy between this particular programme established for teaching academic writing and the policy goal. Thus, given the policy goal which suggests teaching literacy in the context of academic disciplines, inconsistency with such a goal might also imply a problematic preparation of students for meeting the writing requirements of their disciplinary studies and their professional life. This is demonstrated by assumptions underpinning the academic writing discourse as manifested in the MD, and is going to be elaborated following three aspects: view of language as represented in the MD, assumptions about writing and learning to write expressed in the MD, and the approaches to the teaching of writing reflected in the MD.

### **a. View of language as represented in the MD**

Particular ways of conceptualising writing and literacy in general can be materialised through a teaching programme leading to “particular forms of situated action, to particular decisions, choices and omissions, as well as to particular wordings” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 220). Thus, with regard to the Written English I module, the existing curriculum document (i.e. the MD) may be analysed with the purpose of uncovering the institutional assumptions regarding language and language teaching.

According to the MD, the objectives of the module are:

- to familiarise first year students with the conventions of academic writing;
- to enable students to produce different types of short essays as well as informal and formal letters;
- exposing students to different types of authentic reading materials;

- dealing with common grammar trouble spots.

The objectives above appear to encompass views of language based on both the written text (i.e. a skills discourse) and the writing event (a genre discourse or a social practices discourse). But, on examination of each objective, it becomes clear that the view based on the written text (or the linguistic substance of language) is particularly emphasised. This is shown by three out of the four objectives proposed which are making reference to particular forms of text-related<sup>44</sup> aspects such as ‘conventions’ (of academic writing) and ‘grammar’, or some specific types of text such as (short) ‘essays’ and ‘letters’. The only (indirect) reference to the writing event or the social practices discourse of language is the mention of different types of ‘authentic reading materials’ which, in fact, are calling for involvement of different kinds of texts used in social life.

Further, the skills-oriented view of language described above seems to be extended to a new dimension based on ‘mental processes’. This may be noticed in the section “knowledge and understanding” where we can read that students should be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- Different *stages of prose writing* as well as the characteristics of informal and formal letter writing;
- Various types of reading materials and *reading strategies*;
- Grammar accuracy.

The mention of ‘stages of prose writing’ evokes the writing processes view which, as suggested by Ivanič (2004), “can refer to either or both the cognitive or the practical processes” (p.231). These ‘stages’ of (prose) writing mainly involve three central elements proposed by a processes-based model of composing process upheld by research based on cognitive psychology since the late 1970s: planning, drafting and reviewing, and two factors which interact with these: the writer’s long-term

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<sup>44</sup> Written text is here to be considered in its linguistic substance and as opposed to the other dimensions of language viewed by Ivanič (2004) as salient for identifying discourses of writing and learning to write: cognitive processes and social aspects of language production and reception.

memory and task environment (Hayes, 1995; Flower & Hayes, 1981). Thus, mention of 'stages' of writing refers to these practical process of planning, drafting and reviewing and, therefore, reflects a view of language implying what is happening in the minds of the people who are involved in producing and perceiving language. Likewise, the mention of '*reading strategies*' also evokes the processes view as it refers to the procedures involved in the act of reading and, therefore, to what is happening in the minds of the reader.

Thus, this mixed perspective on language where a text-oriented (or skills-oriented) view is jostling with a mental processes view and even a view of language based on the writing event can be perceived across the remaining part of the MD. This is shown by different categories of skills and activities proposed in the document. For example, under the section "Cognitive/Intellectual skills/Application of knowledge" we have:

(a) text-oriented learning outcomes such as those calling for ability to:

- Produce a short and coherent essay-type summary of a long text (L.O. Nr 7)
- Produce any type of essay in a coherent way and correct style (L.O. Nr 8)
- Express themselves with a minimum of grammatical errors (L.O. Nr 10)

(b) processes-oriented learning outcomes such as those calling for ability to:

- Structure and organise different types of essays in a coherent way (L.O. Nr 4)
- Apply different reading strategies to different text types (L.O. Nr 9)<sup>45</sup>

(c) learning outcomes based on the writing event such as those calling for ability to:

- Produce different types of informal and formal letters in English (L.O. Nr 5)
- Write an application letter accompanied by a CV (L.O. Nr 6)
- Apply different reading strategies to different text types (L.O. Nr 9)

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<sup>45</sup> The learning outcome Nr 9 appears rather divided into a cognitive processes-based view and a view of language based on the writing event.

It is the same scenario with the subsequent sections where, under “Communication/ICT/Numeracy/Analytic techniques/Practical skills”, we have a learning outcome rather related to imperatives of communication in the electronic age (Use the computer for word-processed documents (L.O. Nr 11)), which can be counted as a mental processes-oriented learning outcome, and a particular category of learning activities under the section “General transferable skills” where we have a series of learning outcomes which in fact imply, at the same time, the textual, mental and the view based on the writing event. These are those implying to:

- Work confidently and freely on any kind of essay-type task (L.O. Nr 12)
- Present one’s own typed work (letter or essay) (L.O. Nr 13)
- Cope with a range of reading materials (L.O. Nr 14)
- Assess the quality of a piece of writing in terms of accuracy (correctness) (L.O. Nr 15).

Regarding the learning activities proposed in the section “Indicative content”, they are made of mixed activities spanning textual, cognitive and the aspects based on the writing event:

(a) Textual aspects of language:

- Grammar ‘trouble spots’ (sentence structure, sentence combination, dangling, fragments, parallel sentences, tenses, punctuation...)

(b) Cognitive processes aspects of language:

- Essay writing: structure, organisation and different stages
- Reading strategies: skimming, scanning, inference, previewing, anticipation....

(c) Aspects based on the writing event:

- Layout and different kinds of informal and formal letter writing
- Different types of essays.

However, it is worth noting that the learning outcomes presented above as based on the writing event (following a multilayered view of language as presented by Ivanič, 2004) are in fact more concerned with a genre perspective than a social practices perspective of language. Learning outcomes consonant with a social practices discourse of language are represented in rare instances like in the case of the learning outcome calling for exposure of “students to different types of authentic reading materials” (under the section “Brief description of aims and content”).

Further, certain terms or phrasings used can be regarded as rather ambiguous and not clear enough to infer a precise view of language. These are for example the learning outcomes pertaining to the “characteristics of informal and formal letter writing” (under the section “Knowledge and understanding”) where the term ‘characteristics’ can refer to either the linguistic characteristics or the functional ones in terms of writing purposes or contexts. It is the same for the items such as ‘Paragraph writing: cohesion and coherence’ and ‘summary writing’ in the section “Indicative content” which can involve either the textual aspects or the cognitive processes aspects. In any case, the doubt would pose more on the representation of the mental processes aspects, since the linguistic substance is fundamental and represented in any form of text (see Ivanič, 2004; Lea & Street, 1998).

On examination of the MD, one is led to notice that all the above-described aspects are somehow unevenly represented as it appears that in concrete terms the text-oriented (or skills-oriented) view is more visible than any other view of language. Indeed, except by inference, the MD rarely presents explicit indications of view of language based on the writing event or the socio-contextual view of language for example. Thus, the view of language based on the writing event has less chance of being part of the daily component of the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, these different aspects suggested by the comprehensive view of language (Ivanič, 2004) can also be presented in a hierarchical way whereby the socio-contextual view implies both of the other views; and the processes-oriented view of language necessarily incorporates the use of textual aspects of language. So,

whether clearly suggested or not in the MD, the textual aspect of language is fundamentally predominant, and therefore is underpinning to any stage of the composing process. Thus, although the MD is not explicitly showing awareness of such a reality, the analysis of classroom practices will tell us to what extent the lecturers are managing to go beyond what is literally expressed by the MD.

### **b. Assumptions about writing and learning to write in the MD**

On examination of the components parts of the MD such as the expected learning outcomes, the content, the learning and teaching strategy, etc., there is possibility of making an inference about the underpinning assumptions regarding writing and learning to write in the curricular context concerned. The section related to “a brief description of aims and content” is for example a summary of the types of skills or the fields of activity that should be privileged by lecturers. Different aims are presented but one could notice that an emphasis is rather on the mastery of discrete rules of language and academic discourse. This is shown by the categories of classroom activities suggested under that section which are related to ‘conventions of academic writing’, ‘grammar trouble spots’, working around ‘short essays’ and different kinds of ‘letters’ (MD, p.1). Out of five types of writing abilities proposed, the idea of writing as discourse practice or as “purpose-driven communication in a social context” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 225) can only be extrapolated from a single item pertaining to “exposing students to different types of authentic reading materials”.

Regarding the section related to “knowledge and understanding”, it is fundamentally skills-oriented (as long as it is based on knowledge and understanding). It takes up the above-mentioned aims and content, and (re)proposes them as learning outcomes in terms of what the students should have as fact-based information and accurate conceptualization of what is involved in the writing activity. Thus, the learning outcomes concerned with the writing of essays are envisaged in terms of “knowledge and understanding of ‘different stages of prose writing...’” (L.O. Nr 1). The concept of ‘stages’ can also be regarded as evoking the idea of writing as a processes-based activity whereby learning to write may include “learning both the

mental processes and the practical processes involved in composing a text” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 225). The same idea of writing processes is encapsulated by the notion of ‘reading strategies’ contained in the learning outcome Nr 2 implying students’ demonstration of knowledge and understanding of various types of reading materials and *reading strategies*. The idea of reading strategies is regarded as processes-oriented in the sense that it is making reference to the cognitive processes (e.g.: process of selecting what to read, awareness of the author, understanding of the type of message conveyed...) and practical processes (e.g.: previewing, skimming, scanning, clustering...) involved in the reading activity.

Thus, various sections of the MD can be regarded as encapsulating different assumptions about writing and learning to write. The fact is that these assumptions are unequally perceptible from a section to another, and are generally represented at the expense of the social practices view of language which however, as suggested by Ivanič (2004), is encompassing literacy practices students are involved in at university. For example, the section related to the expected “knowledge and understanding” is proposing three learning outcomes based on:

- a. Different stages of prose writing as well as the characteristics of informal and formal letter writing
- b. Various types of reading materials and reading strategies
- c. Grammar accuracy.

Thus, different assumptions can be inferred from the learning outcomes proposed: in addition to the idea of composing processes reflected by the learning outcome ‘a’, the fact of suggesting the “knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of informal and formal letter writing’ makes us think about the “genre discourse of writing” (Ivanič, 2004) based on assumptions that “specific clusters of linguistic features” characterize various types of texts such as informal and formal letters. So, in line with such a view of writing, learning to write is regarded as “learning the characteristics of different types of writing which serve specific purposes in specific contexts” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 225).

The section related to “Cognitive/Intellectual skills/Application of knowledge” also appears as a reinforcement of what is suggested by the preceding section. It is proposing learning activities based on application of knowledge, but in addition to the above-described views of writing and learning to write, the learning activities proposed particularly emphasise two main aspects with regard to text writing:

1. Composing processes in the writer’s mind, and their practical realization as reflected in the learning outcome calling for the students’ ability to (a) ‘structure and organize different types of essays in a coherent way’ (L.O. Nr 4), (b) ‘apply different reading strategies to different text-types’ (L.O. Nr 9);
2. Form and correctness of the written text (i.e. ‘coherence and correctness of style and grammar’): this is reflected in the learning outcomes suggesting students’ ability to (a) ‘structure and organize different types of essays in a coherent way’ (L.O. Nr 4), (b) ‘produce a short and coherent essay-type summary of a long text’ (L.O. Nr 7), (c) ‘produce any type of essay in a coherent way and correct style’ (L.O. Nr 8), (d) ‘express themselves with a minimum of grammatical errors’ (L.O. Nr 10).

The learning outcome implying the ability to ‘use the computer for word-processed documents’ (L.O. Nr 11), in the section “Communication/ICT/Numeracy/Analytic techniques/Practical skills”, may also be viewed as a consolidation to the assumption suggesting the necessity of mastering the composing processes and their mediated practical realization. In fact, the development and pervasiveness of computer technology has imposed a new demand of literacy not only in terms of the mastery of representational conventions as well as cultural and symbolic codes – due to what has been termed ‘lateral thinking’ with reference to the cross-linked information of hypertext, but also in terms of “functional skills of [...] keyboarding, file management, CD-ROM searching...” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 73). Thus, a learning outcome calling for ability to “use the computer for word-processed documents” is necessarily an indirect reference to the mastery of both the mental processes and the practical procedures with which to negotiate the computer-mediated communication in various contexts.



In the case of the remaining learning outcomes under the section “General transferable skills”, the latter supposes a focus on activities likely to help students develop a high level-competence allowing them to assert their identity as writers. But, the reality is different as the section just takes up the above-mentioned activities and gets them formulated in terms of openness to some types of independent application by students on the model of ability ‘to work confidently and freely on any kind of essay-type task’ (L.O. Nr 12). Any form of precision in terms context of communication could have helped assign a social practices orientation to the learning and teaching endeavour, but this seems to be left to the only lecturer’s discretion. It is also worth noting that the learning outcome pertaining to students’ ability “to assess the quality of a piece of writing” has been limited to the accuracy of the written text in terms of “correctness” (L.O. Nr 15). One would expect such learning outcome to be extended to the ability of assessing the quality of a piece of writing in terms of appropriateness with reference to the purpose and the context of communication.

The section related to “Indicative content” just appears as a confirmation of the dominance of a ‘skills discourse’ suggested above. That is, a particular emphasis is on “the correctness of the letter, word, sentence, and text formation” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 227). This is indicated by five out of the eight categories of content proposed: (a) ‘layout and different kinds of informal and formal letter writing’, (b) ‘paragraph writing: cohesion and coherence’, (c) ‘essay writing: structure, organization and different stages’, (d) ‘summary writing’, (e) ‘grammar trouble spots...’. The content related to ‘reading strategies’ is, as suggested earlier, close to the belief in the importance of mastering the mental and practical processes involved in writing (and reading).

The section related to “Assessment strategy” can also be revealing in terms of what the authors of the document believe to be adequate learning activities for academic writing. The activities proposed as possible objects of assessment are providing details regarding what can be the writing purpose for some types of text exemplified. This is the case for the proposed activities relating to ‘writing an

application letter responding to a job offer, writing an apology letter, a request letter, a complaint letter, an acceptance/refusal letter, etc.’ As the possible audience or addressee(s) of such letters remain unspecified, this may be viewed as an indication that the authors of the MD do not have full awareness of the necessity for the module to constitute an explicit response to the challenges of the literacy practices in which students would like to participate.

So, the analysis of the MD shows that the latter is encompassing assumptions about writing and learning to write that are limited to a certain category. As demonstrated by the description above, most of the learning activities proposed in the document are echoing a view of writing consisting of, on the one hand, applying knowledge of formal structure and correctness of the written text and, on the other hand, mental processes and the practical processes involved in composing a text. As for the idea of writing as “purpose-driven communication in a social context”, it is almost non-existent and when represented it is in an indirect way unlikely to indicate to non-informed lecturers what to do to enable their students to assert their voice in their writing and, therefore, to be effective in achieving their socio-academic purposes.

In fact, all these aspects of writing and learning to write (i.e. form and correctness, mental and practical processes, and socio-contextual) represented in the MD are complementary and useful for the apprentice writers. But, a certain balance among them is needed if we want to develop students’ effective competence of writing. In the document described, the learning activities based on form and correctness seem to acquire an important part, which is not necessarily harmful. However, in addition to (potential) benefits of the social practices approach for the literacy practices of HE as suggested by NLS, it is also important to remind that learning activities primarily focused on form and correctness have been called into question by research (see Zamel, 1983) which showed that successful ESL writers focus primarily on exploring and clarifying ideas and attend to linguistic concerns after delineating these ideas.

Regarding activities implying mental and practical processes, which also appear much represented in the MD, they are also useful because, as suggested by the

research conducted by Read (1984) and mentioned in the chapter 2 of the current study, the lecturer needs to be sensitive to variation in composing processes among students in ESL writing classes in order to attend to each one's specific needs. But, as suggested by critics of the process approach often regarded as over-emphasising the cognitive processes to the detriment of the final product and the writing purposes, it is good to bear in mind that the objective of learning and improving the cognitive processes involved in writing is "to improve the quality of the end result, not for their own sake" (Ivanič, 2004, p. 231).

Further, the learning activities implying writing as communication in a socio-cultural context should not be given less importance especially for development of the academic writing competence. In fact, "people learn by apprenticeship, by peripheral participation in literacy events, and by taking on the identity of community membership among those who use literacy in particular ways" (Ivanič, 2004, p. 235). Thus, for the students to identify themselves with the writing practices of academia, activities pertaining to the real academic life and preparing students to function in the literacy practices undertaken by members of academia need to be given a particular emphasis.

### **c. Approaches to the teaching of writing as reflected in the MD**

As already mentioned, existing theories have established contrasting orientations among views or practices related to writing and learning to write. Concerning approaches to teaching writing, it has been demonstrated that discourses of writing "may be heterogeneous drawing on two or more discourses in complex inter-animation with one another" (Ivanič, 2004, p. 226). However, it is often possible to recognise dominant discourse(s) of writing in a particular context where some assumptions and/or practices are privileged at the expense of others.

On examination of the MD, the teaching orientation suggested can be uncovered through analysis of indications availed in the document with the purpose of showing the direction to be followed by the users in terms of pedagogical action. So, as indicated by the brief description of aims and contents in the module description

document, the aims such as (a) 'To familiarise first year students with the conventions of academic writing', (b) 'To enable students to produce different types of short essays as well as informal and formal letters', or (c) "Dealing with common grammar trouble spots..." may constitute indicators of the module designers' intention to maintain the mainstreamed institutional practices with regard to teaching writing in higher education. So, the above-presented aims appear typical of a teaching approach based on decontextualised display where students-writers are expected to demonstrate knowledge no matter what the writing purpose and audience are. This is what Lillis (2001) termed "fictionalization of self (as writer) and audience which is a central feature of essayist literacy" (p. 38). This approach is also confirmed by the remaining parts of the document which, although echoing different teaching orientations, seem to foreground the essayist literacy and, therefore, skills approach.

Thus, apart from what is shown by the section "Brief description of aims and content" presented as a summary of the teaching programme established for the Written English I - and which is foregrounding a skills discourse with a special emphasis on the mastery of discrete rules of language and academic discourse, the section related to "Knowledge and understanding" also seems to paint the same picture. Two out of the three learning outcomes proposed by the section are made up of activities based respectively on 'the characteristics of informal and formal letter writing' and 'Grammar accuracy'. These proposed types of activities are skills-oriented and are good examples of the dominant practices of higher education which seem to uphold a certain control over words and tend to look at linguistic communication as a codified and fixed system rather than a socio-cultural activity (Lillis & Turner, 2001).

Further, the remaining parts of the document described also confirm the trend as shown in every section of the MD where 'skills approach' seems to acquire a significant importance. This is manifested in the section related to 'Cognitive/Intellectual skills/Application of knowledge' where, as shown previously, the half of the learning outcomes concerned is related to linguistic skills (i.e. 'form

and correctness' of the written text). Even the section related to "General transferable skills", which is basically proposing independent work-related activities, is suggesting the critical 'evaluation skills' to be based on accuracy of writing in terms of 'correctness'. The formal aspects of the written language are also well represented in five out of the eight activities proposed by the section related to "Indicative content".

So, with strong dominance of skills discourse, the MD is not easily amenable to teaching activities based on purpose-driven communication in a social context. The document shows little awareness of the current trends regarding theories and discourses of writing and learning to write. This may be the reason why the MD does not appear to succeed in helping lecturers get a sense of what the possible choices are in terms of pedagogical orientations for the Written English I module. The MD also seems to be characterised by a number of pedagogical suggestions that are kept too implicit for a maximal exploitation in classroom. Lecturers' lucidity remains then the only recourse in this regard. There is no indication in the MD of awareness of the necessity for the disciplinary base to constitute the typical strategy for teaching academic writing, as suggested by a model of 'situated practices' upheld by the New Literacy Studies (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

However, as already shown, the MD does not seem to be exclusively geared to skills-oriented activities. There are also activities open to processes approach and genre approach. This can be inferred from some learning activities proposed in the document. The processes-related activities are for example reflected in the section "Knowledge and understanding" where we have learning outcomes pertaining to 'different stages of prose writing' (L.O. Nr 1) or to 'various types of (...) reading strategies' (L.O. Nr 3). These are the kinds of learning outcomes that call for activities based on the practical processes of planning, drafting and revising. Activities pertaining to the processes and procedures for composing (or decoding) a text are also echoed in the section related to "Cognitive/Intellectual skills/Application of knowledge" which is proposing learning outcomes geared to the ability to 'structure and organize different types of essays in a coherent way'

(L.O. Nr 4), and 'apply different reading strategies to different text-types' (L.O. Nr 9). The learning outcome geared to 'use computer for word-processed documents' (in the section "Communication/ICT...") is also evoking the mental and practical processes involved in the composing processes.

A consonance of social practices approach is also perceptible in some parts of the MD as is the case for the teaching aim geared to 'exposing students to different types of authentic reading materials', under the section "Brief description of aims and content". This may be viewed as openness to a perspective of considering these authentic materials as representative of some real literacy practices in 'social' life. Activities leading to genre approach are for example represented in the learning outcome concerned with the ability to 'produce different types of informal and formal letters in English' (under the section "Cognitive/Intellectual skills/Application of knowledge"). Development of such an ability calls for an explicit teaching of "linguistic features" that characterize various types of texts.

As fact of the matter, these teaching approaches pointed out above are not explicitly expressed in the MD. Thus, whatever is the type of activity proposed in the MD, the way of enactment will depend on the lecturer's disposition and commitment to apply it in a way which can help students to benefit from the session. For example, the learning objective geared to 'exposing students to different types of authentic reading materials" can be understood and/or applied differently according to the lecturer. The latter can, at worse, just consider the only formal aspects of these authentic materials which may serve as models to be imitated by students without any initiative pertaining to help them gain explicit information likely to guide subsequent practices. At best, the lecturer can take advantage of 'authentic materials' to create an environment of 'critical framing' where students are helped to develop their literacy abilities through deep understanding of how meaning is made according to the concerned socio-cultural context. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggest that the effectiveness of such an initiative "involves the students' standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context" (p. 35).

So, as already pointed out above, the MD seems to foreground a rather 'formalist' or form-focused writing pedagogy as teaching activities or learning outcomes proposed in the document are much overtly consonant with vocabulary such as "conventions of academic writing, cohesion and coherence, grammar trouble spots, sentence structure, grammar accuracy, form and correctness...". This writing pedagogy, which is focusing on the linguistic rules and patterns of writing 'texts', matches up with the dominant discourse of writing in higher education which places a special emphasis on conventions and key skills deemed as adequate to enable students to respond effectively to the requirements of their academic tasks (Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001).

Indeed, research on the subject indicated that the established discourse practices of academia are mainly articulated around the "essayist literacy" which is the dominant literacy practice within schooling [and] becomes the central action of higher education" (Paxton, 2007; Lillis, 2001). This essayist literacy consists of a range of academic conventions students are expected to write within, and is representing the idea of language as a transparent medium where meanings are rather reflected than constructed. On examination of the MD under analysis, there is no evidence of the designers' willing to raise awareness of users (i.e. lecturers) about the importance of facilitating students' understanding of these conventions governing the essayist literacy in higher education.

With regard to the section related to "learning and teaching strategies", there is no indication either about the way of pedagogically approaching all categories of content proposed. The only focus is on the logistical aspects regarding the organisation of students' writing and reading activities (i.e. preparation and hand over of reading materials, arrangement of timetable, necessity of lecturers' availability for assistance to students, consultation time...). The actual pedagogical orientation, in terms of the way of addressing the issue of meaning-making through

writing (i.e. the notions of addressivity, student's identity as writer, 'appropriacy'<sup>46</sup> with reference to the writing purpose...), the way the representational features of meaning in a written text can be made explicit to students, etc., seems to be left to the lecturer's discretion.

As for the assessment strategy proposed, it is also limited to (a) statements of the types of assessment that will make up the evaluation frame (i.e. 'In-course assessment' and 'End-of-course assessment'), and (b) exemplifications about the categories of activities that will be subject of assessment. A fact worth of being mentioned is that the section related to "End-of-course assessment" is suggesting possibility of a 'comprehensive written examination covering theory and practice'. This may serve as indication of the importance attached by the MD to the theoretical facts regarding academic writing. It may also (partially) explain the lecturers' preference for a face-to-face teaching based on guidelines and exhortations to students to be aware of all principles governing the 'essayist' literacy at university, as this is demonstrated in the chapter related to findings of classroom observations.

Concerning possible institutional general guidelines intended to regulate students' writing practices during their degree studies at NUR, a "*Policy on Language Teaching for the National University of Rwanda*" has been established since 2009 (NUR, 2009). But, this [institutional] policy which is rather focused on the practical modalities of implementing the 2008 government's decision making English the "primary medium of instruction" (NUR, 2009, p. 66) does not say anything about practices of student academic writing at the institutional level. The only indication pertaining to institutional guidelines in relation to student writing encountered during the period of investigation was a written notice from the university's Academic Quality Office warning against plagiarism, copies of which were pinned in the notice boards all around the campus. According to the notice,

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<sup>46</sup> The term is borrowed from Ivanič (2004) who is herself inspired by Halliday (1990).



The National University of Rwanda considers plagiarism as a serious disciplinary offence which, in the same way as any other form of cheating, may render the student liable to failing an assignment or examination, failing a module, failing a level, or temporary or permanent exclusion from the Institution.

The notice is inspired by the article 65 of the General Academic Regulations which treats plagiarism as any other form of cheating but does not define what should be considered as plagiarism. The concept of plagiarism should have been clearly defined in this context because students, especially those who are new in the academic world, need to understand the concept of plagiarism and what practises constitute plagiarism in different disciplines.

Further, although no reference is made to the NPLTHE in the MD, one would expect a certain consistency between the teaching programme established for the Written English I module (as set out in the MD) and the NPLTHE which sets out the national language policy. The fact is that despite the explicit suggestion in the NPLTHE that languages are to be “taught in the context of the academic disciplines and in parallel with subject study”, the Written English I module, in its current state, appears rather generic – and not discipline-specific. It remains general and does not emphasise discipline-specific instantiations (e.g. literary texts, journalistic texts...) with respect to the degree studies requirements of the students who are registered with the faculty of arts, media and social sciences. So, it remains to be seen whether this apparent discrepancy is balanced by the pedagogical practices adopted by lecturers during their teachings in classroom.

## **CHAPTER 5: Lecturers' understandings and expectations of what is involved in the teaching of academic writing**

This chapter presents findings of lecturers' understandings and expectations of what is involved in the teaching of academic writing. That is, the chapter offers an analysis of what lecturer-participants' position is in relation to the teaching and learning of academic writing as a practice often characterised by conflicting expectations and interpretations of lecturers and students (Lea & Street, 1998). Thus, the main themes identified are related to (a) the view that learning of academic writing is likely to occur in an implicit way, (b) an emphasis on the form aspects of language, (c) deficit-driven views about first-year university students, (d) a lack of space for student-writer's choices with regard to the way of meaning-making, and (e) championing of the institutional demand of a standard form of language.

### ***5.1. Learning of academic writing occurs in an implicit way***

To the question "what skills do you privilege in your academic writing teaching?" participants provided answers that can be grouped into two categories: (a) conceptualisation of language and literacy competences as a result of creativity and imagination, and (b) conceptualisation of language and literacy competence as a result of exposure to models of language and literacy products.

By presenting literacy competences as a result of creativity and imagination, lecturers tend to suggest that teaching of writing is a process that "leaves the bulk of the writing to be figured out by the student" (Immerman, 2010, p. 14). In other words, as suggested by Immerman (ibid.) who discusses the idea of creativity and teaching of writing, viewing writing as an act of creativity and imagination implies that "the role of the teacher is restricted in the sense that he or she cannot essentially tell the student what to write" (p. 13). Some of the views expressed by

lecturer-participants then encapsulate a similar perspective even though they do not necessarily show consistency with regard to what should be the teacher's role. For example, lecturer A<sup>47</sup> says:

I think the skill that I have to develop in my students is (...) creativity, because writing is an act of creativity. I have to make sure that my students develop their imagination. (Lecturer A, 08/04/2011)

Lecturer A will reaffirm his conviction in another interview where he underlines that his primary aim is to help his students develop their creativity. He states the following:

In my student writing assignment, the primary aim is to help my students acquire the capacity to work independently in terms of creating their own product, because, as I said, writing is an act of creation whereby the student learns how to conduct his own project. (Lecturer A, 08/04/2011)

Along the interviews with him, lecturer A refers at least four times to 'creativity' and 'imagination' as the skills to be privileged when teaching literacy to students at university. Thus, by emphasising the importance of getting his students "create their own products" during their writing activities, lecturer A seems to restrict teaching of academic writing to the art of creativity and imagination.

As for the view of writing competences as a result of exposure to models of language and literacy products, it tends to suggest that students can learn academic writing "unconsciously by reading samples of good writing..." (Kobayishi & Rinnert, 2002, p. 103). This is the case for Lecturer C who is of the view that students should be exposed to models of good writing. His answer to the above-mentioned question is stated as follows:

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<sup>47</sup> Naming of participants is based on letters and numbers to preserve the anonymity principle.

For the students invited to develop scholarship in different fields, in different scientific domains, they have to prepare themselves in analysing documents of any kind especially those related to academic work like academic articles, academic journal articles and different books published. You know, there is possibility to develop analysis spirit... or critical analysis for our students by getting them to analyse relevant documents and this is what I put focus on during my teaching. Because, you know, students need to be exposed to models of language, to different works from different authors... This is what I do. (Lecturer C, 09/04/2011)

The statement above reveals the view of a lecturer emphasising the importance of using samples of academic writing to help students develop their writing abilities. By recognising to put focus on exposure of students to “models of language and different works from different authors”, the lecturer in question seems to attach less importance to direct teaching involving “some forms of scaffolding, modelling, and instructional guidance” (Huang, 2004, p. 110) which students also critically need.

In what seems to be a contradiction<sup>48</sup> with his previous emphasis on creativity and imagination in academic writing, Lectures A also acknowledges resorting to model texts to help his students to master codes and conventions of academic writing. He states the following:

...I show them books that contain all those rules, and I try to explain to them what they don't understand (...). (Lecturer A, 08/04/2011)

Likewise, a part of the answer from Lecturer B also emphasises models of piece of writing. He states:

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<sup>48</sup> Viewing writing as an act of creativity and imagination seems incompatible with proposing to develop writing ability through imitation of model texts.

...To master codes and conventions of academic writing, the text you choose is important. Some texts will give students examples without directly giving lessons (...). (Lecturer B, 09/04/2011)

Lecturer C also evoked the idea of model texts where he stated:

...We are also assisting them with texts which serve as inspiration to them. In all that process, we are putting a special emphasis on the necessity of working independently through personal research which I think can help students become academically literate. (Lecturer C, 31/03/2011)

The emphasis on the use of 'models of good writing' may signal a view of language and literacy based on "conduit theory". That is, by suggesting that writing ability can be developed through exposure and imitation of model texts, lecturer-participants seem unaware that every single instance of writing is unique and cannot be expected to be successful unless the author is experienced enough to be able to adapt his/her writing to the requirements of appropriateness in terms of the type of text, audience, etc.

The implication of the above-described views is that the actual teaching of academic writing, or development of abilities for meaning making in real communication, is given minimal importance as learning to write academically is supposed to occur in an implicit way. It is also worth noting that consequences of this conceptualisation of literacy as a neutral skill likely to be transferred from an individual to another, and therefore not necessarily object of explicit teaching, are confirmed by students who were interviewed. One of the students stated the following:

(...) the system in which they teach us is not clear (...). He [the lecturer] just wants to finish and he runs quickly, we don't have time to ask questions, he does not give clear examples; he gives only theories and through theory you

can't know how to practice. Theories only are not sufficient. (Student Nr 2, 09/04/2011)

In the context of English as second language, an emphasis on models of good writing (or model texts) also implies an emphasis on 'Standard English'<sup>49</sup>, rules of which are sometimes hard to be accessed by a certain category of social groups whose language background did not allow to be familiar with Standard English at an early stage of their life. In Rwanda, this category is made of a majority of students who, as already explained, live in a Kinyarwanda-dominated sociolinguistic environment and are not exposed to Standard English on a regular basis.

### ***5.2. Focus on the form aspects of language in academic writing***

To the question "What are the features of a good piece of students writing in your opinion?", answers are much resonant with features related to form and structure, including 'correct grammar', coherence, clarity, and even 'Standard English'. Lecturer A asserts the following:

...As far as language is concern, the respect of form is very important. To make sure that you master your English, you have to make sure that the form is correct, also the content yes, but when the form is very poor you cannot even remember [sic] the content. (Lecturer A, 08/04/2011)

Lecturer C has also a similar understanding. He states the following:

I think a good piece of student writing must meet various requirements. First, a good piece of student writing must be clear in terms of responding to the topic given by the teacher, the lecturer or any other examiner. This means, in order to suitably convey what the text is supposed to communicate as message, the text will need to use correct wording, to use a language that

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<sup>49</sup> Essentially responding to the "quality of clear communication and standards of intelligibility" (Widdowson, 1994, p. 379).

meets grammar rules related to Standard English. Also the student must use a precise language in his text. He must avoid redundant language, and use a formal language which is characterised by words without ambiguity or words that are likely to undermine a good understanding by the reader. (Lecturer C, 10/04/2011)

While some L2 writing research argued against feedback focused on form aspects, viewing it as both discouraging and unhelpful (Truscott, 1996, 1999), the above statement reflects a particular attention of lecturers to the linguistic accuracy of students' written text. On observation of the concepts emphasised by the statement, issues related to "clarity", "correct wording", "grammar rules", "Standard English", etc. seem presented as aspects of writing that should dominate teaching to the detriment of the aspects pertaining to meaning and content. The ineffectiveness of corrective feedback has been highlighted by Truscott (1996) arguing that language correction is often ineffective because teachers lack the skills to analyse and explain students' problems, while the students lack the skills to understand and use such feedback.

A misunderstanding between lecturers and students seems reflected in an answer to the probing question to know under which condition students can easily access the requirements of Standard English and formal language. Lecturer C, who asserts his attachment to the form aspects in academic writing, manifests an "us" versus "them" attitude (Lillis, 2001, p. 2) where any struggle students are facing is regarded as 'their' problem. He states the following:

Our students generally don't know how to write in good English. They are always writing as they used to do in secondary school where there were no strict requirements in terms of clarity, coherence and precision. (Lecturer C, 10/04/2011)

As transpiring in the statement above, the lecturer appears to limit what he terms 'strict requirements' of writing to some form aspects of a text such as clarity, coherence, and precision. Such a statement raises the question of whether there may not be strict requirements with regard to the features related for example to content or richness of information provided by an academic text.

The importance of form aspects is also pointed out by Lecturer B, even if he does not place them in priority. For Lecturer B, who is responding to the question related to the features of a good piece of students writing, an emphasis is rather to be placed on "depth of analysis". He says:

The first feature...for me is always they have answered the question that they were assigned because usually there is a problem with students if they have misunderstood the question or they have talked about something else. And beyond that...I think the most important feature is the depth of analysis that the student will bring to a subject. (Lecturer B, 09/04/2011)

Then, Lecturer B seems to rather advocate a deep-writing perspective with a focus on features other than linguistic. This means that, with such a perspective, social events or broader social goals which literacy usually deals with in everyday life are likely to be better served. But, even for this lecturer, "the other feature that goes without saying is that the language to be precise (...), and that the language and grammar are good without faults in sentences..." So, a special attention is eventually drawn to the form aspects of language.

In overall, on observation of what is said by the interviewed participants, who mainly advocated "correctness" of words and sentences with just references to longer stretches of text, an underlying belief is that academic literacy practices essentially consist of applying knowledge of a set of linguistic rules and syntactic patterns to construct a text (Ivanič, 2004). In fact, this is a belief that matches up with the dominant "conventions of language correctness that students are expected



to adhere to” (Bazerman et al., 2005, p. 7) at university. With such a view, the idea of text-types, shaped by social purposes is ignored, and there is an implication on the approach to teaching and learning academic literacy. The latter then tends to be based on learning a set of linguistic skills as is confirmed by the approach to teaching suggested by the interviewed lecturers who emphasise expressions such as ‘correct wording’, ‘coherence’, ‘clarity’, ‘students must/should’, and the explicit and prescriptive teaching of fixed conventions where language is envisaged not as discourse practices but as based on discrete skills.

### ***5.3. Deficit-driven views about first year university students***

For the present section, findings presented are related to what the lecturers involved in the teaching of Written English I module think must be the conditions for meaning making in student writing. The main focus is on the points of view provided by lecturers during the interviews, but tasks assigned to students are looked at as well for evidences on how the process of meaning-making is actually envisaged.

Indeed, lecturers’ answers reflect a particular type of understanding of academic writing practices. Perspectives they manifest are signalling that they envisage a particular way of meaning making which is different from what students have been generally exposed to during their previous schooling. In fact, lecturers represent their first year students’ difficulties in academic writing as somehow a sign of deficiency. As suggested by statements made by interviewed lecturers, students are represented as unable to adapt to the requirements of academia. Lecturer A for example, who is asked to give his opinion about what it means to be an academically literate student, says the following:

An academically literate student is one who has no problem to respect rules and regulations of academic writing. An academically literate student is also

one who is able to work very hard to catch up with the requirements of the academic activities in the academic environment. (Lecturer A, 17/03/2011)

So, for this lecturer, an academically literate student does not have to experience any problem with regard to the respect of “rules and regulations” of academic writing, which means he/she must smoothly adapt to these requirements. Furthermore, according to Lecturer A, the act of “catching up” with “the requirements of the academic activities in the academic environment” does not need an external intervention. That is, the expected change (for new comers) is obvious and is just dependent on the (only) work of the student concerned.

Thus, although the above-presented opinion is emphasising the necessity of commitment on the part of the student who wants to be successful, it also tends to present development of academic writing ability as a matter of swift adaptation to the academic environment. Such a view appears in disagreement with authors interested in acquisition of academic discourse such as Bourdieu, Passeron and De Saint Martin (1994) who point out that “academic language is (...) no one’s mother tongue, not even that of children of the cultivated classes” (p. 8), hence suggesting that there is no magic formula for someone to become academically literate and learning of academic literacy is not expected to be a students’ business alone.

The idea of inability of first year university students to adapt to the requirements of academia is also suggested by Lecturer C who also regards academic writing as a matter of student’s commitment but insists on the need of close guidance from the lecturers. To the question of knowing his opinion about what it means to be an academically literate student, his answer is stated as follows:

Students’ [literate] abilities must be tested with practical activities of all kinds including participation in reading of high level articles; I mean scientific articles, different books produced by famous authors as I said earlier, but also they need to conduct their independent work which will help

them wherever they are. So, as the question is related to ... an academically literate student, this one must also show his or her commitment to a work well done... This means, as I said, to work independently and qualitatively. When an assignment has been provided, the student will be able to conduct his own research, but also to request any assistance needed from the lecturers whose obligation is to offer their help every time this is needed. (Lecturer C, 10/04/2011)

So, beside the emphasis on the necessity for the students to show a personal commitment and willingness to seek assistance, Lecturer C also underlines the fact that an academically literate student is expected to show a swift acquisition of autonomy in his/her writing. For Lecturer C, this capacity to adapt to the conventions of academic writing and commitment to a work well done are not shown by the students currently engaged with the Written English I module, as their work is too much characterised by plagiarism and poor respect of academic writing conventions. He states:

You know, maybe I'd say that there is still a way to go as our students are still struggling in terms of what is expected of an academic work or the academic literacy in general. And I think much has to be done in terms of their preparation to get them to be mature academically because, you know, when you look at their papers, the style is always narrative, much plagiarism, all those habits... (Lecturer C, 10/04/2011)

As facts of the matter, the lecturers investigated seem to blame students for their incapacity to get rid of their habits which, as suggested, are a huge hamper to their personal development in terms of academic literacy. In fact, they are advocating an abrupt discontinuity between students' habits of meaning-making and university literacy practices, which, according to research on the subject (see Pahl & Rowsell, 2005), must be realised progressively as students get used to the practices of their new academic environment. Furthermore, lecturers do not view the students'

literacy background as a base to build new competences. In other words, they show little preparedness to guide a progressive work that can help students integrate new 'habits' of writing on basis of their existing habits of meaning-making.

The fact that interviewed lecturers are pessimistically describing students' problems is characteristic of a 'deficit approach' in viewing problems relating to academic literacy. The implication of this 'deficit approach' is that once student's academic literacy problems are regarded as pathologic, solutions may be envisaged as simple and quick, which cannot be compatible with development of competences of a demanding and unfamiliar practice such as academic writing. Thus, although the lecturers' role has been evoked as well, persistent blame is even directed to the student's mind for not exercising enough curiosity and willing to integrate new knowledge. So, as per some views expressed by lecturers, students are regarded as just having weak abilities with regard to academic writing and academic literacy in general. However, these complaints about student writing do not take account of the fact that academic writing is always demanding for those who are unfamiliar with it.

Furthermore, interviewed lecturers seem to suggest that the student-writer is expected to demonstrate text-related skills regardless of the audience the text is addressed to. This is shown by the focus on formal aspects of a text as reflected throughout the interviews conducted with lecturers, but is also perceptible on examination of a sample of tasks assigned to students. Thus, to the question of knowing what had been the assignment topics to students for a couple of previous years, none of the availed examples of assignment questions seems to be designed in a way that may provide students with a clue about what should be the student-writer's role as author, the audience, or what is supposed to be the writing context in general. Topics such as the following can be regarded as representative of tasks assigned to students: (a) Discuss what you feel, think, know about advertising, (b) Write an application letter accompanied by a CV, (c) Write between 2 and 3 pages on the following topic(s): 1. Life on campus; 2. My plan for a future professional life.

In fact, none of these assignment questions is providing data needed to help students effectively complete the assignment. Students are then unlikely to get awareness of what they are expected to do in their assignment as they are not confronted with writing activities based on authentic situations which provides a clear sense of writing purpose and audience.

To the question of knowing whether lecturers are considering to involve their students in writing activities based on authentic situations, lecturer-participants' answers invoke difficulties inherent to creation of authentic situations in classroom. Lecturer C's answer is typical of the general opinion and is stated as follows:

You can't base your teaching on authentic situation because it is not easy to get students to write the type of texts that are used in social life. Classroom is different from social life. It is practically impossible to bring social activities in classroom. (Lecturer C, 10/04/2011)

The statement by lecturer C may be viewed as a proof of lack of awareness of a possible role that could be played by role-plays in bringing social life into the classroom whereby assignments to students may include clear instructions related to the hypothetical audience, the role or the persona to be assumed by the student-writer in the text, etc. Further, efforts to bring social life into classroom may also help mitigate the issue of "fictionalisation of self as writer and audience" (Lillis, 2001, p. 38) reflected by the views expressed by interviewed lecturers and the assignment topics ascribed to students. They may also contribute to raising students' awareness about certain essential aspects to be attended to in the written assignment. These aspects are those related for example to concepts that need to be defined and explained further, expectations of the intended readers in terms of information, text length and formatting, persona or tone to be assumed in the text, etc.

In fact, on examination of copies of tasks assigned to students and related feedback, much importance is given to surface language features and relationships between sentence and sentence, not between speakers or sentences and speakers. This is shown by a sample of sixteen copies of student assignments where at least a comment related to syntactic problem is made on every copy. Further, as will be shown in chapter 7, when feedback is directed to in-depth issues like the appropriate treatment of the content, it is given in a very generic (and subjective) manner, and issues related to the treatment of content and the writing context (i.e. disciplinary, textual...) are often forgotten. Thus, the fact of the matter is that a particular way of meaning-making based on a rigid formalism is privileged. The latter is governed by a set of undefined regulations which, as per students' testimonies, are nurturing a tension experienced by students in the accomplishment of their written tasks.

This tension is reported by interviewed students who express their frustration due to the kind of writer's identity privileged by their lecturers in the writing tasks assigned to them and what these students usually perceive as their actual identity. For example, during a focus group interview conducted with students, the latter voice their disgust of what they define as confusion about what they say and what lecturers accept in their writing. One of the interviewed students states the following:

It is impossible to know what is required for our texts to be good. They say the sentence is too long... the paragraph is too short without telling how long a paragraph must be. (Student Nr 3, 17/03/2011)

The testimony above highlights transparency-oriented attitudes characterising lecturers. Interviewed students also criticise regulations working against personal voice in their texts. They give examples of 'prohibition' by some lecturers of the first-person pronoun ("I"), some adjectival pronouns (such as "my") or accounts based on [student] personal experience. According to a student,

The problem is that all these regulations regarding right words and good paragraphs are not taught to us. (Student Nr 4, 17/03/2011)

Brief, on consideration of the above-presented views, a deficit-oriented explanation of students' difficulties and a discourse of transparency with regard to the academic writing conventions are in dominance. That is, while students' abilities to write are questioned, the teaching interventions meant to help them are envisaged in terms of decontextualized skills. This implies that lecturers who are very important players in the setting investigated still blame literacy problems on students, and classify literacy as a transferable skill which can be acquired just through observation of 'good' models or constant interaction with scholarly people. As shown by the type of activities proposed to students, teaching continues to be based on a series of discrete skills whereby the socio-cultural dimension of writing is ignored.

#### ***5.4. Lack of space for student-writer's choices with regard to the way of meaning-making***

As indicated earlier, the points of view provided by participants with regard to what is involved in academic writing are signalling a dominance of a skills-oriented view of academic literacy in general and academic writing in particular. This has implication on the teaching process which remains essentially monologic and unlikely to foster an appropriate dialogue between lecturers and students in order to attend to the specific learning needs in terms of capacities for meaning-making. It is also useful to remind that students' statements as presented in the previous section are unveiling a certain confusion regarding lecturers' expectations of the texts that students are required to write. Such confusion may also be regarded as an indication of a gap between lecturers' and students' understandings of what is involved in academic writing.

In the case of the lecturer-participants in the present study, they do not seem aware and, hence, are not prepared to address the issue of the existing gap between them and students with regard to expectations of academic texts. Their views are far from recognising students as real participants of the academic discourse practices. This is indicated by what is stated by interviewed lecturers who betray a certain preference to prescribe what must be said and how it must be said (i.e. the form of wording) in the students' texts. For example, the answer from Lecturer C to the question of knowing what he thinks of his students' written work is revealing. He states:

...When it comes to their standard of writing, they really still have much to learn. Unfortunately all of them don't show a certain commitment to get there. (Lecturer C, 10/04/2011)

Lecturer C elaborates further when asked to provide an overall picture of the actual state of his students' writing:

Our students' written work in general is far from what is expected of a good written work especially when we make reference to the requirements of an academic work which has its rules and conventions like the use of correct language, the use of good sources and not some unwarranted claims.... All these principles are still unknown by our students who write as they used to in their secondary school like I said earlier. In fact, they...I mean students, they really have a long way to go before being accepted in the academic community as producers and, why not, critics of academic works at different levels. (Lecturer C, 10/04/2011)

So, far from showing a certain readiness to establish dialogical relationships in order to understand and help his students, the lecturer appears rather judgmental of his students' as he is blaming them to breach the "rules and conventions" determining "what is expected of a good written work" at university. By suggesting that "all" students do not show commitment to get away from the habits of their



schooling background in order to satisfy the requirements of writing practices at HE, he seems to seek homogeneity and uniformity of student writing standard, which is an indicator of an autonomous view of language and literacy where language is regarded as a neutral medium and, therefore, discourses as static. According to such a prescriptive view of academic literacy as expressed above, the student-writer does not have to mark his/her text with his/her own style, tone, persona or even his/her personal experience. Such a view also constitutes a proof that the lecturer in question is not aware that any written text has its own originality which is significantly owed to the writer's identity and personal experience.

Further, for Lecturer C, the students do not yet deserve a place "in the academic community as producers" until they show abilities to satisfy the standard of academic literacy. In other words, these students are always regarded as receivers of knowledge and cannot be regarded as contributors to knowledge (see Ivanič, 1998). This appears as a prejudicial attitude for these novice-writers who, through their actual knowledge and experience, need to be facilitated to develop their competences by being allowed to assert their participation to "the academic projects of writers making a contribution to knowledge" (Ivanič, op. cit., p.144).

The attitude pertaining to lack of readiness to base the learning and teaching on the students' context of culture or context of situation is also confirmed by the types of assignments topics proposed to students. On examination of the latter, one may notice a certain disconnection with the familiar context of students. For example, out of eleven tasks assigned to students (see chapter 7), only three are related to a context familiar to students or close to their life. These are: (a) Task Seven: write a formal letter (e.g. to SFAR) or a friendly letter (e.g. to friend, commiseration, condolences, congratulations, etc.), (b) Task Nine: write between 2 and 3 pages on the following topic: Life on campus, and (c) Task Eleven: write between 2 and 3 pages on the following topic: My plan for a future professional life. The rest of

assignment topics are just imposed to students without any attempt to contextualisation.

In addition, on examination of lecturers' response to the students' texts, one may conclude to the predominance of a monologic voice in what is supposed to be a process of interaction between lecturers and student-writers. In fact, only the lecturer seems to set the pace and take full control of the process from the beginning to the end. He sole makes choice of the task to students and decides the modalities of its realisation without necessarily attempting to make explicit, through negotiation with students, the expectations set around the task. Thus, it is a type of monologic relationship which is not likely to allow mutual understanding between both parts involved, that is, lecturers and student-writers with their particular identities and expectations, on the one hand, and the requirements of writing conventions, the writing disciplinary context (or context of situation), on the other.

Thus, there is still a challenge with regard to establishment of a dialogical relationship likely to enable the student-writer to assert his/her voice and take on the identity of member of the university community, that is, the identity of a person with authoritative voice. As long as there is no such a perspective, the challenges related to "voice types" and addressivity (see Ivanič, 1998) is likely to undermine the attainment of the goal set for the module.

The present study was also interested in assessment of lecturer-participants' awareness of the importance of addressivity for meaning making in student writing. Through different interviews conducted with lecturers, none of them could evoke the necessity for the forms of wording used (including some diacritic signs such as quotation marks, parentheses, and person pronouns) to draw on the "intertextual relations" represented in the text which is being produced. This gap is also confirmed by the above-mentioned statements from student-participants who point to the prohibition by lecturers of certain forms of self-representation in students' text (e.g. the first-person pronoun, some adjectival pronouns, and accounts based on

personal experience perceived as unwarranted claims). It is also worth noting that, as per information provided through interviews, some elements related to the context of writing situation such as the adaptation of the text to the writing context are not given importance. For example, a testimony provided by Lecturer B during an interview is offering a glimpse of the type of knowledge privileged by the institutional tradition. He says the following:

On the first day in the class I discussed with students what are their interest, what they liked about literature... and based on those discussions I selected topics, and I started with a topic that was not very difficult, and when the student started to write on it I got a phone call during the exam from a professor saying the students don't understand your question, and I said ok let me talk to them. And when I looked to the exam later I understood why because my question was very different from the typical [questions] they were used to (...). I understood that I had given them a question that required them to tell their claims and back them with facts from their day to day experience... it's fairly common for [the perspective of where I come from] because we want to see evidence of the students' thinking through the subject rather than simply memorizing something and telling us what they had memorized. (Lecturer B, 31/03/2011)

Such a testimony is signalling a lack of preparedness on the part of the faculty to recognise the student-writer as a text author with a voice and personal experience he/she has to bring into the text, and to encourage students to draw on the existing social practices in their context of culture and/or context of situation as a means to effectively integrate their learning. In the case of academic writing, drawing on existing social practices and students' experience may also help the lecturer to have the real picture of every student's abilities and limits in order to intervene accordingly.

In addition, there is persistence of what Lillis (2001) referred to as “an institutional practice of mystery” which, in the case of Written English I module, can be regarded in two ways: firstly, the way the current pedagogy facilitates students’ understanding and learning of academic writing whereby only students’ written product is questioned while rules and conventions used in this process are not explicitly taught. Mastery of these rules and conventions is indeed viewed as a given, as is confirmed by interviewed lecturers who, as shown above, keep complaining about the standard of their students’ writing and, at the same time, suggest that learning of academic literacy occurs in an implicit way through observation of models of literacy products. Secondly, the way writing assignments are designed. In fact, there is no specification of the task to be performed by students which, as already indicated, should be realised through setting of criteria related to the intended type of text, content, level of analysis, audience, assessment criteria, etc. Tasks to students generally appear as broad topics which can be approached differently according to each student’s understanding.

However, when it comes to lecturers’ feedback, same types of observation are given to texts that are totally different, which appears as an indicator that the lecturers want students to guess their expectations and have the same understanding of what should be the preferred response to the assigned task. As example, for an exam task “Write a short essay (maximum 3 pages) around an event that was significant in your life”, a sample of 16 student copies was drawn. On examination of the copies, it is noticed that each of them received a comment structured around the following two issues: (a) incoherence of paragraphs, and (b) problem with sentences, with as variants ‘unclear paragraph, remember characteristics of a good paragraph, rules of a good paragraph, you have problem with paragraph, a paragraph of one sentence? What a paragraph! Unclear sentence! Too long sentence! Sentence please! Topic sentence! Use of capital letter...!’

In fact, one would think that the task assigned to students was focused on skills of making a good paragraph. However, there was no instruction in that direction as

shown by the exam question above. According to interviewed students, “only the mark obtained can tell you if you got it right or not.” The interviewed students affirm that they have no sense of what determines good or bad quality for their written texts. For them, “sometimes it’s a matter of an individual lecturer’s taste”.

Furthermore, while addressivity is viewed as “an essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.95) since it is the basis of its quality of being directed to someone or to a certain audience, the necessity to adapt the writing to the needs of the reader is ignored by the interviewed lecturers who rather advocate a straightforward way of conveying meaning without any concern about the writer-reader relationship. In fact, with the above-mentioned “fictionalisation of self as writer and audience”, the addressee seems to be conceptualised as an additional factor. This means that the addressee or the audience is deprived of a certain role, and the process of meaning-making is based on the sole relationship between the student-writer and the lecturer-reader. So, one would wonder how students can appropriately learn to adapt their writing to the reader’s needs when they are writing to the sole lecturer-marker whose expectations are hardly predictable.

So, given the relationship between the student-writer and the lecturer, which is still based on monologic relationship whereby the focus is on the final written product, and not on the construction of text as meaning-making, the addressivity issue is not addressed. Therefore, the novice-writers are always confronted with the problem of meaning making in their texts. Indeed, a problem of communication between lecturers and students persists due to an existing gap between lecturers’ and students’ conceptions of academic writing conventions.

In fact, all the above-described perspectives are signalling dismissal or ignorance by the lecturer-participants of the “indeterminacy, heterogeneity and struggle view” (Ivanič, 1998, p.45) of language variety. In other words, they believe that any text must be constructed in respect of what they view as universal conventions of the academic discourse. This type of belief is also echoed in some declarations of

lecturer-participants who position themselves rigidly within what they view as the literacy practices of university, leaving no space to student-writers' choice with regard to the way of meaning making (i.e. through wordings, words, phrases...) drawn from their habits of meaning and, hence, asserting their own identity in their writing.

### ***5.5. The standard form of language to the detriment of the student-writers' sense of identity***

As found out in the previous section, students seem to be denied real participation in academic literacy practices where, on the part of student-writers, it is about invention rather than negotiation of the institutionally acceptable voice. The monologic relationship characterising the process of interaction between lecturers and students does not allow students to assert their voice and identity in their writing. However, as stated in respect to addressivity, personal identity is one of inherent characteristics of an effective authorship (Lillis, 2001; Ivanič, 1998).

In fact, as pointed out by Ivanič (1998), "writer identity is 'discoursally constructed' in two ways (...): the way in which a writer's discorsal self is shaped by the specific, situated 'discourse' into which s/he enters with one or more actual readers, and [the way in which a writer's discorsal self is shaped] by the subject positions – the abstract 'possibilities for selfhood' – which are socially available in the discourse types on which writers draw as they write" (p. 255). The present section is particularly focused on the way lecturer-participants understand the significance of the (second) way a student-writer's discorsal self is constructed. In other words, what importance do lecturer-participants attach to the (abstract) possibilities for student-writers to represent themselves in their writing?

As per statements by lecturer-participants through interviews, the role of student-writer's identity is not given importance by lecturers who suggest that the individual students' habits of meaning making have no place at university. This is

shown by what is said by lecturers who deplore the fact that their students “are always writing as they used to do in secondary school” (see Lecturer C). Lecturer-participants also criticise their students’ style which, according to them, “is always narrative...” According to Lecturer A, who foregrounds the importance of ‘creativity and ‘imagination’ in academic writing, students do not show ‘readiness’ for academic writing because they have not yet acquired enough discipline for working independently. He states the following:

Remember a paragraph is about one specific idea, and sometimes students are confused, they squeeze you a lot of ideas in one paragraph. And some students don’t know how to respect presentation of a paragraph. Some students don’t even know how to respect a conclusive paragraph...Some are confused; they don’t know how to introduce (...) because some of the students they are not used to work independently... It’s lack of discipline. (Lecturer A, 08/04/2011)

So, according to the view as expressed by lecturer A, students’ limitations in terms of abilities in academic writing are not necessarily regarded as indicators of where a pedagogical action should be oriented. Instead, there is a tendency to blame students’ limitations regarding the respect of academic writing rules or conventions on their background and their working habits. However, as Lillis (2001) suggests, the student writing owes much to “...what she brings to the act of writing, her habits of meanings from her different life experience” (p.31).

In fact, as already mentioned, lecturer-participants tend to regard language skills as universal and do not recognise the heterogeneity and the struggle view of language variety. Then, an effective involvement of students in the authorship of their own texts seems to be humped by the fact that they are denied possibilities to use their habits of meaning and to make choices about different ways in which they can make meaning in their writing. This is also confirmed by the fact that lecturers are championing the institutional voice whereby they foreground ‘good’ models of

textual products which, for students who approach English as an additional language in the Rwandan context, appear as hardly helpful. Indeed, academic literacy practices upheld by HE institutions has been described as based on western patterns of meaning making at the expense of student-writer's connection and affective accounts of experience<sup>50</sup> (Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001). So, to be helpful in a context where English is used as an additional language, student's contextual connection appears as a resource to be tapped by lecturers.

However, interviewed students show awareness of the significance of this sense of personal and social identity to their performance in meaning making. They suggest that they need more freedom from their lecturers to express themselves freely in their texts. To the question of knowing whether their writing course is meeting students' expectations, student Nr 5 says the following:

Sometimes our expectations are not met because if we are taught to write for example about an article, there are some articles we find difficult to write about because sometimes it may be dangerous for you. You must check whether it will be good for the reader, and in that case you are not free to talk about anything you want. (Student Nr 5, 17/03/2011)

Student Nr 5's remarks are complemented by Student Nr 6 who states:

There is no way to write what you feel as right because whatever you write the lecturer is going to deconstruct it saying 'you have to write as a scholar' [Lough of classmates as Student Nr 6 was apparently evoking a particular lecturer's attitude or habit]<sup>51</sup>, meaning you are not to the point. (Student Nr 6, 17/03/2011)

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<sup>50</sup> According to Bourdieu (reported in Newkirk, 1997), "discomfort with emotional appeals [in academic texts] is a feature of the 'aesthetic disposition' assumed by those who belong (or seek to belong) to a cultural aristocracy" (p. 27).

<sup>51</sup> These views were collected through a focus group interview with students.



Further, students – who maintain the impossibility for them “to know what is required of their texts to be good” - reckon to exercise a form of self-censorship by switching their working ‘tactics’ according to every individual lecturer and what is assumed to be his demands regarding students’ written texts. Some of the students interviewed in focus group affirm that they sometimes do not feel themselves in their academic writing. One of the students who presents himself as a poet in his mother tongue regrets to feel in shortage of inspiration when he is writing academic texts as he has to exercise self-censorship not only regarding the content which must be carefully selected but also regarding the form of his expression which must take account of what is to be judged as good by the lecturer-marker.

Thus, students’ choices about meaning making in writing are stifled by lecturers who are positioning themselves with institutional voice and take advantage of unbalanced power relations between them and students. As shown by their statements, lecturers are upholding reproduction of dominant institutional discourses whereby writing conventions are treated as if they were transparently meaningful in a HE community viewed as homogeneous (see Lillis, 2001). Indeed, there is always attempt to lead students to adopt the institutional values regarding academic writing. As suggested by Ivanič (1998), lecturers’ preferences regarding some discursal characteristics (e.g.: lexical and grammatical use in accordance with requirements of the standard language) may be viewed as function of classic institutional values. In the case of a sample of student copies drawn for the current study, this is shown for example by lecturers’ comments where a particular insistence is put on a ‘topic sentence’ at the beginning of paragraph, or a clear distinction of three main parts in every text, namely a ‘good’ introduction, a middle part or development and a conclusive paragraph.

An institutional voice may also be perceived in a lecturer’s statement such as the following:

A good piece of writing must meet all requirements of a good text which include correct grammar, relevant content, sound coherence, etc. A good piece of writing must therefore demonstrate a high level of thinking on the part of the author. Then, the text must show relevant ideas or a good argumentation if it's an essay, coherence and logic if it's a short story, etc. (Lecturer A, 08/04/2011)

The fact of the matter is that conventions surrounding students writing in HE appear to be based on common sense: focus on language as a universal code and not on the specific instances of written communication where every 'utterance' is unique in its context. Further, a rigid formalism and power relations governing the enactment of these conventions are nurturing a tension between the kind of identity that the academic literacy privileges and the student-writer's sense of identity. Thus, it seems hard to bring students to take a full authorship of their writing as long as they do not feel personally connected to their texts and their voice and identity are obscured by regulations which remain a mystery for them.

## **CHAPTER 6: Pedagogical and assessment practices used in the module**

As shown in the previous chapter, lecturer-participants view conventions governing the academic texts as self-evident and autonomous. The writing activity thus tends to be regarded as consisting in conveying ideas into words which are then transcribed. In consequence, they emphasise writing as a product rather than as a process. Further, some of the interviewed lecturers view writing as an act of arts, imagination or intuition. They admit to often use models of textual products to show their students the type of texts they should be producing. The current study was also concerned with classroom observation with the aim of getting an insight into the nature of pedagogical and assessment practices used by the lecturers. The observation process conducted was also meant to examine to what extent pedagogical practices as observed in classroom corroborate the views reflected by interviews conducted with lecturers and students and, therefore, can contribute to test the trustworthiness of information collected through interviews.

Thus, the present chapter dedicated to analysis of the teaching process undertaken by lecturers for the Written English I module will be focused on three salient aspects of the observed sessions namely the teaching strategies used by lecturers, the assessment practices conducted, and the form of feedback provided on student texts.

### ***6.1. Teaching practices***

Before an in-depth exploration of the teaching and learning process as observed in the classroom, the table below is offering an overview of the teaching and assessment activities undertaken by the lecturers:

**Table 3: Overview of teaching and assessment activities undertaken by lecturers**

	<b>Teaching activities</b>	<b>Assessment tasks</b>
<b>Week One</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of (some) grammar trouble spots;</li> <li>- Introduction to grammar rules relating to sentence and sentence structure;</li> <li>- Presentation of types of sentence in English.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Task One:</b> Identify a standard sentence and a non-standard sentence in a list of sentences;</p> <p><b>Task Two:</b> Use the given sentence to write a cohesive paragraph;</p> <p><b>Task Three:</b> For each of the following items, underline the absolute and write the kind of absolute in the blank space before the sentence.</p>
<b>Week Two</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collective feedback and discussion of common problems with task Three;</li> <li>- Overview of verbal tenses;</li> <li>- Presentation of types of sentences in English.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Task Four:</b> Use any of these verbs in the different tenses;</p> <p><b>Task Five:</b> Ask a W.H. question (why, where, when, who, how...) and extend it with a paragraph using all of these above-presented different patterns of sentences.</p>
<b>Week Three</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of reading strategies for reaching one's reading objective – speedy reading tips</li> </ul>	
<b>Week Four</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of the writing conventions related to the text composition</li> </ul>	<p><b>Task Six:</b> Discuss what you feel, think, know about advertising.</p>

	<p>processes (general organisation of a piece of writing; structure of a composition such as report, academic essay...; stages of writing; advice for writing a good paragraph...)</p>	
<b>Week Five</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feedback on Task Five and discussion on common problems with Task Five;</li> <li>- Discussion on the way of recognising the writer's purpose;</li> <li>- Presentation of the SQ3R<sup>52</sup> method for an effective reading, referring to different steps of a good reading;</li> <li>- Presentation of 'meaning-markers' in a piece of writing.</li> </ul>	<b>Task Seven:</b> Write a formal letter (e.g. to SFAR) or a friendly letter (e.g. to friend, commiseration, condolences, congratulations, etc.)
<b>Week Six</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individualised feedback and discussion of common problems with Task Six;</li> <li>- Presentation of conventions about writing of a letter and a CV;</li> <li>- Presentation of a sample</li> </ul>	<b>Task Eight:</b> Write an application letter accompanied by a CV.

<sup>52</sup> Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review.

	of application letter.	
<b>Week Seven</b> (with a new lecturer coming in)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to the concept of academic literacy;</li> <li>- Presentation of reading strategies for improving one's reading skills: pre-viewing, skimming, scanning..., using structure of paper as guide;</li> <li>- Presentation and discussion about the process and the structure of an argument;</li> <li>- Presentation of rules for referencing and summarising someone else's opinion: use of direct quotations, paraphrasing, summarising...</li> </ul>	<p><b>Task Nine:</b> Write between 2 and 3 pages on one of the following topics: (a) Life on campus; (b) The importance of literature; (c) My plan for a future professional life</p> <p>N.B.: To be ready two days before the following session)</p>
<b>Week Eight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feedback and comments about common problems with Task Eight;</li> <li>- Analysis of samples of student work;</li> <li>- Further discussion of the way of developing an argument, an explanation in a piece of writing.</li> </ul>	

As shown by the table above, the teaching process observed is mainly based on the conventional face-to-face teaching. No technology-based mode is involved even though students are sometimes advised to do their own research through different types of aids including internet. The module content is mainly presented together with separate handouts (i.e. typed texts used as guidelines on reading and writing, and textual extracts from different publications used either as exercises or as models of good pieces of writing) distributed to students all along the teaching period.

In contrast with the Rwandan policy on language teaching in HE which suggests that any language programme intended to help undergraduate students improve their academic writing needs to take account of both the disciplinary and social contexts (NCHE, 2007a), the focus of the teaching process observed is rather on specific surface features of the final written product with little attention to the process of writing which involves decisions made by writers to adapt the text to the contextual requirements such as the text type, the writing purposes, the audience, etc. Details confirming this dominance of the text approach are presented in the sections below.

### **6.1.1. Dominance of skills approach**

As noticed throughout the observation process conducted in classroom, the delivery mode used is mainly based on presentations by the lecturer. The whole process thus takes a form of “skills discourse of writing” (Ivanič, 2004) made of lecturer’s presentations punctuated with short discussions and/or explanations triggered by students’ questions. The skills-oriented nature of the teaching process observed is reflected by the type of content and activities proposed by lecturers. The teaching episode below serves as illustration:

L.: Can someone tell me what we saw on last Thursday in our course of Written English? Yeah... [Note that a series of handouts on grammar trouble spots had been distributed]

St.1: We were looking at some grammar trouble spots.

L.: Yeah, and what did we learn? ... Lucie?

St.2 (Lucie): We saw some grammar rules relating to sentence....

L.: You're right. What did we see then? Yes [in a sign of green light to a student to speak]

St.3: We saw the sentence structure

L.: Yeah, as I said, sentence structure is the basis for writing, because you can't have a text if you don't know how to make a sentence.... So, this is a very important 'aspect' (sic) of our course. Of course, the course is not intended to make a review of English grammar or to cover everything you need to know to correct all errors in a piece of writing. It's focused on rules..., and will help you apply some principles, and it will then help you examine and evaluate your writing ...in terms of grammar.... [After a moment of a silent reading in the lecturer's documents] In fact, we saw the sentence structure and boundaries...

Tell me, what parts make up a sentence and with what a sentence starts and ends?

Sts: [Silence]

L.: It's something you have been learning since the primary school...

St.3: A sentence has a subject, a verb and a complement

L.: That's it [Nothing on the second part of the question...]. Let's do an exercise [writing on the black board with a chalk]:

'Which of these sentences are standard sentences (SS) in written English, which are not (NSS)?'

As illustrated by the episode above, the teaching activities observed resonate much with terms such as "grammar", "sentence", "sentence structure", "error(s)", "rules", etc. indicating a particular emphasis on form and correctness (or skills related to linguistic accuracy) in the writing abilities expected of students. Such an emphasis is not only reflected by the terms used in the classroom interaction, as shown above, but is also openly expressed by the lecturer who underlines the importance of aspects such as "sentence structure" presented as "the basis for writing" and



remarks that the course will provide students with “rules” and “principles” meant to help them examine and evaluate their writing “in terms of grammar”.

Further, the emphasis on linguistic accuracy featured by the teaching session of 17 February 2011 is not an isolated fact as it appears as the main characteristic of subsequent sessions. In the session of 24 February 2011, after correction of the exercise left on 17 February 2011, the course continued with activities pertaining to skills approach. Another exercise proposed to students and title of which – Forming absolute phrases – was written on the black board consisted “in combining two sentences to make one sentences an absolute phrase and another the main clause”. The activity resulted in exercises presented below:

- a. John won the contest b. We were in good spirits  
→ John having won the contest, we were in good spirits
1. a. It is a nice day. b. We are going for a walk  
→ Being a nice day, we are going for a walk
2. a. Our car was in good conditions. b. We felt ready for the trip  
→ Our car having been in good conditions, we have felt ready for the trip
3. a. The skies cleared up b. People began to appear on the beach  
→ The skies having cleared up, people began to appear on the beach
4. a. The names of the winning contestants were announced b. The meeting broke up  
→ The names of the winning contestants having been announced, the meeting broke up
5. a. The newspaper is late b. I cannot tell you what programmes are on TV  
→ The newspaper being late, I cannot tell you what programmes are on TV

As shown by the exercise above, the activity is limited to combination of two sentences to make one sentence made of two different clauses. Few students actively participate in the exercise while the majority show difficulties to form one sentence out of the two sentences provided. No opportunity is offered to address difficulties of the silent majority of students. The exercise is then immediately followed by an activity related to the “types of sentences” which starts with a definition of the notion of “sentence” as shown in the extract below:

L.: Let's look at some patterns of sentences.

**SENTENCES** [written on the black board]

L.: We can have **S - V - O**, example 'John cleans his bedroom'

On basis of this sentence, who can define a sentence?

St.: A set of words which has a meaning.

L.: ... which has a meaning? What's a meaning?! Let's say a combination of words that ends with a full stop.....and beginning with a capital letter. Example [written on the black board]:

He studies Accountancy

I like to listen to the music

They are sleeping

ii. You can also have a sentence made of a S - V

iii. You may have S - C = Subject Complement, Example 'I am a student'

iv. You may also have S + V + D.O+ I.O, Example 'Peter sent a post card to his mother

v. Also a combination of: S + O - O.C, They (S.) elected (V.) him (O.) President (O.C.=object complement)

These are the 5 patterns of sentences. Of course, they make a distinction between a simple sentence and a complex sentence. When you say 'John and Peter clean the bedroom, or when you say 'Suzan and Rose have been dancing all night... That is also a simple sentence. When we say 'the tallest student of our class ran the marathon last year', this is also a simple sentence.

Let's ask someone to clean that part of the black board, then we'll look at other aspects of the sentence.

When you say 'Tom and Joy are getting married', you can also describe them 'The tallest and the most handsome boy of our school is getting married with the shortest and not very good looking girl of my village'.

L.: I want to propose you homework. You are going to write a paragraph beginning with these above-presented types of sentence. That's how you write paragraphs, you ask W.H. question and you extend it with a paragraph: why, where, when, who, how... Your paragraph will use all of these different patterns of sentences.

The above-presented teaching episode provides an illustration of a teaching session meant to get students "manipulate and master grammatical forms with little attention to the content or organisation of the texts" (Frodesen & Holten, 2003, p. 141) they are expected to produce. The explicit teaching of grammar without necessarily incorporating it into a writing activity highlights the importance attached by the lecturers to the language form in their teaching of academic writing.

The writing activity proposed to students as homework at the end of the session also focuses on “different patterns of sentences”, and does not provide guideline in terms of features related to “the writer, the content and purpose” (Frodesen & Holten, *ibid*, p. 141) of the paragraph to be produced.

This focus on language form highlighted by the episodes above is also reflected by a series of handouts distributed all along the module and which are made of headings such as “grammar trouble spots”, “types of sentences in English”, “speedy reading tips”, “rules of sentence structure”, “hints for writers to maintain good habits”, “elements of style, etc.”

The form-focused teaching manifest in most of the content (and activities) proposed in the teaching process observed is also indicated by statements made by lecturers such as “you can’t have a text if you don’t know how to make a sentence” or “sentence structure is the basis for writing” (Week One: 17/02/2011), etc.

It is also worth noting that, beyond the teaching episodes presented above as illustrations, the focus on form aspects or specific surface features of the written text are in great dominance in the whole process of teaching. Apart from two of the eight sessions observed which featured activities pertaining to writing processes and contextualisation of the written product, the rest of the observed sessions are mainly oriented either to explicit grammar-based teaching or presentations of a series of theoretical principles on codes and conventions of academic literacy. It is worth indicating that even these two sessions of writing activities are limited to analyses meant to make various academic writing conventions more explicit (e.g.: rules for referencing and summarising someone else’s opinion, structure of an argument in an academic text, etc.).

Indeed, by way of raising awareness of students about the dominant “conventions” and rhetorical characteristics of academic texts, the teaching sessions observed makes much use of presentation of guidelines focusing on specific features of written text such as spelling, text structure, lexical items, style, etc. The following extract is typical of the form of presentation in dominance:

L.: Today we'll be looking at some tips and conventions related to text composition.

Who can tell us different parts of a composition?

Sts: (Silence)

L.: You don't know the main parts of a complete text?

St.1: A text is made by (sic) title, an introduction, a body and a conclusion

L.: Is it?

Sts: (many voices together) Yes

L.: Who can repeat?

St.2: An introduction, a ...body and a conclusion [expressed with hesitation; no comment on the "title" mentioned by the first student].

L.: When you are writing an essay for instance, you'll make sure that your title is short and really attractive

St.: The title must be short?

L.: Economy is relevant in nearly every field of life, and it's recommended for the quality of your composition. Quality of text is made by simple sentences, simple statements....., an idea per paragraph...

L.: In fact, there are some principles to write a good composition...

The extract above highlights a teaching focused on exhortation of students to be aware of general principles governing the essayist writing practices of university. In the teaching sessions observed, these principles are presented as "some tips to help you reach your reading [and writing] objective" (Week Three: 03/03/2011) and take a form of general advice transferable to any literacy context. The teaching episode below serves as example:

L.: Let's come back to our reading tips... In your reading you may need some tips to help you reach your reading objective. Don't worry you will have a copy of the document [as the lecturer is reading from a printed document].

Speed reading tips [Written on the b.b.]:

1. Reading every day
2. Prioritize your reading
3. Skim the material first for the main ideas
4. Focus questions

5. Jot down notes
- St.: What does it mean?
- L.: To jot? It means just to write down
6. Read in a proper environment
7. Use a flexible speed
8. Preview before reading
9. Enroll in speed reading
10. Practice timing yourself

L.: As you know, speedy reading is very important in this time where a big amount is produced for reading and people don't really have time for this...

St.a: I think it is difficult to understand well a message from a text when you are reading with speed.

L.: You're right but it depends on the objective and some other constraints especially those related to time. This is the reason why there are some tips to help you cope with such constraints.

As illustrated by the teaching episode above, the teaching process of the module is centred on a particular discourse treating literacy as an autonomous tool of communication. This type of discourse is for example reflected in a definition of the concept "academic literacy" provided to students by one of the lecturers:

Academic literacy refers to all stuff regarding conventions and practice of academic writing and reading. This includes writing in clear, knowing how to incorporate ideas from authors or speakers in your writing, respect the right structure for an academic text, etc. (Week Seven: 31/03/2011)

Although spontaneously uttered, this definition is typical of an autonomous and transparent view of academic literacy assuming for example that conventions of academic writing relating to clarity and the right structure for academic texts are self-evident to students. The same perspective is perceived in a lecturer's statement that "Quality of text is made by simple sentences, simple statements...an idea per paragraph..." (Week Four: 10/03/2011) which may signal a lack of awareness of a possible subjectivity attached to what is viewed as 'simple sentences' or 'simple

statements'. Thus, pieces of guideline and advice such as the following remain the basic component parts of the observed teaching process:

Once you have located your sources, you must read and think critically about your material.  
Ask yourself how relevant, valid, and accurate your sources are... (Week Four: 10/03/2011)

It is in fact a teaching process foregrounding guidelines around 'academic literacy conventions' and 'writing strategies' in an apparent attempt to fix difficulties students are confronted with during their writing tasks. This is illustrated by some of the statements in the above-presented teaching episodes such as "There are some rules or some cautions for improving your reading skills..." (Week Seven: 31/03/2011), "This handout will help you to have an idea of different types of sentences" (Week Five: 17/03/2011), or advices such as "be aware...", "don't forget to put details you judge useful...", "don't forget to sign", "please note that *résumé* is an American term....", etc. The focus on theoretical guidelines and advice is so dominant in the observed sessions that opportunities of analysing the implication of the writing purposes, the audience, the textual genre, and corresponding formal and linguistic features are reduced to the minimum.

One may also mention the existence of a normative approach of teaching according to the model of "Say... Don't say..." This is the case with sequences related to "Some expressions commonly misused" (Week Seven: 31/03/2011), the rectification made by the lecturer on a student's answer which urges "The sentence is made of...not by...", or declarations such as "There is nothing as future tense, it's future time, and we say 'present time'..." (Week Two: 24/02/2011), "We say 'cope with' and not just 'cope' (Week Seven: 31/03/2011).

### **6.1.2. Tentative attention to contextualization and the writing processes**

By way of attempting to initiate students to text types varying according to contextual circumstances, sessions of overt discussions are organised in classroom, and they mainly revolve around analysis of samples of students' texts. This is the

case for the session of 24<sup>th</sup> March 2011 devoted to analysis of the structure of an application letter:

L.: Last time I had asked you to prepare two types of letters. Did you write them?

[Some students are showing their letters]

L.: Let's see Gratian's letter. Ok, no problem if a formal letter is handwritten!

St.: But it's better to type it [Some discussions erupted about the issue....]

L.: You know, it depends on different parameters. Sometimes it's specified in the advertisement when it's a job letter. Otherwise, it's better to use computer.... What about the writer's address, to what extent has it to be detailed... Look at this one [The lecturer is reading the address of the student]: no telephone number, no email...

St.: [a neighbour to Gratian]: But the department is included

L.: Ok, this may be accepted as a needed detail but when possible put the telephone... Let's look at the receiver details [He is reading]: Don't say at Kigali, please. You don't need this 'at'...

[An example is put on the black board]:

'The Executive Secretary of FARG

Kigali'

L.: Kigali may be either underlined or put in bold.

St.n: Put in what?

L.: I said 'put in bold'. You know to put the characters in bold when you are writing on computer?

St.x: Yes [an explanation is given in French by the student]

L.: [Reading] For the reference '(RE)' [written on the b.b.], put 'For payment of tuition fees' [Written on the b.b.]

St.y: What is the difference between tuition fees and bursary?

L.: 'Tuition fees' are money paid for your studies whatever is the source. It can be based on a bursary or not; 'bursary' is just referring to a funds made available not only for the cost of your studies but also for other students' needs...

I think there are mistakes in this formal letter from our friend. You can say "I am writing to apply for...", "I am a student at the National University of Rwanda..."

All of this in one paragraph? Please separate for instance "I was in the Faculty of Arts"

Therefore ....→ ok

What about the leave-taking formula? → 'hoping that my application will have favorable ...'

'Faithfully' and not 'Faitefully'!

Note that the sender's name and the signature would better be put close to the left margin.

[...Then, the letter is handed back to the author]

As shown by the teaching episode above, classroom discussions around the student's written text are focused on common textual features which are made explicit to students through a series of comments and oral explanations. Even though the activity is object of a lively interest for a portion of students who strive to ask questions of clarification in relation to their difficulties with writing of an application letter, a big majority of students stays inactive in the process as there is no targeted activity meant to engage everyone in the process.

Another session attempting to make explicit conventions governing the writing of academic text is organised on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011. It is intended to discuss about the process and the structure of an argument in an academic essay:

L.: Let's take one of your texts [a student text is randomly grabbed]: 'Life on campus'... I wonder whether this one made a plan before starting to write the text... because a general shape of what is to be written and to pursue that shape. Your paragraphs must give an impression of holding together. This one is introducing his text for example by a narrative of what is going on on campus 'Students are enjoying life on campus, and they are happy to live ....However, student life is tough on the academic side...', and the following paragraph...' life on campus is a mixture of events which every student is enjoying during all the time spent at university...' And the tough side of life on campus does not come back anywhere throughout the text. I won't talk about language and grammar...

Coming back to paragraph organization, the organization of a paragraph is very important for your writing because it will determine the way you place your thoughts on paper. A good paragraph usually adheres to a basic form; it begins with a generalization, a general statement... supporting sentences will follow...

St.a: Can you make a paragraph with one sentence?

L.: I don't know how you define a sentence ...but an ideal paragraph must have certain autonomy or a unity of information or statement. When the writer can feel that his paragraph contains a particular idea, particular information..., a paragraph can be made of what you call a single sentence.



As specified by the lecturer in the introduction of the session, the episode above is devoted to comments on student's texts with the aim of helping them ensure coherence in their writing. The comments made by the lecturer are then presented in response to students' writing problems, and are meant to help raise their awareness about different features of a written text according to the text type, the purpose, etc. Thus, although the lecturer's comments are highlighting specific difficulties detected in the students' texts, the way these difficulties are presented reflects a monologic communication where the student's voice is not foregrounded.

The whole teaching process observed is also characterised by episodes of attention to basic steps and stages of writing that an individual writer may work through as she/he writes. The initiative is mainly marked by presentation and comments on

The three basic stages which a good composition usually goes through: (i) Initial thinking, (ii) Revising and (iii) Final writing. (Week Four: 10/03/2011)

It is worth noting that these initiatives pertaining to the processes involved in the writing activity are also dominated by theoretical guidelines. The teaching sessions observed do not result in practical activities in application of what writers do as they write. Such activities may for example help clarify students' misconceptions about authorship and writing on basis of the premise that writing is an iterative process (Coffin et al., 2003).

In fact, a focus to these three practical processes involved in the teaching activity and their possible exploitation is rather diverted by a constant call of the students' attention to codes and regulations of academic writing which are recited to students as illustrated by the episode below:

L.: You know already the main parts of a text... the introduction, the body and the conclusion... For the style to be used, when you are writing you must be aware you're just expressing your opinion and not necessarily the gospel truth. Also, don't be full of your own persona. Avoid making reference to yourself as an 'agent' or 'performer' when possible. This means when you're writing, you try to be as neutral as possible with regard to your persona as a writer. Ok?

St.x: The meaning here 'avoid making reference to yourself as an 'agent' ...?

L.: It means when you're writing, you don't have to say for example 'I think what I am saying is true..., I,I,I...'. If possible use 'one' ..., use the passive voice... (Week Six: 31/03/2011)

One of the notable facts in the episode above is that these rules of academic discourse are object of recitation and oral comments by the lecturer without subsequent exercises aiming to test the real enactment and entailed challenges once embedded in a disciplinary context. Thus, the particular challenge facing students who want to learn how to 'be' part of a particular higher education community, hence to write as academic, journalist, social scientists, etc. receives little attention.

So, a key issue in this process, as noticed through the analysis above, is based on the fact that there is no attention to writing as an activity that always occurs in a social context. That is, the teaching process investigated does not propose activities intended to develop students' ability for meaning making in real communication. Learning to write continues to be envisaged as likely to occur in an implicit way whereby writing competences are acquired through exposition to "good models" of writing and advice or guidelines provided by lecturers. This gap may also be explained by the prevailing conceptualisation of what is involved in academic writing (See Chapter 6 for details) and the type of relationships that exist around teaching and learning in the investigated context.

In fact, the lecturer remains the only player determining everything in the process: he decides the teaching content, selects the writing assignment topic, sets the rating criteria, and is the only reader of the student text. So, the teaching process observed remains characterised by a monologic relationship where possibilities of dialogue between students and lecturers are limited. Furthermore, complaints such as "When one is reading your texts, the overall feeling is that most of you need to be capable of in-depth analysis of the topic you're given" (Week Eight: 06/04/2011) or "...the type of writing we have with our students ...leaves so much to be desired" (Week Three: 03/03/2011) permeate the whole teaching process.

As noticed through the observation period, lecturers are advocating an abrupt discontinuity between secondary school literacy practices and university literacy practices. They often complain about their first year students' failure to write according to rules and regulations of academia which however, according to research on the subject (see Pahl & Rowsell, 2005), are meant to be realised progressively as students get used to the practices of the new academic environment.

Regarding the way in which learning opportunities are created at institutional level, students are afforded opportunity to make an optimal exploitation of the newly introduced modular system which makes more time slots to help them conduct independent work. In fact, out of the 200 hours assigned to the Written English module, only 45 hours are dedicated to lectures while the remaining time is reserved for the students' independent work. However, concrete strategies for accompanying the students' work during these time slots are not noticed during the observation period. Lecturers' accessibility for providing advice to students is limited as the common procedure is to request an appointment with the lecturer before being allowed to individually meet him<sup>53</sup>.

The distant relationship between lecturers and students then appears as impediment to a closer follow-up on assignments given to students. As consequence, student assignments are not provided with needed feedback as the classroom time is not enough for this exercise. For example, at least three take-home assignments left to students during the observed teaching period (i.e. an assignment of 24/02/2011 and two assignments of 17/03/2011) did not get any form of feedback from lecturers.

## ***6.2. Assessment practices***

While the teaching process used in the Written English I module is explored in the previous section, it is also worth looking at assessment choices made by lecturers

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<sup>53</sup> A notice pinned on the door of one of the lecture-participants reads: "Strictly by appointment".

and to what extent students are likely to benefit from the assessment practices established either to grade their written texts or to help them improve their writing abilities. Indeed, assessment as a tool at the centre of teaching and learning at all levels of education can also be crucial to determine success or failure for any educational undertaking. In this section, the emphasis is on examination of the way in which the assessment practices established are addressing students' needs in terms of production of texts that are adapted to the requirements of written texts. This examination is specifically carried out in relation to the type of assessment tasks proposed, the forms of guidance provided to students, and the type of assessment criteria used.

### **6.2.1. Priority to linguistic accuracy in the written product.**

As noted by Sadler (1989), “teachers use feedback to make programmatic decisions with respect to readiness, diagnosis and remediation” (p.120). Regarding the assessment practices observed, the use of continuous assessment to monitor the quality of students' performance does not seem to be on agenda. For example, no attempt is made at the outset of the course to gauge the students' level of preparedness in order for the lecturer to get a clear sense of the type of assistance students need. The course starts with a series of guidelines provided by way of “memory refreshment” about “some grammar rules relating to sentence” (Week One: 17/02/2011). The first assessment task is related to these very discrete grammar skills as shown in one of the teaching episode presented in the previous section<sup>54</sup>.

With regard to lecturers' responses to students' written works, lecturers' attention does not seem to be focused on specific problems students are confronted with. The choice is rather on a collective form of feedback whereby a prescriptive presentation of grammar rules is in dominance as shown by the session of 24<sup>th</sup> February 2011:

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<sup>54</sup> “Which of these sentences are standard sentences (SS) in written English, which are not (NSS)?” (Week One: 17/02/2011).

L.: I want you to show me what you did of the exercise I left on last Thursday. [The lecturer is going through different rows where students are seated; the latter are showing the sheets of paper (now completed (i.e. blank spaces filled in as requested last time)].

St.1: Some sentences are hard to explain [i.e. to characterize...]

L.: Which one for example?

St.1: Like the sixth sentence

L.: Let's go systematically [All students are implicitly requested to find the right answer]. The first sentence has already got an answer, hasn't? And the next sentence?

St.: The sentence Nr 1? It has not an absolute

L.: Yes. So what to do now? Can you tell me the kind of word or expression used in a place of the absolute?

St.: A subordinate clause has been used.

L.: Which one?

St.: Therefore, we we.....

L.: [Disrupting] Who can tell me what kind of word 'therefore' is?

St.: It's an adverb

L.: Exactly. It's a conjunctive adverb. So, can we transform the sentence into an absolute phrase?

Sts.: [No answer]

L.: Look at the sentence Nr 3 [He reads the sentence]

St.: Yes, the highway we planned to travel on being under repair, we will have to change our route.

L.: Exactly. Who can repeat the sentence?

St.: [Sentence repeated]

L.: Let's go on following the same pattern. The word used in the following sentence is just "a word of address. And for the sentence Nr 4?

As shown in the episode above, the interaction between the lecturer and students is envisaged collectively and potential difficulties of individual students regarding these basic conventions of language structure remain unexplored. Further, the assessment practices focused on judging the correctness of students' responses to linguistic accuracy-related exercises do not appear open for an application with tasks resulting in production of written texts by students.

Further, as noticed during the investigation period, the assessment practices in place pay little attention to “criteria and standards of performance” (see Boud, 2000) in students’ written texts. Some initiatives pertaining to helping students improve their task-based performance are undertaken toward the end of the course (i.e. during the three last teaching sessions). As shown in the previous section, these initiatives seem to arouse interest of students even though they could not be spun out given the time period at which they were undertaken. Indeed, this tallies with what is suggested by theorists that “formative assessment is of little use at the end of [the teaching process]” (Brown, 1999, p. 7).

Another issue worth being noted is the fact that some of the attempts to undertake formative assessments do not seem to gain students’ engagement as a number of student-participants acknowledge to “devote little time” to the assessment tasks which they assume as not meant to be marked by lecturers and therefore not relevant for the required academic score. This is the case for the assignments of 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March 2011 which are left to students but do not get follow-up by lecturers.

### **6.2.2. Unspecified guidance on assignment tasks**

As part of challenging aspects in the assessment system established is also the type of guidance provided with the writing assignments which, in general, does not offer needed specifications for the text to be produced by students. As noticed during the observation period, guidance provided to students is generally laconic and limited to specification of the length of the final text to be handed over for marking<sup>55</sup>. There is no detailed indication regarding the required work (which could be extended to the style preferences, referencing system, modalities for use of sources, etc.). Tasks to be performed are sometimes chosen from a list of titles proposed by the lecturer as is the case for the assignment of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 where the length of the task to be handed over and a list of topics for students’ choice were the only guiding instructions on the assignment phrased as follows:

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<sup>55</sup> It is worth reminding that ascribing of a mark in figures appears as almost the only student’s expectation of an assignment handed over to the lecturer for ‘correction’.

Write between 2 and 3 pages on one of the following topics: (a) Life on campus; (b) The importance of literature; (c) My plan for a future professional life.  
(31/03/2011)

As illustrated by the assignment tasks above, specific requirements of the lecturer in relation to the final text are kept implicit while in reality the tasks as assigned are likely to result in various text types (e.g.: description of life on campus, argumentative essay on the positive effects of having spent a part of one's life on a university campus, etc.) whose writing conventions are not necessarily the same.

Further, a problem based on the duality of audience has also been identified in different instances of assessment. That is, some assignment tasks are phrased in a way that is directing to a specific fictitious audience while in fact the lecturer will be the sole real reader of the final text. Thus, students are likely to be frustrated by the lecturer's feedback (or the outcome of the assessment) as the latter may be based on criteria other than those (implicitly or explicitly) represented in the assignment question. For example, an exam question phrased as "Write a short essay persuading a friend to study literature" received feedback comments as varied as relating to the language style used, inaccuracy of the information conveyed, as well as the validity of the arguments presented. Thus, while the type of language style used may be naturally questioned, as is the case for one of the comments calling into question the type of vocabulary and sentence structures used which is often described as inadequate by the lecturer-marker, one would wonder whether lecturers are entitled to penalise the inaccuracy of information<sup>56</sup> provided to a friend with purpose of leading him to make up his mind about a particular commitment. One would rather imagine that the student is free to use all means at his/her disposal to persuade his/her friend particularly since the accuracy of information is not required in the guidance provided to the assigned task.

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<sup>56</sup> In this particular case the classification given to categories of literature (i.e. oral literature, sign literature and written literature).

A similar reasoning applies to a comment questioning the strength of the argument presented (namely “an attractive job?” with reference to what is cited by the student-writer as successful jobs obtained by leavers of Arts Departments where ‘teaching in secondary school’ is given as example). One would here wonder to what extent the lecturer is entitled to judge his student’s preferences with regard to a successful job. An example of a marked student script where the strength of the argument put forward is being questioned is presented below:



7/10

A short Essay persuading a friend to study literature

It is commonly known that literature can be defined as a domain which deals with different kinds of written words and oral works. This domain presents many things that involve different ways of how people live in the world. Through different works produced by writers, each has something to teach to the society. Grammar, please Considering all main goals of literature that it searches to fulfill including guidance, education, history and life of people in general, every individual may be interested in learning literature.

As it is seen in the campus, people or students who often read, receive effective knowledge. Therefore, any student may feel free for studying literature. Literature is the domain that softens life. This means that a student who does literature shel he cannot be bored. shel he always has to read and understand. Literature is the source of wisdom because students find every topic from it.

In fact, literature is said to be a mirror of society. It covers all ideas that show how people live at a given time such as their culture, customs, economy, religion and politics. A part from issues mentioned above, students who finished their study in the domain of literature they easily get different jobs for an attractive job instance teaching in secondary schools. They know much about the life of a given country. They are the best advisor of society. They know everything that can harm the society and uproot it by implementing perfect ways to be followed for achieving good life.

To sum up, it is a good choice for everyone to study literature there in the campus because students who have achieved this goal are the best teachers and advisors. They are skillful persons.

- Be more convincing at the end (last paragraph)  
- poor grammar, vocabulary...

As illustrated by the student script above, it is noticeable that lecturer's comments are putting a special focus on grammar (i.e. sentence structures, conjugation...) and vocabulary while these two dimensions are not emphasised in the assignment question.

The wording (or the phrasing) used in the assignments may also constitute a source of misunderstanding on the part of students. It is noticeable that some terms commonly used in assessment and which are semantically different tend to be alternatively used by lecturers without apparently making any distinction between them. For example, in an exam question phrased "Write a short essay (maximum 3 pages) describing an event that was significant in your life", the term 'describing' can be considered as central to the activity required of students.

However, as already demonstrated in chapter 6, a sample of students' scripts analysed shows that the assessment focus of the lecturer-markers is placed on formal aspects of the written text (i.e. sentences and paragraphs) while no attention is drawn to the description skills suggested in the exam question. Likewise, with the exam question 'Write a short essay ... describing...' confusion may be created in students' minds with regard to the type of text required given the perceptible contradiction between an essay (implying a process of making a point or a process of meaning making through argument and evidences<sup>57</sup>) and a description (normally based on analogical representation of physical features or a course of events). It is a similar scenario for the activity suggested in the assignment questions "Identify a standard sentence and non-standard sentence in a list of sentences" (Week One: 17/02/2011) and "Discuss what you feel, think, know about advertising" (Week Four: 10/03/2011) where it may be hard for students to understand the specific gesture or activity suggested by the key terms used (namely 'identify' and 'discuss') as they are not self-evident and no further contextual indication is provided.

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<sup>57</sup> See Coffin et al. (2003) or Lea and Street (1998) for details.

Thus, a gap of understanding between lecturers and students is noticeable as indicated by lecturer's feedback comments which signal expectations that are different from what might be regarded as the plain meaning of the key terms used in the assignment question. These feedback comments focused on ability to make sentences and paragraphs, while the assigned task is implying a description, can serve as illustration of such an inconsistent assessment. Thus, the expected learning efficiency of students who are just novice-writers is likely to be affected by such an unclear guidance on writing assignments.

### **6.2.3. Lack of assessment criteria for rating students' written work**

Another noticeable fact is that lecturers do not make clear in advance what they are intending to assess and how. That is, they generally do not have clear assessment criteria set in advance whereby allocation of marks will be based on separate aspects of the written text such as the relevance of the answer to the assignment question as set, the way of presenting and pursuing an argument, the ability to use grammar rules appropriately, etc. In fact, lecturers do not seem to make use of specific criteria to allocate marks to students' writing. The assessment is generally based on a global judgment or general impression. Such a type of assessment is noticeable on examination of the feedback comments made on students' scripts but is also confirmed by apparently highly contrasting marks awarded to particular assignment copies which do not show fundamental differentials in terms of quality (i.e. content, text structure, linguistic accuracy...). An analysis of the following marked scripts can provide idea of the dominant assessment mode:

2. ESSAY.

(3)

THE STUDY OF LITERATURE IN NATIONAL  
UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA.

6/10

1. Improve your grammar, vocabulary  
- More convincing arguments, please!

Newdays the members in society used to keep their custom by looking after what their ancestors left to them. That why literature combine all those customs, it means people study like it in order to know all those knowlegment. In this short essay, I'm going to show what are included in literature, how is very important to study literature and how it is studied in National University of Rwanda.

Many important things like the modern society are included in literature. literature to the modern society has a good way, what person can be joined. This one, is what we read from the writer, where they telling us how our ancestors used to escape from the problems of what they used to across with, in their life. This can be compared as the one (life) of to day. literature included also the stories which help the persons who read it for not having many problems in their mind instead being happy. it means after reading those stories all some problems in the mind disappeared.

It is very important to study literature. As we have seen in the above paragraphs, literature helps men to be developed in their mind, where they are also able to take a good decision which can bring them to the other category (level) that what where they were. literature is important also because, with it, we study the stories of our ancestor how they lived, for instance, their knowledge which, nowadays, help us to grow our society. The study of literature, sometimes, bring us to be the good artists in different genres.

In National University of Rwanda, (we study) literature is studied in the faculty of Arts Media and Social sciences departement of English and Modern languages. There is also many books about literature in the library of National University of Rwanda. Not enough reasons!

As it is interested and very important to study literature, you, students, are wellcome to study it, then we, all together, share the knowledge from our ancestors.

The children and grand children of Innocent and believer stayed alive. They stayed alive because they are the young ones and grand young ones. Those children and grand children arranged were the burial ceremonies of those their parents, and those children and grand children of Innocent and believer went on doing good things as they were well brought up by their parents, Innocent and believer.

Those children and grand children of Innocent and believer also begot children and brothers and sisters. In - slow of Innocent and believer, also begot the children. All of those offsprings played a role in building the united nations of welcome and patient.

— Punctuation? Respect i

To conclude, that boy and girl who were being talked by me at the beginning of story, had good lives. Innocent, that boy and believer, that girl did many good things in spite of difficulties at the beginning. Every body should do the same as that boy and girl because they did good things as it was said through this short story.

- Your story not adapted to English language: clear influence of Kin.
- Language structure very poor
- Problem of coherence

As illustrated by the student scripts above, two main characteristics are noticeable in the way student works are assessed: (i) formal aspects of the written text are given much importance to the detriment of the content which is focused in the assignment question, and (ii) no accurate criteria are used to rate the student work. This is shown by the general character of feedback comments made on students' scripts (e.g.: 'Poor grammar', 'Sentence structure please', 'More convincing arguments please', 'Your story not adapted to English language', 'Language structure very poor', 'Problem of coherence'...) and the way of awarding marks to the students' works which does not seem to make justice to different students' texts assessed (See comparison of the marks awarded to the essays written with the aim of 'persuading a friend to study literature' as illustrated above).

### ***6.3. Form of feedback provided to students' work***

Feedback envisaged in terms of its effect rather than its informational content can be defined as "information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way" (Ramaprasad, 1983, quoted in Sadler, 1989, p. 120). That is, in order to alter the gap between the actual quality of student work and the quality appropriate to it, the feedback on the work produced needs to be expressed in a way that is clear enough to indicate a fine performance and how the poor performance can be improved (See Sadler, *ibid*, p. 120). The current section analyses the way in which feedback on student work is presented, and the analysis is carried out in relation to the written feedback as well as that made in oral form throughout the observed teaching process.

#### **6.3.1. Not always in line with the objective of the assigned task**

On analysis of the form of feedback used for the Written English I module, one may wonder whether there is a certain pedagogical purpose underpinning the type of comments made on students' writing. Indeed, as already suggested in the previous section related to the assessment practices established, feedback comments made

on students' written texts show no consonance with any informed pedagogical agenda to support students' learning. That is, some of the comments made on students' texts are not explicit and appear as just meant to justify the marks awarded. Further, a significant amount of comments made are not in line with the objective of the assigned task as reflected by the assignment question. In other words, feedback comments made on students' work do not seem to inscribe themselves in a learning improvement perspective set in advance by the lecturer. The type of comments produced on student scripts below serve as examples:

#### 4. Essay

6/5/10

### The importance of literature

To break the ice, <sup>storytelling?</sup> literature is the all kinds of value arts, such as stories, poems and plays. In this essay, we are going to deal with how literature is important to people, and how ~~going~~ you may be interested when you learn about literature.

Inaccurate classification!  
In fact, literature is classified into three categories such as oral literature, sign literature and written literature as the art of social science, when you read or listen to literature it help you to change the behavior of the different communities, in the different countries. However literature help you to change ideology and mentality, if you read for example some books on author, we see how literature change the ideology of these communities.

For instance if you listen play on the radio you understand some behaviors as well as good and bad. Moreover you choose the good way and avoid bad way. on the other hand literature is very important in our society because is the one which solving some problems. In our society, for example, there are some books and stories which are giving some solutions in many conflicts. In our country literature concern with African literature, and others, when you join literature especially in our Campus (National University of Rwanda), you will be able to know more information about literature.

In sum, literature plays great role in our daily life because it gives you some instructions and education in our daily life.

- Not very convincing
- Faulty grammar & sentences, conjugation...



cares to Billy in the way that Billy could not escape this love until now their love is still strong. After the university studies Billy found a job. He was an interpreter in Serena hotel Kigali .he passed an exam and became the first .That how he found a job.

He worked there for a period of five years and him also doing his masters degree in USA in information and communication skills. While working at Serena hotel many beautiful girls tried to fall in love with Billy but in vain. He had promised Bubu to be her father's children, that's why he could never deceive his fiancé.

One of these girls even promised him a car but he denied the gift because he knew this will be dangerous to him .the time for wedding ceremony arrived, the family of Billy and Bubu <sup>(sense)</sup> gathered to celebrate their children's party, in their honey moon the new couple had a trip to Kivu sun beach to relax and plan for the new life, they had their own house, car and many other properties.

After two years they had their first child, this was a great pleasure to their family, they had their family planning so that they could never go beyond 2 children. After leaving the second born they decided to send their children abroad, their children were very intelligent, they all come first in their classes. Billy and Bubu are now a happiest family in the world, every body wishes to be like them.

In short, Billy faced a challenged life when he was still young. You can't imagine. the way he overcomes those struggles it's a long way. If he didn't take care of himself he wouldn't become a man he is now. Many people face struggle in their lives but a few of them successes. Billy at the end of his life will be a hero; everybody who knows him will try to imitate him. At the end of my story, I encourage people to take care of themselves like Billy of this story did.

- Problems of coherence in your story
- The Kiryarwanda influence is very clear
- Pay attention to the use of grammar, punctuation...

As illustrated by the student scripts above, a discrepancy can be noticed between the assignment question (which is directed to the content or the student-writer's understanding and treatment of the topic) and the lecturers' feedback comments (which are focused on the linguistic accuracy or just the surface features of the text). This is also a further proof that lecturers' comments do not reflect any consistent purpose with regard to students' needs in terms of writing abilities. Surface language features as varied as spelling, punctuation, and the set of notions referred to as "grammar" including conjugation, sentence structure, etc. remain the main focus of lecturers' comments on the student scripts, while features such as argument and supporting evidences which are nevertheless important in essay texts are not evoked by the feedback comments made by the lecturer. Thus, the assessed students are not likely to make appropriate use of the feedback to improve their writing. They are rather likely to be confused with regard to what the lecturers' requirements are and hence what is required of an academically acceptable text.

In addition, the way in which most of feedback comments are expressed is rather vague and reflects a discourse of academic transparency whereby lecturers assume that the understanding and the enactment of the academic writing conventions are self-evident. For the observed sessions, such a view is reflected by the incessant calls to exercise a series of skills generally taken as given by lecturers such as coherence, clarity, good structure, etc. The remarks made by lecturers in relation to a sample of students' written texts may serve as illustrative examples: "When you're writing an essay for instance, you'll make sure that your title is short and really attractive" (Week Four: 10/03/2011). However, it is probably easier said than done. In this last example, it may be possible for a student to judge the shortness of a title, but the question is different regarding the attractiveness which is not necessarily a self-evident concept.

Undoubtedly based on the view of language as a transparent medium - a reflector of meanings rather than a situated discourse - feedback sessions often take the form of a prescriptive 'presentation' of general principles regarding the academic writing

activity. For instance, for a feedback session organised around assignment on letter writing, the lecturer randomly picks up a student letter which becomes object of comments from both the lecturer and students who take the opportunity to raise some of the issues they are confronted with during their writing tasks. They ask questions such as the following:

How to know the form of greeting to adopt when writing a business letter? Is there special punctuation for a letter? When does one use 'sincerely yours' or 'faithfully yours' in the leave-taking part of a letter...? (24/03/2011)

The first and second questions, calling for analysis of a sample of authentic written letters if not a practical exercise of letter writing, receive as lecturer's response a simple reading of "some tips" on 'Letter Writing and CVs'. The teaching process which has started as a session dedicated to comments on student take-home assignment ends up becoming an advice-session with focus on letter structure as indicated by the extract below:

The title of the receiver for formal letter is very important. Don't forget to put details you judge very useful for the wanted position: qualification, experience... Please, don't forget to sign.... The receiver's address must be put below the sender's address and toward the left margin; the salutation or greeting follows... The main part of a letter is the body... Short sentences are recommended for all letters, concision, and to the point. (24/03/2011)

Pieces of advice related to 'good letter' are provided but probably not in a very meaningful way to students. There is no attempt to establish critical reading activities for example. Indeed, as Rose et al. (2008) suggest, "learning the field of academic texts involves reading (and writing) the language patterns in which it is expressed... The [scaffolding] pedagogy entails teachers guiding students through a detailed reading of texts [...], drawing attention to the organisation of texts and their language patterns (p.167)." Thus, the above-mentioned feedback session probably

needs more focus on critical reading likely to enable students to develop a deeper understanding of the text type they are examining.

Further, these feedback sessions based on prescription of principles are focused on particular aspects of the text to the detriment of others. Thus, the surface aspects (including linguistic accuracy and text structure) seem to acquire too much attention in comparison with aspects such as the student writer’s understanding and treatment of the topic (i.e. the writing content), the rhetorical purpose and register-related aspects (e.g. referencing conventions, use of discipline-related terminology, use of formal language, etc.) which are however so challenging to students. For an overall view of typical comments made, an analysis of a sample of students’ assignments copies is made. A comparison of areas commented on can be represented as in the table below:

**Table 4: Overall view of typical comments made on student texts**

<b>Assignment question (or the assumed epistemological purpose)</b>	<b>Typical comments made on student texts</b>	<b>Academic writing area focused by comments</b>
1) Write a short essay <b>persuading</b> a friend to study literature:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor grammar (Improve your grammar, Incorrect grammar, Grammar please...!);</li> <li>- Use of tenses! (Tenses...!)</li> <li>- Spelling!</li> </ul>	Linguistic accuracy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor paragraph! (Paragraph!)</li> <li>- Underlining (or Circling) of words, phrases... (Questions marks...);</li> <li>- Sentence structures! (Sentence not clear; Topic sentence...?)</li> <li>- Attention punctuation... (Punctuation!)</li> </ul>	Text structure
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vocabulary! (Lexical suggestions to replace inappropriate words...)</li> </ul>	Language register
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inaccurate classification</li> </ul>	Content
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An attractive job?</li> <li>- More convincing argument please! (Be more convincing at the end; Not enough reasons...);</li> <li>- Story telling?</li> <li>- Examples?</li> </ul>	Rhetorical purpose
2) Write a short essay (maximum 3 pages) <b>describing</b> an event that was significant in your life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tenses!</li> <li>- Spelling!</li> <li>- Grammar! (Pay attention to the use of grammar...)</li> </ul>	Linguistic accuracy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Underlining of words, phrases... (Questions marks...);</li> <li>- Good introduction!</li> <li>- Language structure very</li> </ul>	Text structure

	<p>poor!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sentence structures! (Topic sentence please! Only one sentence? Some sentences are unclear...);</li> <li>- Poor paragraph! (Remember rules of writing a good paragraph! A good paragraph between 3 &amp; 7 sentences! Paragraph?</li> <li>- Punctuation! (Punctuation respect it)</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your story not adapted to English language: clear influence of Kinyarwanda<sup>58</sup>;</li> </ul>	Language register
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Problem of coherence (Problem of coherence in your story...)</li> <li>- Meaning?</li> <li>- No point here</li> </ul>	Rhetorical purpose

As it is reflected in the table above, there is a lack of balance in the way in which different textual aspects are focused on by lecturers' feedback comments. The latter seem more focused on some straightforward aspects that are easy to spot (e.g. linguistic accuracy, text structure...) to the detriment of aspects that are however critical to the writing abilities expected of students such as the language register and rhetorical issues. Thus, in the case of the two assignment topics presented as illustrations, aspects related to the epistemological purpose of the assigned task (e.g.

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<sup>58</sup> Kinyarwanda is the mother tongue for most of students

the form of the persuasive arguments presented and the description skills) seem to be given less importance by lecturer-markers.

It would however be useful to remind that the above synthesis of comments made on student texts does not constitute a full reflection of the assessment criteria used by lecturers as the assessment mode in place rather appears as much based on implicit criteria. So, the representation of 'typical comments' as shown by the table above can be regarded as an indication of the general trend in the assessment system but not as an accurate representation of the way the assessment criteria are applied by lecturers.

### **6.3.2. A hierarchical relationship between lecturers and students**

Concerning language of feedback, it is worth reminding that dominance of negative feedback comments is remarkable. That is, lecturers' comments on students' work are mainly characterised by criticism which is much focused on shortcomings in students' texts. For example, each script in a sample of 22 student scripts drawn for analysis in the current study has its lot of negative comments such as 'poor paragraph', 'bad sentences', 'faulty grammar', no point made, etc. which are rather generic and do not seem to help students understand where the problem is exactly. There is in fact a tendency to over-negative comments which are likely to undermine students' confidence as writers. Further, the language of feedback used reflects a relatively hierarchical and rather didactic relationship in which the power differential between lecturers and students is emphasised as illustrated by the student script below:

The children of Innocent and Believer, and also their brothers and sisters - in - law continued to be in the government of those two united nations, welcome and patient. As the people of the same blood, they had a good friendship and they are among the governors who developed those two united nations, welcome and patient.

The parents, Innocent and Believer got old. After having got old, they died. The death of these Innocent and Believer was not bad at all. This is because they died after having kept the important and great children of the country and moreover, these parents, Innocent and Believer died after having been old.

This is to mean that these parents, Innocent and Believer died after having done all the things which they were destined to by God. In spite of the problems they met, these parents, Innocent and Believer achieved victoriously and none can blame them for the decision they made of escaping from their parents when they refused them to get married, under the pretence that Innocent came from a very poor family whereas Believer came from a servant rich family. These ones, Innocent and Believer were helped by God. So Believer and Innocent were good christians and it's the reason that they were lucky. -- No point here!



As shown by the hand-written copy above, the type of feedback made on the student copy cannot be considered a type of “judgment” meant either to indicate the right performance expected of the students or the way of improving the poor performance characterising the text produced. With only question marks on the copy, there is little possibility for the student-writer to understand what is required of him/her to gain membership in the academic community (Ivanič et al., 2000).

In overall, there is lack of features likely to encourage a relatively collegial relationship between lecturers and students. For example, the sample of copies drawn during the observation period shows comments generally written in red pen over the students’ texts<sup>59</sup>. These comments are generally devoid of positive comments likely, as Ivanič et al. (2000) put it, to foster a more collegial relationship in which the lecturer attempts to “build students’ sense of membership of the academic community” (p. 61). Indeed, there is a need of comments that are likely to create students’ awareness of relevant discourse features and, hence, help positively accommodate them into the academic community.

### **6.3.3. Not engaging students in the authorship of their work**

As already alluded to, feedback is likely to be more beneficial when presented in a way that draws students’ attention to the comments made on their work. This seems to be a challenge to the Written English I module where students do not appear very attentive to the feedback provided on their written work. Indeed, as noticed during the observation period, students do not seem much interested in feedback comments made on their assignment copies. They are only interested in the final mark obtained. The case of the writing assignments of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 may serve as illustration. Students had been asked to submit a short essay on a topic of their choice among three topics offered by the lecturer. After the lecturer made his written comments, the scripts were returned and handed over to students

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<sup>59</sup> Ivanič et al. (2000) suggest that “a red pen is the symbol of teachers’ superior knowledge and their right to make unchallenged judgments” (p.51). The authors also suggest that providing separate comments (on an attached sheet for example) shows greater respect for a student than writing directly on the student text.

individually. There was no word about the global performance of the class in relation to that particular assignment. Thus, in front of the remarkably terse written comments, students with low marks were apparently not sure about what was wrong with their texts. Each individual student went straight to the final mark awarded to his/her script, sighed with relief or sorrow (according to whether or not the obtained mark was good) and kept quiet. Such a situation is frequent and is not likely to help students benefit from feedback they get from their lecturers. Instead, they seem frustrated by what they get as outcome of their work.

Furthermore, the newly established modular system does not facilitate a systematic track and solution of students' problems. It is indeed supposed to merge together different course units (i.e. Grammar, Reading and writing strategies, and Essayist writing) taught by different lecturers. But, the investigated module does not seem to be coordinated in a way that helps address the issue of contradictions emerging from the successive interventions of the three members of the teaching team. Thus, students are confronted not only with possibility of conflicting demands from the teaching team but also with lack of follow-up on their learning difficulties as problems left in suspense by a lecturer are not necessarily taken into account by the lecturer meant to take over for the following session. The afore-mentioned undecided fate of the take-home assignments left during Week Two (24/02/2011) and Week Six (17/03/2011) may serve as illustrations. Further, students' confusion subsequent to existing contradictions was noticed during the observation period but also was echoed by interviews with students who, as already shown in chapter 6, affirm that they try to play it safe with the lecturers' conflicting demands by refraining from taking responsibility in their writing.

In overall, the observation of classroom activities confirms that students have still to take on the authorship of their writing and assert their voice as members of the university community. There is also a need for lecturers to feel more in charge of guiding their students through an understanding dialogue allowing them to build on their knowledge and experience for progressively asserting their identity as

members of academia. Indeed, an effective involvement of students in the authorship of their own texts is deemed critical to gain the required ability for meaning making in their texts (Ivanič, 1998). Under such conditions, the teaching endeavour is also likely to achieve what Coffin et al. (2003) refer to as 'handover', that is, "the point at which the 'expert' tutor or lecturer hands over responsibility to the students for writing" (p. 127).

#### ***6.4. Visibility of the investigated pedagogic practice<sup>60</sup>***

As a complement to the analysis already conducted on the pedagogic practice under investigation, this section focuses on the characteristics of the observed practice that may help describe the kind of power relations that exists between participants in interaction and, hence, the nature of interaction foregrounded in the teaching and learning context in question. Thus, the Bernstein's (1977, 2003) model of pedagogic discourse is particularly used and is expected not only to help analyse the teaching process but also discuss the significance of the strategies undertaken by lecturers in the development of students' competences.

As noticed during the whole period of classroom observation, power relations between lecturers and students are characterised by strong framing, given the higher status of the lecturer. The pedagogic interaction is characterised by lecturers' control of communication in both instructional (rules of selection, sequence, pacing and evaluation criteria) and regulative contexts (hierarchical rules). In fact, in the teaching process investigated, classroom activities (i.e. in the instructional context) are generally centred not on the student-acquirer but on the lecturer-transmitter. The scenario is similar with regard to the hierarchical rules (i.e. in the regulative context) which are marked by strong framing values as communication is exclusively controlled by the lecturer.

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<sup>60</sup> The basic difference between visible and invisible pedagogies is in the manner in which criteria are transmitted and in the degree of specificity of the criteria. The more implicit the manner of transmission and the more diffuse the criteria, the more explicit the manner of their transmission, the more visible the pedagogy (Bernstein, 1977, p. 511).

### 6.3.1. Visibility of regulative discourse

**Hierarchical rules:** with regard to the type of regulative discourse fore-grounded in terms of hierarchical rules between lecturers and students, it is worth noting that power relations between lecturers and students are strongly framed in most of modalities of pedagogical practice. This is indicated by the higher status of lecturers in the pedagogic relations. Indeed, the lecturer determines both regulative and discursive characteristics of the teaching and learning context. The students' role is generally confined to a passive listening with limited opportunities of interventions. Further, the strong framing of the hierarchical rules is also illustrated by the form of feedback provided to students' texts which, as already demonstrated, reflects a conception of teaching and learning based on unbalanced power relations and a monologic communication. On a four-degree scale, these regulative rules can be characterised by a very strong framing (F++)<sup>61</sup>.

**Lecturer-student space:** on observation of operational space between lecturers and students, it becomes clear that there is a clear cut separation of lecturers' space and students' space. This is particularly indicated by the existence of a special lecturer's desk placed on a small platform raised in the front part of the classroom. The lecturer spends most of the teaching time standing on this platform or seated in a chair behind the desk.

Further, the demarcation of space between lecturers and students is also indicated by limited possibility of face-to-face meetings between lecturers and students. This kind of meetings is possible 'strictly by appointment' as indicated on the office door of one of the lecturers involved in the module. Thus, such a distance in the physical space occupied by both lecturers and students is an indication of a very visible and, hence, strongly marked pedagogic space.

**Power relations students-students:** The initial steps of observation of the teaching process conducted in the Written English I module create the impression that students involved in the investigated teaching and learning process enjoy the

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<sup>61</sup> The strength of framing increases from the first degree (F--) to the fourth degree (F++), the first two degrees (F--, F-) corresponding to weak framing and the last two (F+, F++) to strong framing.

same status and, hence, use a similar 'voice' when asking their questions or responding to different lecturers' solicitations. This may be regarded as a characteristic of weak classification of power and control relations between students which may be favourable to equal development of students' competences (Muller et al., 2004). However, as one become familiar with the teaching context, it becomes noticeable that there is lack of power balance between students who are different in terms of both language background and linguistic proficiency. In fact, as already indicated, a certain category of students in the observed classroom have a relatively strong grasp of English as they could be exposed to English speaking milieus either during their young age or their previous education. Thus, this category of students intervene more in classroom discussions and seem to have their opinions valued to the detriment of students who enjoy less what Lillis (2001) calls "the privileged symbolic resources of higher education" (p.166). Further, there is no opportunity of horizontal activities organised in order to create a social interaction conducive to a construction of knowledge which is responsive to the specific needs of every category of students.

In terms of visibility of the pedagogic practice in place, the power relations between students can be characterised as strongly visible or, on a four-degree scale, as having a strong framing (F+).

### **6.3.2. Visibility of instructional discourse**

While it may be expected that students may have a say in the control of the instructional context in a way that meets their motivations, interests and particular needs, the instructional rules prevailing in the Written English I module seem to create an opposite situation. The following scenario is observed:

**Selection:** with reference or not to the existing module description document, the lecturer solely selects the themes, sub-themes, learning activities and material for each teaching session. He also determines the order which academic contents would follow, thus marking a strengthening of these contents. Thus, these instruction rules of selection can be characterised by a very strong framing values (F++).

**Sequence:** with regard to the sequencing rules, one must just say that boundaries between the academic writing discourses presented are not well defined. This is indicated by the existence of blurred boundaries between various course units. For example, demarcation between different course units (a. Grammar, b. Reading and writing strategies, c. Essayist writing) suggested by the module description document is not made clear as such during the observed teaching process. Blurred boundaries between academic contents are also indicated by different conceptual themes encountered where several themes are often combined in one sub-section of a teaching session.

Thus, the lack of clear boundaries between different units or academic contents is signalling the existence of weak classification and, hence, weak visibility of the discourses involved. On a four-degree scale, these sequencing rules can be characterised by a weak classification (C--).

**Pacing:** Lecturers impose time limits for any activity, hence setting the pace of students' learning for the entire period of the module. In most of instances, exercises are proposed to students either in a form of classroom activities or as take-home assignments with time limits imposed by the lecturer. So, faced with a model of pacing explicitly controlled by the lecturer, students are not allowed any control over the timing of their activities, which is an indication that the pedagogic practice in place is visible in relation to pacing. The context of the assignment left to students on 31 March 2011 may serve as illustration:

L.: For the assignment, please prepare between 2 and 3 pages on one of the following topics: (a) Life on campus; (b) The importance of literature; (c) My plan for a future professional life. I want them to be ready for next Monday for a possible feedback during the next session.

St. x: Don't have time this weekend...

L.: [No answer].

**Evaluation criteria:** As already demonstrated the whole teaching and learning process investigated foreground a discourse of transparency based on an apparent

assumption that conventions governing the academic writing activity are self-evident. So, teaching is mainly based on theoretical prescriptions exposing conventions of academic writing without making them visible enough to students. The fact is that the legitimacy (i.e. the correctness) of the learning is decided by the lecturers who stick to the presentation of what they think is the relevant epistemic criteria (viewed as knowledge of a higher order) to be learned by students without making them explicit or offering possibility of problematising them whenever necessary.

The knowledge display approach is real in the investigated teaching process to such a point that only two of the eight sessions observed can be regarded as based on knowledge construction procedure where students are involved in situated and practical activities allowing evaluation criteria to be made explicit (even though the lecturer's role remains preponderant as previously illustrated). The rest is dominated by recitation (and oral comments) by the lecturer of the rules of academic discourse: guidelines around academic literacy conventions and strategies, advices on the model of 'be aware...', 'don't forget...', 'say... don't say', etc.

With regard to explicitness of evaluation criteria through correction and marking of student assignments, it has been noticed that assessment tasks are not used as opportunities to explicate evaluation criteria in the Written English I module. This may be illustrated by the type of guidance provided on assignments to students which in fact is to be regarded as specification of the clear value ascribed to the task expected of students before they answer the test. As previously demonstrated, lecturers involved in the Written English I module do not provide clear assessment criteria likely to determine in advance the specific values serving as a basis for rating students' texts. Analysis of marked students' scripts shows that what constitutes legitimate knowledge generally remains the discretion of the lecturer who often allocates marks based on a global judgment or general impression. Lack of explicitness of evaluation criteria may also be illustrated by feedback comments made on students' texts that are not clear, are often in contradiction with the objective of the assigned task, and do not reflect consistency with regard to specific

needs of students in terms of writing abilities as is indicated by students' scripts presented in the previous sections.

Further, 'criterial rules' in place remain implicit due to the fact that they are not performance-based. In fact, the teaching and learning process investigated lacks authentic activities whereby critical factors of social texts such as audience, text type, role or persona of the text author, etc. are used to serve as reference to the student-writer in the text being written. Lack of reference to social texts serving as an external common standard also implies lack of possibility for students to have awareness of some essential aspects to be attended to in the written texts (e.g. terms that need to be defined or explained further, needs of the intended audience in terms of information, text length, formatting, persona or tone to be assumed in the text, etc.).

In addition, feedback provided by lecturers to written texts does not systematically make students aware of what is missing in their texts. The lecturer-markers whose feedback comments appear rather as intended to justify the marks allocated than to support students' learning fail not only to write the text which is missing but also for most of time do not even bother giving just an indication of an existing gap in the student text. They often content themselves with global judgment (e.g. 'Coherence please', 'Poor language structure', 'More convincing argument please' ...).

So, framing of evaluation criteria is weakened and students are likely to have difficulties of acquiring the recognition and realisation rules of the academic texts. In the case of academic writing course, performance-based evaluation criteria call for efforts to promote a horizontal discourse based on articulation between the academic language and the language students bring with them to university. That is, make the academic discourse (with an elaborated orientation) available to students through the use of their usual spontaneous texts.

In short, the weak level of framing as illustrated in the assessment context can be characterised on a four-degree scale by a weak framing (F-) whereas a more strong framing (F+ or F++) would have the potential to make classroom activities more



meaningful and more understandable as the latter would be based on explicit evaluation criteria and a performance-based demonstration. An external common standard would also be used to gauge the extent to which texts produced by students are meeting these criteria.

With regard to the relations between instructional rules and regulative rules, one would rather wish to see a weak framing of the regulative rules which would create a context where students can question, discuss and share ideas, hence engaging in a frank dialogue with lecturers. This weakening at the level of hierarchical rules (regulative discourse) may lead to the strengthening of the framing of evaluation criteria, or the instructional rules in general, where students would get the means to discuss the marks or the feedback received and, hence possibility of self-evaluation and of giving a correct answer in the future.

## **CHAPTER 7: Discussion of findings**

The present research set out to investigate conceptualisations and teaching practices related to the Written English I module which is intended to prepare first year university students for the academic writing tasks they are expected to carry out during their studies at university. Thus, a particular focus was placed on examination of (a) the existing institutional policy regarding academic literacy practices, (b) lecturers' understanding and expectations about student writing activities, and (c) the pedagogical and assessment practices used in the module.

The study was conducted following a case study perspective whereby the focus was put on understanding of the phenomenon in its natural setting with a particular attention to contextual conditions and experience of the participants (see Lacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009). The research also brought together pedagogic and academic literacy theories to understand conceptualisations and practices involved in the module under investigation. The current chapter will thus discuss the key findings and evaluate their relevance to the research objective, and how they contribute to the global academic debate.

### ***7.1. Main findings of the study***

The findings of the study have been presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis. Thus, the current section will discuss the findings in relation to the three specific questions of research. The fact of the matter is that, with reference to the general research objective set out at the beginning of the study, the description made of the findings appears to offer sufficient information for an objective understanding of what is being done at every stage of implementation of the module investigated.

#### **7.1.1. Policy and institutional discourses**

What emerges from the analysis of the official documents relating to the language teaching in the Rwandan HE and the Written English I module is that these

documents reflect what has been pointed out by Berkhout and Wielemans (1999) that “policy as text (the language of policy) contains divergent meanings, contradictions (...), so producing different effects” (p. 413). Contradictions are identified, on one hand, between the goal set out by the National Policy for Language Teaching in Higher Education (NPLTHE) and the specific objectives presented by the same document and, on the other hand, between the goal set out in the NPLTHE and the type of learning activities proposed by the Module Description document (MD). On analysis of the NPLTHE, the policy goal set out suggests to provide learners with literacy skills they need for both their academic tasks and their future professional life. The policy also makes clear that languages should be taught on basis of disciplinary context. However, on observation of the specific objectives proposed by the NPLTHE, the policy goal does not appear taken enough into consideration.

Indeed, the specific objectives and learning activities suggested by the NPLTHE are dominated by a ‘skills discourse’ focusing on correct linguistic usage and adherence to conventions for the form features of academic language. The document also proposes learning activities based on the surface features and mental processes involved in composing text without locating them in a social context. Approaches to teaching proposed are also dominated by a ‘skills discourse’ emphasising “abilities” in the use of conventions in academic writing. This means, with respect to the level of learning objectives as specified in the NPLTHE (with a focus on a lower order thinking skills requiring students to demonstrate only knowledge and comprehension of language skills and academic literacy conventions), it is unlikely for the policy goal focusing on higher order thinking skills to be attained (see Resnick, 1987). Indeed, literacy which students need for their academic tasks and their future professional life corresponds to a higher order thinking skills that may rather require application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, 2002).

Thus, it remains a challenge on the part of those in charge of implementation of the NPLTHE to carry out a successful action on basis of the specific objectives as set out

in the policy document. They would need at least to operate an adequate adaptation of these objectives in accordance with the requirements suggested by the policy goal. With regard to the imperative of meeting the policy goal, it is up to individual institutions of HE, particularly the ad-hoc faculty commissions and lecturers involved in the process of designing curricula, to establish curricular documents that meet the requirements of the policy goal and, at the same time, take account of the specific needs of every category of students.

Concerning the existing discrepancies between the type of learning activities proposed by the MD which are mainly generic and skills-based, and the goal set out by the NPLTHE suggesting to teach languages on basis of disciplinary contexts, they may be explained by different possibilities: either the designing team of the MD did not pay attention to the policy goal and was influenced by the global socio-historical debate and their own learning experience, or the designing team was aware of the policy goal as set out in the NPLTHE but used tactics for “getting the agenda up and running”<sup>62</sup> (Taylor, 1999, p. 31). In the latter scenario, the slippage between the policy goal and the learning activities proposed in the MD is to be viewed as part of what Taylor (ibid.) describes as “struggles between contenders of competing objectives (...) occurring at all levels and in all arenas of policy making” (p. 26). Indeed, existence of tensions and contradictions between policy development and policy implementation has already been pointed out by empirical studies suggesting that policy effects are by no means predictable (see Henry & Taylor, 1995; Fulcher, 1989).

Whatever the cause of the existing discrepancies is, the above-mentioned policy goal is at the same time the ultimate goal of the Written English I module. A challenge thus at the level of module implementation lies with the type of learning objectives and activities proposed. The latter in general reflect relatively low order thinking

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<sup>62</sup> As the module was designed amidst generalized complaints about Rwandan students’ literacy abilities (see chapter 1 of this thesis), lecturers involved in its design may have been influenced by their perception of academic writing as a tool likely to help in finding a quick solution to the critical issue of students’ writing competences.

skills and are not focused on preparation of students to the type of tasks they will be confronted with both during their degree studies and their professional life.

Thus, a teaching programme focused on general writing skills essentially based on “atomistic and decontextualised units of writing” (Cumming, 2003a, p. 76) is unlikely to address the specific needs of students in terms of meaning making abilities in their academic disciplines. Indeed, as already alluded to in this thesis, the view of academic writing ability as made of a series of generic and transferable skills has been strongly contested through research suggesting that “writing is produced and mediated through writer’s experiences of prior discourse, rather than explicit knowledge of rules, and involves making rational choices based on an understanding of how texts work within and for specific contexts and audiences” (Hyland, 2004, p. 145).

However, in realistic terms, while the way in which learning objectives and activities are expressed in the MD does not totally match with the ultimate goal of preparing students for both their academic tasks and their future professional life, it does not mean that there is no possibility for this goal to be reached. All the teaching team in charge of implementation of the module has to do is adapt the latter to the ultimate goal of the activity and the specific needs of students. Nevertheless, in the case of the teaching and learning process investigated, an appropriate adaptation of the module still constitutes a challenge given lecturers’ understandings and conceptualisations of academic writing as presented in the chapter 6 of this thesis.

From a pedagogical and assessment point of view, the fact of conceptualising a writing curriculum in reference to specific purposes (or disciplinary context) is in fact likely to be more workable. As suggested by a large scale study carried out by Cumming (2003b), in contrast with a general-purpose orientation to ESL writing instruction, “Conceptualising ESL/EFL writing curriculum from an orientation of specific purposes<sup>63</sup> provides a definite rationale for curriculum organisation, the

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<sup>63</sup> In reference for example to particular academic disciplines or employment objectives.

selection of learning and assessment tasks, and specifying methods of assessment and standards for achievement” (p. 222).

Thus, in the case of the Written English I module, if the latter is meant to prepare students for writing activities they will have to undertake during their studies at the university, the module needs to be modelled with consideration of specific needs of students in terms of meaning making in their disciplinary writing. If such a condition is not met in the prescribed curriculum as it seems to be currently the case, it should be up to the teaching team to adapt and organise their students’ learning according to the ultimate goal of the module.

In sum, as noticed on analysis of the official documents as well as through field investigation, much still needs to be done. Appropriate initiatives are needed at institutional level to establish pedagogical mechanisms likely to effectively address students’ needs in terms of preparation for the writing tasks they are expected to carry out during their degree studies and their professional life.

### **7.1.2. Lecturers’ conceptualisations about teaching of academic writing**

The chapter 6 of this thesis reported on lecturers’ conceptualisations about teaching of academic writing to first year university students. That is, what the lecturers of the Written English I module understand and expect of the teaching of academic writing to first year university students. With respect to the current section, it will discuss key findings of lecturers’ conceptualisations which are made of the following: (a) academic writing as a set of autonomous skills that can be taught in a decontextualised manner, (b) students cast in a deficit mould, (c) teaching of academic writing as supposed to occur in an implicit way.

- ***Academic writing as a set of autonomous skills that can be taught in a decontextualised manner***

As is transpiring through their different statements, the lecturers’ views reflect a “structures conceptualisation”<sup>64</sup> of academic writing implying an emphasis on

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<sup>64</sup> See Cumming (2003) for a detailed definition of this approach.

abilities related to form and structure of a written text. They also tend to regard “writing as a transparent medium of representation” (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159) of meaning.

In fact, the emphasis on “text functions or structure” has an important underlying assumption that academic writing is based on a series of monolithic and transferable skills (see Toh & Hocking, 2010). This is the case for the Written English I module whereby, according to what is suggested in lecturers’ statements, students are expected to quickly adapt to the literacy practices of the academic community. The issue with such a view is that a “unilateral socialisation” (see Starfield, 2007) of novice-writers ignoring the existing discourses students may bring with them at university is not likely to effectively help them make meaning in their writing (See Lillis, 2001, Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998). With regard to the lecturers’ “structures conceptualisation”, any analyst would share the view expressed by Penaflores (1998) who remarks that if success in learning to write is understood as mastering form aspects, good teaching would be seen as direct skills transfer, as well as the ability to explain the meaning of phrasal verbs such as “make up to” or “wake up to” or the fact that “wake” collocates with “up” and not “on” (p. 173). Thus, as the author infers, “diligent” grading would be seen as “red pencilling all over the papers” which signals that “form rather than substance is given (...) attention” (p. 173). Thus, with such a conceptualisation of academic writing, dominance of a teaching approach based on what is seen as “universal conventions” (Ivanič, 1998) and decontextualised skills is far from over in educational contexts such as NUR.

As for the lecturers’ attitude of shifting responsibility to students, it may be seen as a revelation of unawareness, on the part of lecturers, of their own role as facilitators in charge of helping students negotiate their access to the discourse practices privileged by the complex interdisciplinary context of HE. A divide then persists between lecturers’ expectations of student writing and students’ interpretations of what is required of their texts. Lecturers’ misconception about their real role together with their skills-based view of the academic writing ability also appears as

a hindrance to any form of awareness of the “heterogeneity and struggle view” (Ivanič, 1998) of language variety which would rather foster a teaching process taking account of every student’s needs and/or difficulties.

- **Students cast in a deficit mould**

It is worth noting the fact that lecturers tend to perceive their students’ lack of writing experience as a deficit in the knowledge which should be expected of them. Indeed, in addition to the relatively low level of general communicative capacities in English, mainly for the reasons that are explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, new students entering the Rwandan HE institutions generally have not had any writing experience as writing is not emphasised, or even taught at all, at school level (Twagilimana, 2002). So, in the face of students’ inexperience, lecturers involved in the Written English I module seem persuaded that they are remediating their students’ knowledge deficit with basic skills and writing conventions they need for their academic literacy. The apparent low level of students’ writing abilities, together with the lively interest they manifest in discovering the new knowledge (see chapter 7 of this thesis), also contributes to justify the lecturers’ current position as they stick to the “correctness” of “sentence structure” as “the basis for writing”.

It is useful to remind that this deficit assumption consisting in explaining students’ writing problems in terms of defect of their mind which is “slow to adapt to the university practices” is not unique to lecturers involved in the Written English I module. As stated by Hull et al. (1991), “We are primed by [our] history, by our background and our educations to speak of students as deficient, even as we attempt to devise curricula we call forward-looking...” (p. 315). The fact that students are faced with difficulties regarding codes and conventions of academic literacy may rather be associated with their little experience of the practices of higher education. But, a view of students’ struggle in terms of deficit is likely to maintain, and even broaden, the existing tension between lecturers’ understanding of academic writing as transparent and structure-oriented, and students’



expectations of academic writing as complex and undefined<sup>65</sup>. These differing expectations, as will be seen in the next section, have consequences on students' learning as they raise the issue of fairness in assessment and accuracy of guidance on student writing tasks.

- **teaching of academic writing as supposed to occur in an implicit way**

Concerning the view that learning of academic writing is supposed to occur in an implicit way through imitation of model texts, it has been highlighted by lecturer-participants who acknowledge resorting to model texts to help their students to master codes and conventions of academic writing. This means that, in some cases, lecturers base their teaching on presentation of models of good literacy products (without having to organise actual 'lessons'). The view evokes the "informant method" consisting in L2 students' imitation of the language produced by a native speaker, which was popular around the time of World War II but did not prove successful in conventional language teaching (see Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 50-52). So, whatever the quality of these model texts, the relevance of the procedure will depend on the learning objective and the place of the activity in the whole teaching/learning process as various and complementary activities are to be involved in any teaching unit. But according to the lecturers' statements as presented in chapter 6 of this thesis, the use of model texts seems to be foregrounded as the appropriate strategy to help students to master codes and conventions of academic writing.

Thus, in an ESL context where students are faced with particular challenges in academic writing, it would rather appear problematic to envisage learning of academic writing as likely to occur through exposure and imitation of model texts. Lecturer-participants holding such a view seem uninformed that every single instance of writing is unique and requires a certain level of creativity for adaptation to the specific context of communication. Further, as demonstrated by a study

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<sup>65</sup> Given the fact that conventions governing academic writing are not made explicit enough, and lecturers' expectations of the written tasks remain hardly predictable.

carried out by Cumming and Riazi (2000), teaching academic writing on basis of an “Input-oriented” approach involving reading of model texts in English as well as studying grammar and vocabulary does not seem to help students improve “the communicative aspects of their writing” (pp. 65-66).

In fact, the above-presented view representing language and literacy competence as result of exposure to models of language and literacy products is matching up with the view of language as universal and neutral medium. That is, since language and literacy competences can be ‘acquired’ through observation of ‘good’ models of language products, language and literacy are viewed as based on some universal skills which are transferable from a context to another (Lea & Street, 1998). Such a view may be understood as consonant with the pervasive view representing instances and contexts of communication as fixed and homogeneous (see Lillis, 2001). That is, specificity of communication requirements depending on specificity of contexts which may be social, disciplinary, etc., seems to be ignored or just dismissed by lecturers advocating such a view. They uphold the ‘given’ status of academic literacy which supposes ‘acquisition’ of academic literacy abilities through observation of models of literacy products or by osmosis through interactions with members of academia.

So, student-writers’ habits of meaning-making have no chance to be taken into consideration as a basis for wished improvements. As demonstrated in chapter 6, students may keep resorting to exercise a form of self-censorship by switching their working ‘tactics’ according to every individual lecturer and what is assumed to be his demands regarding students’ written text. They are indeed likely to be frustrated over the kind of writer’s identity privileged by the lecturers which does not correspond to what they perceive as their own identity. Their recognition as real participants of the academic discourse practices appears actually impeded.

There is in fact a relationship between the type of beliefs held by lecturers regarding how learning of academic writing is supposed to occur and probabilities for them to undertake innovative actions in the teaching of this discipline (Hyland, 2003b). In

the case of the Written English I module, what lecturers view as features of a good piece of students' writing has more chance to remain the focus of their writing. Lecturers' divorce, as suggested in their statements, from possibility of introducing writing activities that bear more significance for students in terms of authenticity and contextual connection is to be viewed as a further justification of a need for innovation in the way the module is conceived and implemented.

### **7.1.3. Pedagogical and assessment practices used in the module**

The process of classroom observation undertaken allowed the researcher to be acquainted with pedagogic practices of lecturers. The process was also supposed to help in getting an idea of how practical procedures established by lecturers corroborate their conceptualisations as reflected in the statements made through interviews with them.

#### **7.1.3.1. Pedagogic practices**

With regard to the teaching practices used by lecturers, what emerges is that the observed teaching sessions are dominated by a skills-based approach focused on specific features of written text such as spelling, text structure, lexical items, style, etc. Attention to writing as an activity that always occurs in a social context is almost non-existent. Some attempts to contextualise the writing activity are limited to genre approach with a focus on teaching of linguistic features that characterise specific text-types.

In fact, as pointed out by Toh and Hocking (2010), a skills-based approach remains popular in some contexts of ESL. These two authors present three main reasons for persistence of "reductionist approaches" in the teaching of academic literacy and academic writing in particular: (a) view of academic literacy programmes as an intellectual and economic short-cut. That is, English for academic purpose is seen as "a necessary adjunct to the academic success of individual students" (Turner, 2004, p. 51). So, it constitutes a pressing demand favourably addressed by "short courses where the development of a syllabus beyond the introduction of a single model for paragraph structure and a set list of rhetorical expressions is difficult" (Toh &

Hocking, 2010, p. 51); (b) influence of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as a standardised test of English proficiency which, according to the two authors, emphasises surface level skills; (c) the initial pedagogical training of teachers who often get their initial training in short TESOL or TEFL certificates or diplomas which generally do not have enough focus on significant investigations into the nature of writing practices beyond “the accessible topic-sentence structure of the paragraph” (Toh & Hocking, *ibid.*, p. 51).

With regard to the Written English I module, two of the above reasons appear relevant. Even though Written English I is integrated into the main curriculum of the faculty as a normal-status subject, one cannot lose sight of the fact that the module serves as a preparatory course for students who are expected to write for academia. Thus, seen as such by lecturers, there are many chances that their conceptions of the course and subsequent practices are influenced by a vision of a quick skills-based solution to what constitutes an obstacle to the academic success of students. Such a view of the necessity for the students to be “encultured into the forms and structures of academic writing” (Toh, 2005, p. 34) could also explain the lack of discipline-specific instantiations in the teaching practices undertaken by the lecturers as noticed during the field investigation.

The other reason relevant to the Written English I module is the one relating to the initial training of the lecturers who, as already mentioned, have their academic background in English literature and are not pedagogically prepared to address the specific needs of ESL students in terms of meaning making in their disciplinary writing. That is why, to ensure a successful attainment of the course objectives, not only the teaching team should be better prepared in terms of competences with reference to the recent theoretical developments in academic literacy, but also diversified in terms of disciplinary orientations. Indeed, as suggested by Starfield, (2007), “In pedagogical terms, working within the [academic literacies] approach for teachers who are not themselves disciplinary specialists presents a challenge, particularly within a context of increasing intertextuality, hybridity, and instability of genres” (p. 883). So, lecturers cannot be expected to teach students how to

construct meaning in the academic disciplines while they are not themselves familiar with the orthodox discourse practices of the disciplines in question.

With reference to the ultimate goal of the Written English I module implying preparation of students for writing situations in which they will have to carry out their academic activities, the lecturers involved in the module are expected to consider the logic of a “specific-purpose” orientation. That is, “defined in reference to their students’ long-term academic or career domains” (Cumming, 2003b, p. 211). To such an end, the course would rather be based on students’ needs which, in the case of the Written English I module, are basically determined by the academic field pursued by students. An assessment of the students’ writing abilities particularly at the beginning of the course would also help determine individual students’ learning needs.

Indeed, in contrast with the current approach to teaching process which seems determined by the only individual lecturers’ beliefs and preferences, a teaching orientation carefully modelled on a particular academic programme pursued by students is likely to more effectively prepare students for the academic tasks they have to undertake during their studies at university. It would not only help better address the specific needs of students but also, as suggested by Cumming (2003a), is likely to provide “a framework for [lecturers] and students alike to define explicit expectations for writing performance and to establish and know the criteria for how it will be assessed” (p. 82).

However, a logic of specific-purpose implying that teaching is modelled on the students’ academic programme does not mean that basic literacy skills involving micro-functions or structures of written texts such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar rules, characteristics of a coherent introduction or conclusion, conventions for referencing, etc. cannot be taught. As suggested by research on the subject (see Frodesen & Holten, 2003), the problem is not to teach the form aspects of the written text but to focus on them. Indeed, the knowledge of grammar rules is necessary in academic writing as they are needed for accurate language use. But, as remarked by Frodesen and Holten (*ibid.*), grammar rules or form aspects of the

written text can be effective when they are taught in contextualised activities or “as a component of instruction that starts with a focus on meaning” (p. 144).

So, the fact that the teaching process of the Written English I module, as observed during the investigation period, starts with grammar is questionable according to the above-mentioned research findings which also suggest for example that “students’ grammatical errors gradually disappear as they review their written output and clarify their thoughts on a topic” (Frodesen & Holten, *ibid.*, p. 145). The fact is that grammar and writing cannot be separated. But, as suggested by Frodesen & Holten (*ibid.*), teachers may realise an effective integration of the teaching of grammar with the teaching of writing “by drawing not only on their knowledge of the issues (...) but also on their classroom experience and intuition” (p. 157). In other words, for creation of means for students to effectively access and develop their writing abilities, lecturers’ knowledge and experience are also crucial.

### **7.1.3.2. Assessment practices**

With regard to assessment practices carried out by lecturers, they are also focused on specific features and conventions related to the correctness of the written product. The latter constitute then lower order thinking skills involving facts that students are generally expected to memorize (see Resnick, 1987) without any link to the writing activity and/or its context. Assessment tasks resulting in production of written texts and subsequent feedback are scarce and placed at the end of the teaching process where, as suggested by research on the subject (see Brown, 1999), they risk to be of little benefit to students. Marking is mainly based on global judgment and general impression, and clear rating criteria are not established ahead of the assessment process.

In relation to the assessment practices focused on lower order thinking skills (i.e. knowledge of discrete grammar items or reproduction of writing conventions, etc.), it may be argued that this type of practices is not likely to adequately address students’ needs in terms of preparation for production of texts that are adapted to the requirements of written texts with regard to the text type, audience, accuracy of

information, etc. Indeed, with reference to the ultimate goal of the module implying that students need to be prepared for the kind of tasks they will have to face both during their degree studies and their professional life, assessment practices undertaken are expected to take the lead in helping students identify common patterns of writing problems in order not only to help them overcome these problems, but also to familiarise them with the demands of writing in their specific academic area.

However, on examination of students' scripts, lecturers' feedback comments are generally focused on some straightforward aspects that are easy to identify (e.g. linguistic accuracy, text structure...) to the detriment of aspects that are however critical to the writing abilities of students such as language register, rhetorical issues, adaptation to the audience, etc. Feedback on students' written texts generally reflects a discourse of transparency whereby conventions within which students are supposed to write are taken as given. This is demonstrated by the form of feedback made on students' work which, as shown in chapter 7, is characterised by a monologic communication and authoritative attitude often negatively challenging students' attempts to express their voice in their writing.

Also, feedback practices fore-grounded by lecturers are based on hierarchical and didactic relationships and do not appear proper to engage students in the authorship of their writing. In fact, as suggested by research findings on the subject (see Conrad & Goldstein, 1999), teacher feedback comments that challenge students' logic or type of argumentation are likely to have a negative impact on novice-writers. Further, both L1 and L2 composition researchers reported by Ferris (2003) have warned teachers against "appropriating (taking over) students' texts by being too authoritative and direct in their feedback" (p.124). As suggested by Ferris (ibid.), "When teachers cross out portions of students texts and substitute other words or ideas, make directive suggestions, or use the imperative mood, these behaviors communicate to student-writers that the teacher's priorities are more important than what the writer wants to say in his or her own text" (p. 124). Ferris

notes that “such appropriative behaviour can frustrate, demotivate, and otherwise disempower student writers” (p.124).

Thus, there is a need for feedback based on a closer communication or dialogue between lecturers and students. For such a dialogue to be formalised, feedback comments should not be seen as an end in themselves. They should rather be inscribed in a longer process whereby students’ difficulties are discussed and the first text serves as a basis to produce an improved version of it. Instead of focusing on shortcomings in students’ texts, discussion sessions will help create awareness of relevant discourse features and, hence, positively accommodate students into the academic community.

Further, a dialogue approach would foster a constant follow-up on students’ completion of their assignments which is so relevant in the case of the Written English I module. Follow-up on student assignments implies strategies to constrain students to complete tasks left to them. As suggested by Coffin et al., (2003), such strategies can consist of considering “a summative assessment with a low weighting attached to it” (p.77). So, the type of assignments mentioned above may be conducted with an option whereby a formative assessment (i.e. teaching feedback to students’ assignments) is combined with a summative assessment (i.e. awarding of grade to student work).

Concerning the assessment criteria, their availability is normally seen as an indicator that the lecturer/assessor has a clear idea of the dimensions with which the quality of students’ text is judged (see Coffin et al., 2003), and can form a good base for validity of the marks allocated to students’ writing. In the case of the Written English I module, it has been noticed through interviews with lecturers that the latter do not always have a clear idea of the learning outcome(s) expected of the assessment tasks they assign to their students. This is also proven by a discrepancy in marks awarded to student scripts which cannot be explained on basis of fundamental differentials in terms of quality.



Thus, as it may be too demanding to always establish detailed lists of criteria, lecturers can also use broad and relatively open criteria which, as suggested by Coffin et al. (2003), have the advantage of ensuring flexibility in allocating marks to students' essays with their various and complex aspects. The important thing is to exercise transparency of intended learning outcomes, and share the assessment criteria with students ahead of their writing tasks because, according to research findings, such practices have proven beneficial to students (see Torrance, 2007). In fact, if assessment of student writing in HE is to move from the "gate keeping function" (Lea & Street, 1998) to assessment for learning, there is a need to develop assessment practices which, as suggested by Torrance (ibid.), "support learning and underpin rather than undermine student confidence, achievement and progress" (p.281)<sup>66</sup>.

### **7.1.3.3. A discourse of transparency and its potential impact on the process of learning**

As previously mentioned, literacy practices in place for the Written English I module treat the norms and conventions of academic language as transparent and obvious. Students who participate in the module are regarded as likely to swiftly adapt to the requirements of academic writing without necessarily going through any floundering phase in their writing process. By way of help, these students are provided with a series of guidelines on academic writing conventions and are mainly expected to acquire writing abilities from observation of model texts, and from occasional suggestions in the margin of their texts. They are in fact not provided with opportunities to explicitly address literacy and discourse issues involved in academic production and representation of meaning.

Thus, the provision of academic writing as investigated could be criticized for having assumed for example that academic writing abilities can be accessed through explicit teaching of general conventions related to form and linguistic accuracy.

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<sup>66</sup> Torrance (2007, p. 282) cautions however against the danger of a potential "instrumentalism" whereby assessment procedures and practices "come completely to dominate the learning experience, and 'criteria compliance' comes to replace 'learning'". So, congruence has to be found between procedural compliance and the imperative of an effective learning.

Further, the integral relationship between writing and knowledge construction has been neglected. That is, instead of focusing on a more appropriate way of addressing specific difficulties each student is faced with regarding academic discourse, teaching practices in place tend to be dominated by a discourse of transparency judging “good” and “poor” student texts through the lens of what Lillis and Turner (2001) describe as “ideology of clarity for the interrelationship between language and thought” (p. 63).

In the context of ESL as is the case for the investigated module, this failure to make plain what is to be learnt has consequences to students. These students who usually do not even have familiarity with the common communicative conventions and lack knowledge of the typical patterns of variation within English text types, find themselves in an “invisible curriculum” (see Hyland, 2003) as they are denied access to the rules of the discourse which is indispensable for their success. Indeed, as shown by the analysis of the teaching practices made on basis of Bernstein’s (1977, 2003) model of pedagogic discourse, instructional rules prevailing in the Written English I module contribute to the creation of a typical model of invisible curriculum. That is, while it should be expected that students are provided with abilities of using conventions of academic writing, the latter continue to be treated by lecturers as self-evident and are not generally made explicit to students. This is reflected not only by the pedagogical activities proposed in the classroom but is also illustrated by the assessment practices used by lecturers.

A Bernsteinian analysis of the pedagogical activities reveals that the latter are dominated by rote learning of the rules governing academic discourse without any attempt to explicate them or facilitate their integration by students through application in authentic writing situations. Regarding the assessment practices, it appears that the assessment tasks proposed to students are not used as opportunities to make explicit the “criteria rules” that constitute the basis of what must be learnt by students. This is illustrated, on one hand, by guidance provided on assignments to students which generally is not made clear enough to support the specific purpose of assessment and, on the other hand, by feedback comments on

students' writing which do not reflect consistency with regard to the needs of novice-writers in terms of writing abilities. Briefly, in Bernsteinian language (see Morais, 2002; Bernstein, 1996), one would suggest that framing of evaluation criteria is weakened and students are likely to have difficulties of acquiring the recognition and realisation rules of the academic texts.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that this weakening or invisibility of curriculum appears to be more harmful to a particular category of students as analysis of power and control relations between students themselves shows possibilities of unequal development of students' abilities. In fact, lecturers' failure to exercise differentiation or adaptation of teaching strategies (Randi & Corno, 2005) in response to the specific needs of every category of students has consequences. It mainly contributes to creating a category of students – those with an English speaking background - who intervene more in classroom discussions and have their views valued to the detriment of another category of students – with a French speaking background - who remain passive as they have a relatively weak grasp of English due to their educational and social background. Thus, if not rectified, such a situation is meant to maintain or reproduce the Francophone – Anglophone divide hence constituting a hinder to the process of building of “a unified and reconciled nation” envisioned in the current Rwandan education system (NCHE, 2007a, p. 1).

## ***7.2. Relevance of the findings***

### **7.2.1. In relation to the research objective**

One of the criticisms made of a majority of research on writing in second language is that it has missed focus on the usual complexities of learning and teaching as it privileged isolated writing tasks whose validity or representativeness is limited to the performance of these tasks alone (Cumming & Riazi, 2000). So, beside studies on characteristics of the texts produced in L2, descriptions of the L2 writing processes, technology and L2 writing... as mentioned in chapter 2 of this thesis, little information is available on how students actually learn to write or how pedagogical interventions are to be conducted (see Cumming & Riazi, *ibid.*). That is why the

present study appears as a timely contribution accounting genuinely for one of the typical occurrences in teaching of academic writing in a second language context.

With respect to the relevance of findings to the research objective, this study contributes to showing aspects of the investigated pedagogical provision which need improvement. Indeed, findings of the study have pointed to various weaknesses in the investigated provision suggesting that literacy development in that context needs a stronger support than it is currently the case. They highlight the limitations of the dominant teaching approaches which are essentially based on the textual bias. In other words, as demonstrated in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis, findings of the study illustrate typical classroom practices intended for development of student academic writing abilities on basis of surface textual features and decontextualized skills. The findings highlight for example potential shortcomings related to any attempt to develop ESL students' writing abilities without taking account of their socio-educational background and their academic programme.

In fact, as reflected by views expressed by lecturers, which are also confirmed by students' testimonies, the lecturer-participants tend to think that students should arrive at university well equipped with high level skills of reading and writing academic texts. Such a view is reflected by the dominant mode of intervention based on taken-for-granted practices where a writing course such as Written English I comprises quantities of texts which students are generally required to work on without assistance. The main role of lecturers is then to 'direct' (more often through 'corrective feedback') and suggest learning activities where students are required to either reproduce monolithic rules related to what is viewed as standard written English or demonstrate what they have learnt from readings and lectures in the form of take-home assignments. Thus, as shown in the case of the Written English I module, this type of distant and monologic relationship entails that lecturers' remain unaware of the needs of students who generally have not acquired literacy

skills to the requisite level, situation which may explain what lecturers describe as problems of standards in their students' academic writing.

Thus, the study reveals insufficiencies constituting a challenge not only for students but particularly for the institution and its members as it particularly highlights the shortcomings attributable to the type of understandings and hence practices foregrounded by lecturers. In fact, while students are in a desperate need of appropriate literacy competences to respond to the requirements of writing related to their degree studies, findings of the present study show that conceptualisations and teaching practices used in the Written English I module are rather likely to limit their participation and hence their access to the discourse practices of university. This is particularly demonstrated in chapter 7 where various examples are presented illustrating how both teaching practices and assessment procedures in place contribute to rather confuse and frustrate students who are kept in the dark with regard to what constitute legitimate knowledge of the discourse practices they are expected to work within.

It is worth reminding that the study drew on various sources involving official documents, staff and student-participants, and in doing so adds primary research findings to 'inform' the existing theoretical positions developed so far. It thus contributes not only to casting light on the big challenge of preparing first-year university students in a complex socio-linguistic context such as that of Rwanda, but also to availing a significant case study material for the benefit of further research in the same area. More specifically, the amount of information obtained from these multiple data sources familiarises the reader with a particular type of conceptualisations and teaching approaches established around an academic writing course meant to help students overcome writing challenges they are faced with throughout their degree studies.

In terms of the pedagogic approaches privileged by lecturers, the study demonstrates how the social dimension of writing is neglected, if not ignored, by

lecturers whose action is mainly characterised by a textual bias viewing both the writing 'problem' and 'solution' as located at the level of the material text. As shown in chapter 7, textual features related to form and structure seem to play a privileged role all along the teaching and learning process investigated. Specific instances of classroom practices exemplified illustrate how the teaching process established attaches a special importance on imitation of established scholars and model texts in an apparent bid to induce students into what is regarded as the mode of meaning making acceptable within HE. Students' previous personal and educational experience of meaning making which should serve as a basis for improvement finds itself stifled.

The research thus shows that the type of provision established to help students is not informed by the current thinking on acquisition of academic writing skills. That is, the pedagogic and assessment practices used do not take account of both the nature and requirements of the writing activity which is always inscribed in a contextualised task, competences of which must be developed through contextualised practices. In fact, learning of academic writing cannot ignore the institutional and social contexts where it is supposed to take place. It should be envisaged with consideration of "the complexity of the writing practices that are taking place at degree level in universities" (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 157). Thus, for novice-writers to develop academic literacy competences, this cannot be realised through passive observation and imitation of 'good' models of literacy products. Such competences must rather be developed through practical and targeted activities based on production of various texts. This in fact alludes to the view from the New Literacy Study entailing "recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power" (Street, 2003, p.77).

In this respect, findings of the study suggest that first-year university students need to be apprenticed about the rules of the game regarding writing in HE. To such an end, as advocated by theoretical research (see Lillis, 2001), practices based on a systematic dialogue with students around literacy practices privileged by academia

may be the way to go. Such a dialogue would also constitute a therapy to the existing tension between lecturers' and student-writers' understandings about the dominant writing conventions.

### **7.2.2. In relation to the global academic debate**

Given the fact that student writing in HE is a relatively recent focus of research globally (see Lillis, 2001), this study is a contribution to this new field of inquiry in various regards. As sought in the description of the research problem, the present study reports on policy, conceptualisations and teaching practices characterising a particular programme intended for preparing ESL first-year university students for the requirements of academic activities expected of them during their studies. It provides original data in relation to an instructional provision of academic writing to new entrants to university in the specific context of Rwanda where students are already faced with particular challenges relating to language proficiencies even in general English.

As for the relevance of the study to the global academic debate, the fact is that there is little research exploring the implementation process for a specific writing curriculum (Jun, 2008; Starfield, 2007; Cumming & Riazi, 2000). This gap in the literature is particularly evident with regard to students who have a limited proficiency in the language in which they will have to carry out all their academic activities, as is the case at NUR. Findings of the present study therefore contribute a new insight to what may represent challenges in the development of academic writing abilities in a particular context of second language.

Indeed, the teaching approaches in place seem to fail to address the challenges students are faced with due to the lack of consideration of the real source for their difficulties. So, an objective analysis of the context and the practices in place with reference to the global network of research may constitute an alert about a number of issues to be taken into account for development of a new teaching approach likely to better facilitate acquisition of academic writing skills for the students concerned. Such an approach would also entail an insight about issues of student writing within

a broader institutional context. That is, the necessity to remediate the existing gap between the writing discourse as advocated by the institution and students' interpretations of academic writing conventions, and to present teaching of academic writing as a response to student writing difficulties with respect to their disciplinary writing requirements.

In fact, research studies into L2 writing (see Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Silva, 1993) revealed that in spite the existence of similarities between L1 and L2 student-writers' strategies, the L2 writing processes involves less strategies related to planning and reviewing as L2 student-writer's attention tends to be focused mostly on formal aspects such as grammar. So, it is to be seen as problematic if a course meant to help L2 student-writers to develop their writing abilities continues to ignore those strategies students lack the most. Further, with the contribution of the New Literacy Studies, it has become more and more incontestable that what makes a piece of student writing 'appropriate' has more to do with issues of epistemology than with the surface features of form which lecturers often refer to when describing their students' writing (Lea & Street, 1998). Analysis made of feedback comments to students' writing has raised questions for instance about the relationship between this feedback and epistemological issues of knowledge construction. It has been noticed for example that the assessment practices in place rather work towards confusing rather than illuminating students in relation to conventions of academic writing. Thus, the inconsistencies revealed by the study constitute a challenge not only for students but particularly for the institution and its members.

In a particular context of L2, the critique made of the current provision regarding the Written English I module is ultimately locatable within a transformative perspective as changing literacy practices would require changing instructional modes. The contradictions uncovered by the present study implicitly call for a more adapted approach to teaching literacy in the Rwandan context. Such an alternative approach might draw for example on social practices model implying that language is neither transparent nor autonomous, that is, no separate from the contexts and



history of language use (Lillis, 2006). Such an approach is likely to help students effectively respond to the requirements of academic meaning making, to make use of their personal experience and hence their sense of personal and social identity.

Thus, through the highlight made of the needs of new entrants to university in terms of academic writing in the investigated context, findings of the study constitute a further evidence of the 'relevance' of a teaching approach based on 'social practices' model which, by mediating the writing process through local, historical, and interactive dimensions of context (see Lei, 2008) is likely to better address the issue of ESL student writing. The research thus provides support, on basis of a case study from the Rwandan ESL context, to conclusions made by empirical studies previously conducted in other contexts of English as second language (see for example Matsuda et al., 2003; Lillis, 2001, Lea & Street, 1998). It also provides support to existing theories which suggest that teaching of academic literacy inherently requires attention to the student voice, even though most of current provisions continue to privilege what is described as institutionally appropriate wordings according to the identities that these invoke (Lillis, 2001).

The study contribution also consists in the highlight of the notion of 'cultural shift' (see Ballard & Clanchy, 1988) which is useful to explain the process that novice-writers undergo in learning to write appropriately. In other words, through the analysis made of the process of inculcating a set of rules for using academic writing appropriately, the study accounts for the ways students are initiated to taking on new identity as they enter the culture of HE. Thus, through description of what students encounter as difficulties of adapting to the new practices and new identity, a new hypothesis is open regarding how L2 writing students need to base their learning on activities which are significant in terms of connection with their writing experience and aspirations as new entrants to university.

### ***7.3. Implications of the study***

#### **7.3.1. Appropriate strategies needed**

With reference to lecturers' conceptualisations of what is involved in the discipline they are teaching, students are viewed as in deficit and in need to swiftly adapt to the academic literacy practices. Lecturers seem to believe that the knowledge of conventions of academic discourse is sufficient to enable students to write academically. As a consequence, a skills-based teaching approach is established to help students catch up with this academic discourse. Students are in fact expected to be acculturated into the norms of academic literacy through rote learning, without necessarily any attempt to help them get a critical awareness of those norms or problematise them.

So, judging by conceptualisations and practices highlighted in the findings, it is hard for students to learn how to 'be' part of a particular higher education community, hence, to write as academic, journalist, social scientists, etc. as long as the rules of academic discourse tend to be subject of recitation and comments by the lecturers without subsequent exercises aiming to test the real enactment and challenges entailed. So, the present study constitutes a critique of lecturers' conceptualisations of academic writing skill generally seen as neutral and likely to be transferred from an individual to another. Change of conceptualisations would in fact help problematise the tradition of "essayist literacy" and "textual bias" privileged in most of HE institutions (Lillis, 2001).

Calling into question the generic mode characterising the course investigated, the current study also highlights the need of attention to the subject matters or the academic orientation pursued by students. The study thus concurs with previous research suggesting that a pedagogical model based on social and contextualised development of the student is conducive to students' participation as members of the academic community (Lea & Street, 1998). An academic writing course such as the Written English I module cannot afford to ignore particularities related to writing requirements of different academic disciplines, as well as the particular situation of the ESL students who are involved in the course.

The necessity of taking account of the disciplinary context of students has as among other merits to help students negotiate their voice as authors in the complex environment in which their academic activities are conducted. Attention to the disciplinary context also implies consideration of genres of academic writing which basically underpin rhetorical choices made by the writers for responding to writing tasks. So, through the analysis made of the practices prevailing in the Written English I module, findings of the study constitute a further demonstration of the relevance of a pedagogy offering students an explicit understanding of how and why certain text-types are structured the way they are and, hence, the implication to the process of meaning-making. From a classroom practices perspective, it is a question of methodological shift from the implicit to explicit instruction in which the “rules” of meaning-making are made clear to students.

Concerning development of the reading ability, it is worth reminding that apart from a series of guidelines on what has been called ‘reading strategies’ as described in chapter 7, the observed teaching sessions desperately lack initiatives pertaining to the way writers can negotiate social relations with their readers. Students are not provided for example with opportunities to know the links between different ways of reading and different forms of discourses. That is, textual genres, their implied forms of rationality, and corresponding reading or writing strategies (see Olson, 2009). In fact, a deep approach to learning (Marton & Säljö, 1997) which may be realised through an appropriate exploitation of the reading activity does not seem to be fostered.

However, findings of reading exercises, in relation to a particular disciplinary area and language patterns of a text, can be capitalised on and used to write a new text which will be particular beneficial to novice-writers in lack of disciplinary content. Thus, within the framework of academic writing curricula, reading ability should be given the importance it deserves as, when appropriately developed, it constitutes a means of awareness raising about the role of discourse features in meaning making for particular genres of text. Indeed, reading ability is deemed to be critical to academic writing. As Hyland (2004) suggests, “the ability of writers to control the

level of personality in their texts, claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material, and acknowledging alternative views, is now recognised as a key feature of successful academic writing” (p.133-134).

In fact, reading should be seen as an integral part of the practical processes of planning, drafting and revising which need to take over from the teaching based on exploration of characteristics of the written product as it seems to be the case in the module investigated. One would have liked to see for example sessions on ‘reading strategies’ being followed by sessions analysing the implication of the writing purposes, the audience, the textual genre, and corresponding formal and linguistic features. Lecturers should also have striven to organise activities meant to raise students’ awareness of the norms and conventions of academic discourses and then help them add these conventions to their linguistic and rhetorical repertoire through exercises related to construction of different text types, use of evidence, draw on sources, etc. One would have also liked to see students regularly submitting report on their work to the lecturer some time ahead of class for possible feedback, or to see systematic discussions about the assignment findings being organised in classroom for the interest of all students and the benefit from peer response. Indeed, used complementarily, lecturer and peer feedback constitutes “an important ingredient and may help the student-writer develop into an autonomous, independent writer” (Kasanga, 2003b, p. 217).

Through the critique made of the existing teaching model, the present study advocates a writing pedagogy where students will be empowered for taking over the authorship of their writing. To such an end, an institutional transformation enabling more creative and egalitarian teaching and learning practices is needed. Further, findings of the study reaffirm, among other facts, the imperative of foregrounding a dialogue between lecturers and students around the writing activity, and the necessity to address the issue of differing perceptions and expectations with regard to student written texts. This issue of differing perceptions and expectations could be resolved through teaching practices emphasising a transparent and explicit

definition of 'criterial rules' (Bernstein, 1977, 2003) governing the academic writing discourse.

The issue of gap between lecturers' and students' understandings and expectations of what is involved in student academic writing might also require initiatives at the institutional level consisting in publication of documents making explicit practices and expectations of student writing. This would contribute in the promotion of academic literacy in general and would for example include publication of general guidance pertaining to suggestions and modalities on extra-curricular writing activities (e.g. participation to clubs and/or special bulletins), referencing conventions, institutional policy on plagiarism, etc. Subsequent implications for the teaching process would also be considered.

The highlight of shortcomings in the course investigated is also likely to contribute in raising awareness about the necessity to promote a new practice based on writing in disciplines or writing across curriculum (WAC). The latter, as suggested by Spack (1998), has as advantage to encourage lecturers of all disciplines to use writing as part of the teaching and learning process in their courses. The move, which may serve as a substantial complement to a stand-alone module such as the Written English I, would help ensure the effectiveness of student development as it would be facilitating familiarity with writing in various disciplinary areas. Promotion and mainstreaming of a WAC approach would also strongly rely on publication of the afore-mentioned documents and general guidance making explicit practices and expectations of student writing.

## **CHAPTER 8: Concluding remarks**

### ***8.1. Conclusion***

This research strove to highlight challenges related to teaching of academic writing through an autonomous approach in a particular context of ESL. Findings have unveiled problems based on a network of issues at both institutional and pedagogical levels. An appropriate solution might then be multifaceted as this is shown throughout the analysis of data where an alternative approach based on social practices of academic writing has been pointed to. The latter has the advantage of being inherently hybrid incorporating both the technical skills and the discourse practices demanded in the social institution of HE. So, it is likely to help in addressing students' difficulties in terms of the linguistic rules as required by the writing conventions in use, but also in terms of meaning making in the complex disciplinary areas of HE.

With regard to the form of provision of academic writing course geared to first-year university students such as the Written English I module, it must be regarded as a positive move that the current provision is located in the main curriculum of the institution as a subject rather than a form of writing support whereby teaching is provided by a separate unit (e.g.: foundation language learning unit, learning support unit, etc.). This insertion in academic departments has as consequence that the course is treated with a normal-status subject and is mainstreamed in the academic activities to such a point that students take the course seriously. However, the course is not supposed to overlook particular requirements related to the context of learning or disciplinary areas of writing.

The analysis made of the investigated teaching and learning process suggests the existence of a link between lecturers' conceptualisations of academic writing and the form of practices used for development of competences in this activity. In other words, the practices as described are at a certain extent underpinned by lecturers' views of language and what is involved in writing and learning to write. Further, through reflections made on the practices in place for the Written English I module,

findings of the study implicitly call for a new approach based on a view of literacy as a social practice and on problematisation of the textual bias dominant in the investigated setting. This approach envisages academic writing and literacy in general as complex, situated, and involving issues of knowledge construction and power relations among different parties involved in education (Lea & Street, 2006). It is thus likely to facilitate novice-writers to find their own strategies to cope and adapt to the new practices and, on long-term, to constitute a new identity as members of academia.

In fact, at the pedagogical level, it would be naive to expect overnight changes in practices of lecturers who appear to believe that the rote learning of academic conventions will solely solve the writing problems of students and help them swiftly adapt to the requirements of the academic literacy practices. But, as this was one of the purposes of the current research, raising awareness about the limitations of the dominant pedagogic approach should be the first step in such a direction. By a highlight made of the high degree of dissatisfaction expressed by both parties involved in the module – lecturers and students, the research has contributed to providing emphasis on the need for a series of relevant strategies to be undertaken including a more explicit definition of the rules that govern the writing practices in HE, the importance of a dialogue-based intervention, etc.

It is also worth reminding that, on the side of students, rules and regulations of academic writing are meant to be gradually integrated as students get used to the university literacy practices. In other words, instead of complaining about students' failure to write according to rules and regulations of academia which they are supposed to be acculturated into, lecturers need to view student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or acculturation (Lea & Street, 1998). Thus, the students' background must be taken into consideration with the purpose to devise a more appropriate way of addressing their specific difficulties regarding academic literacy. Success of the pedagogic action will also require a new perspective based on a set of situated practices, including genres, disciplinary areas, etc.

Thus, for an academic writing course such as Written English I, a shift in pedagogy implying moving away from concentration on form aspects appears of great relevance. Such pedagogy would be based on the principle that a written text is a complex unity of diverse voices and that the student-writer, as suggested by Scott and Turner (2004), is bearer of “the voices of past instruction, the voices of current tutors, the loud of faint voices of the student’s assumptions and expectations regarding writing in English” (p. 152). This principle would thus help address the issue of the “in-between space” many students are faced with as they need for example to negotiate at the same time the meaning of a source text and conventions governing “essay text literacy” as emphasised by academic practices of HE (Scott & Turner, 2004, p. 146).

The fact of the matter is that focus on form aspects of a written text is likely to distract attention from the need to understand and negotiate the socio-linguistic, cultural, economic, and interactive dimensions linked to the writing context (see Lei, 2008; Matsuda, 1997). Indeed, a teaching model focusing on form aspects contributes to misleading student-writers about the necessary balance between, on one hand, language features such as grammar, spelling and register-related aspects and, on the other hand, elements related to content, purpose, adaptation to audience, etc. It is also worth noting that structure errors in students’ writing are often symptomatic of difficulties due to a lack of familiarity with a particular disciplinary discourse (see Nightingale, 1988).

So, a teaching model shifting focus from form aspects of the written text would open more space for a “dialogue of participation” (Lillis, 2006) with students to ensure their familiarity with discourse strategies regarding elements such as audience expectations, genre characteristics with respect to different disciplinary contexts, etc. As suggested by Lillis (2003), it is important for teachers to provide opportunities of dialogue with students about the type of meanings they might wish to make in their academic writing, instead of imposing particular meanings based on categorically rigid feedback about “one version of truth” while there may exist “a range of possible truths and interpretations” (p. 198).



Further, to counter the effects of the “atomistic” model of language conceptualising teaching of academic writing mainly “in terms of smaller functional units of writing, such as formal text units, stylistic devices, or lexico-grammatical features of academic prose” (Cumming, 2003, p. 76), what Rose (1985) terms a “rich model of written language development and production” (p.357) may be adopted. That is, a model allowing to go beyond the deficit view of student writing and to better understand novice-writers’ difficulties as they negotiate the complex codes and conventions governing the academic discourse of HE.

Indeed, ESL students cannot be expected to overcome difficulties related to how to deal with the use of sources, with plagiarism, etc. through learning activities focusing on “grammar trouble spots”, the use of direct and indirect speech in a short sentence, etc. A model of teaching academic writing allowing to deal with the complex interdisciplinary discourse of HE need to be foregrounded. Implementation of such a model implies to draw on the existing theories on intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, hybridity, construction of authorial voice (Ivanic, 1998; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007) to help students assert the ownership of their written texts.

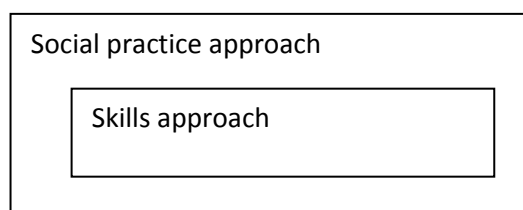
With reference to the research findings of the present study, it would also be interesting to look at how the current approach to academic writing reflects the goals of HE. In fact, the goal of HE might be regarded as fostering students’ thinking autonomy whereby the established conventions and practices are made visible and challenged through pedagogical practices oriented to a dialogic perspective. But, what is witnessed through observation of classroom activities is that the Written English I module is characterised by a monologic relationship between lecturers and students where teaching practices are focused on uncritical reproduction of the established discourse conventions. Such a conception of the HE community of participants as homogeneous is not likely to help in addressing specific difficulties of the students who are inherently diverse given their personal, educational or socio-economic backgrounds. So, particular conditions are needed to facilitate young ESL students to negotiate a new language identity and to assert their voice which seems stifled by the prevailing discourse of transparency inherited from the

Western academic culture (Lillis & Turner, 2001). That is why, at classroom level, the introduction of a more dialogical mode of communication between lecturers and students appears more and more needed.

Concerning the situation of African university students, although the current globalisation system dictates the mastery of one of the ex-colonial languages such as English, it is high time, as increasingly suggested by some African scholars, that the form of abilities that could empower African students be built at least on African socio-cultural realities (Alidou & Mazrui, 1999, p. 101). This is consistent with Ramanathan (2005) who, speaking about the “dominating role of English” in the current globalising movement, cautions against language policies which “sometimes reproduce, legitimise and compound social stratifications on the ground” (p.90). Ramanathan recommends to view language policies as hybrid entities that have to draw their force and movement from the lives of real peoples and their motivations.

Likewise, with regard to the teaching of academic writing in ESL challenging contexts such as that of Rwanda, it is useful to understand students’ difficulties with reference to their language background and the specificity of the Rwandan sociolinguistic context. So, the implementation of an adapted teaching model needs to explore a hybrid model whereby a social practice model taking account of the students’ socio-cultural and educational background is complementarily used together with an autonomous model based on technical skills. The figure below represents the teaching and learning model to be undertaken:

**Figure 4: A hybrid model of academic writing**



As suggested in the above figure, the skills model is incorporated into the social practice (or contextualised) model of academic writing. So, while the skills approach implies explicit teaching of discrete elements of language and text, the

social and contextualised approach involves the same skills but integrates them into a set of communicative practices, including reading activities, genres of academic writing, writing in academic disciplines, (quasi-)authentic writing tasks, dialogue with student-writers, etc.

For an implementation of such a model, a coordinated pedagogical action would strive to plan a balanced teaching-learning process switching technical skills and a practice-based application of the codified conventions of academic discourse. With such an approach, teaching and assessment practices would be adapted to the ESL students' needs instead of requiring students to automatically fit the prevailing discourse conventions of academia. The hybrid model is thus likely to better ensure the achievement of the objective of teaching and learning academic writing, hence meeting the students' needs in terms of meaning making, identity, power relations, as well as basic linguistic and structural skills.

## ***8.2. Limitations of the study***

Methodological considerations related to the constraints of conducting a qualitative investigation, and some of the ways in which limitations inherent to this type of design could be addressed has been discussed in the chapter related to research methodology. This discussion has made reference to the issues relating to the selection of participants, the sample size, constraints based on participant observation where the researcher is present as both 'insider' and 'outsider', etc. However, in addition to these considerations already discussed, some further comments related to the validity of findings and potential limitations to the study are made in the lines below.

Indeed, one of the challenges to the quality of data analysis encountered in the present study is related to the type of content and the methodological variation used by lecturers in the investigated module. As particularly shown in chapter 7, the observed teaching sessions are almost exclusively characterised by a knowledge display approach where a "skills discourse" hogs the teaching process. So, this limitation in pedagogical creativity did not purvey a large variety of teaching

initiatives worth of being analysed with exclusive focus on what is actually done in classroom. The researcher sometimes resorts to referring to what is lacking in the activity undertaken by lecturers in order to clarify the argument being made in the analysis. This may in fact appear as a deviation in favour of what the researcher would like to see while the real purpose of the chapter is to analyse activities on basis of actual occurrences.

Another appearance of limitation is related to the degree of significance of the findings to the context of ESL. Indeed, as suggested in the research rationale, the present study is supposed to relate its findings to the particular Rwandan context of ESL. But, on observation of the analysis carried out and the findings, one might think that such a dimension is not sufficiently in focus. In fact, the above-mentioned limitations in pedagogical creativity claimed so much attention that the analysis of classroom “initiatives” in terms of specific requirements of the Rwandan context of ESL seemed to lose of its importance<sup>67</sup>. However, it would be useful to remind that findings of the study, in the way they have been presented, appear very significant to the Rwandan context of ESL. In fact, the highlighted failure of the module to address contextual needs of students is likely to be particularly harmful to the Rwandan students who are in desperate needs of English language proficiencies.

With regards to the limitations of the study in relation to the conclusive nature of findings, it is worth recognising that some of the perspectives of action proposed are not to be taken as absolute; they are always subject to reflexive nuances. For example, feedback practices based on collegial comments, that is, comments to students’ work that are expected to positively accommodate students into the academic community, must take account of the socio-cultural habits of Rwandan students. Indeed, hierarchy is the main benchmark of relationships between adults and young and, particularly, between teachers and learners in the Rwandan society. So, to avoid miscommunication, a check and balance perspective is needed as the use of mitigated forms of criticism (such as ‘Perhaps...’, ‘You may like to consider...’)

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<sup>67</sup> It would appear superfluous to emphasise the irrelevance of writing practices in relation to a particular community context while these practices do not even seem to adequately respond to what may be viewed as universal requirements of the writing activity.

may not be properly understood by the Rwandan students who, generally, are not used to collegial relationships between students and lecturers.

Further, the dialogic approach proposed as possible solution to the existing tension between lecturers' and students' understandings of what is involved in academic writing is also likely to create a new form of tension. The latter may be located at the level of enactment of a pedagogy which enables students to write within academic writing conventions while, at the same time, it is problematising these conventions. Thus, a check and balance is once again needed for managing this cycle of tensions. A combination of approaches where the encouragement of the student voice does not infringe the rules of academic rigour is probably an avenue worth exploring.

### ***8.3. Recommendations***

Following on the findings discussed above, and by way of contributing to the expected transformation in the teaching of academic writing within the investigated setting and in HE in general, some recommendations are proposed. They are directed to different categories of players including the academic staff involved in the module, the university as institution, and the bodies in charge of policy making.

#### **a. Recommendations to the academic staff involved in the module**

One of the pedagogical aspects worthy of attention is related to the issue of equal learning opportunities regarding the way in which the Written English I module is enacted. In fact, as demonstrated by the research findings, the classroom interaction observed seems to privilege students more proficient in English to the detriment of those who are less proficient through the way in which power and control over knowledge is managed in the classroom. It would then be of interest for the teaching team to assess how this dimension is unfolding in the pedagogical setting concerned. Such an assessment would analyse the role of the pedagogic procedures used in maintaining the above-mentioned unbalance. It would also go beyond the horizontal relationship among students to examine whether and how perpetuation of specific power relations is enacted with regard to the expected student learning

which involves particular forms of meanings, ways of thinking, and particular forms of expression.

In relation to the mentioned contradictions and conflicting practices noticed during the period of investigation, a systematic collaboration within the teaching team is needed. That is, under the leadership of a module coordinator, teaching should rely on a team work where members plan and prepare their sessions and materials together. They should also work in consultation for assessments and in searching solution to emerging difficulties of students. A coordinated action will thus help not only in a better adaptation of the curriculum and pedagogy, but also in consolidation of connections between different units of the module. It will also help in exploration and integration of the most recent insights of research and theories in the academic writing and literacy.

A coordinated work might also help ensure transparency and fairness in the assessment practices whereby “criterial rules” governing the academic writing are systematically made visible to students. To such an end, the teaching team would strive to work out an assessment system implying principles such as:

- **Shared definition of learning objectives between lecturers and students:** this definition should also include exemplars for application of these criteria (particularly in the context of evaluation system privileging summative assessment as is the case for the Written English I module). A systematic use of criteria in assessment could lead to improved practices at institutional level as it might help lecturers engaged in such practices become familiar with ‘criteria-based’ assessment, particularly in a context of time pressure and/or regular assessment practices.
- **Clear guidance:** there is much to be gained by setting out clearly what components and characteristics a student satisfactory response will be with respect to a particular writing assignment. Surely, as suggested by Catt and Gregory (2006), “a well phrased and carefully explained assignment brief should promote intellectual engagement” (p. 26). Specified assignment guidance might

also stand as a guarantee of transparency as it implies clear characteristics of the expected writing task. Students should then be provided with detailed criteria for successful performance.

- **Appropriate feedback to student work:** such feedback must consist in purposefully informing students' learning instead of undermining their motivation through 'over-critical' comments. Feedback comments must be focused not on what is lacking but on how to overcome one's difficulties and progress. It thus goes without saying that this feedback must be issued on time as, in the case of Written English I, long delays generally elapse between the submission of assignments and the return of grades and eventually feedback. This has as consequences for students to miss feedback needed for their performance particularly due to the 'course' switching mode attached to the newly adopted modular system at NUR. To alleviate detrimental effects of such a system where there is no possibility of making use of feedback which is often received after module completion, appropriate strategies might be devised including organisation of discussion sessions after writing of each 'essay'. These discussions would for example contribute to address some emerging issues related to previous writing assignments.

#### **b. Recommendations to the faculty concerned and the NUR as institution**

Having received the mandate from the Council of Faculty for handling the module, the teaching team is responsible for the success or the failure of the course since they have a relative autonomy to orient the course content according to what they view as priorities in terms of students' literacy competences. This is not done without risk because, as is the case for the teaching and learning process investigated, the adaptation or selection of the learning objectives and activities by lecturers can be informed by the national language policy or the institutional goal. So, the terrain is subject to errors, and that is why a closer institutional overseeing appears critical to make sure that the course remains within the limits of what is expected to be an adequate response to the specific needs of students.

**c. Recommendations to those in charge of policy making in the Ministry of Education and NCHE**

Part of insufficiencies in the provision and the institutional system in general is the lack of an academic literacy support for students with difficulties as it is currently the case in many institutions of HE around the world (see Russell et al., 2009; Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006). Thus, by highlighting the weaknesses characterising the type of provision established for the Written English I module, the study is also questioning the current model of teaching writing in the investigated context. In fact, it is just easy to recommend innovation at institutional level in relation to the transparent model of language implicit in official discourse, but for the expected change to be effective, it would probably be better to consider solution from the roots. In fact, the Rwandan education system as a whole is characterised by a lack of practice in writing (Twagilimana, 2002). It is probably worth reminding that even from the lower level of schooling (i.e. pre-school and primary) significant steps are ignored where, even in the mother tongue, children's writing is only 'transactional' (see Russel, 1991). That is, school children are expected to pass to the step of communicating information without having received opportunities to practice the expressive or poetic style involving their personal forms of writing and consequently develop their writing abilities gradually.

At secondary and university levels, writing generally tends to be assessed and not taught. Research carried out in secondary school (see Twagilimana, 2002) revealed that written assignments are almost exclusively intended for summative assessment. Very few opportunities are availed for in-course assessment purposes where students' texts can be seen by the teacher at the draft level. Writing practices do not seem to be encouraged at university level either. By way of proof, writing competence is not part of the prerequisite for university entrance. Successful results in the test of 'English language', which is part of the required components for admission to most of university programmes in Rwanda, do not necessarily bear on text writing in the form of essay or composition.



So, teaching and learning of writing should be better promoted at all levels of education. It should not be for example limited to some stand-alone syllabi embedded in the university programmes without necessarily a direct connection to the academic orientation followed by students as it is the case at NUR. Learning of academic literacy should start with early education at school level and continue to be facilitated as much as possible throughout degree studies at university. A transformative perspective is then needed beginning by the way writing is treated in the whole system which should help students acquire writing competences even before going to university.

At the national level, a national literacy strategy should be established which would define modalities for promotion of literacy practices not only at all levels of education but also in every sector of the national life. Such a strategy would thus inform adequate policy regarding language and literacy teaching from primary to university. It would also serve as a reference for development of teaching programmes in accordance to the requirements of specific disciplinary contexts. Through such a strategy, advice may be provided to teachers about how learners can be more effectively empowered and allowed access to the literacy practices of the academic community. Guidelines would for example be published detailing the nature of the coaching procedures needed according to the educational level concerned: tutorial support at the drafting stage of writing – especially early in the course. That is, instead of reducing teaching of writing to teaching by correction or teaching after the event, a teaching system based on a coaching approach – viewed as an accompaniment to success – incurred by lecturers at every stage of the learning process should be considered.

#### ***8.4. Further research***

The findings of the current study might be valued in relation to the research objective set out by the researcher. They can be regarded as useful enlightenment to the existing challenges but cannot be expected to bring solution to all problems regarding academic writing in the Rwandan HE. Further research is needed by way of complementing findings of the current study or exploring new horizons.

Thus, an exploration, involving more than one faculty, needs to be carried out at the NUR and other Rwandan HE institutions to find out what the general patterns characterising teaching of academic writing in the Rwandan HE are. Such an investigation would also allow an evaluative understanding of how the national language policy for HE is being enacted with regard to academic writing and literacy in general.

Research is also required into the assessment and feedback practices fore-grounded in the Rwandan HE and their impact on students' engagement with the academic writing as well as the potential development of competences in that activity. This research would also help determine the main issues faced by both lecturers and students throughout the process of assessment and feedback, and what changes are needed for these practices to appropriately contribute to the attainment of the learning goals.

Research is of relevance as well to examine how the critical issue of disciplinary writing is perceived and approached by lecturers in the Rwandan HE. This research, through exploration of lecturers' perspectives on hybrid discourses and disciplinary genres in the academic writing course, would also help in better illuminating the issue of monolithic conceptions of academic discourse which often characterise classroom practices.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Draft interview sheet for lecturers

Lecturer: -----Date: -----

- 1 What have been the assignment topics for your students for the last 2 years? Can you give examples?
- 2 What are the goals in your student writing assignments (including immediate and future goals)?
- 3 What are the features of a good piece of students writing in your opinion?
- 4 What skills do you privilege in academic writing teaching?
- 5 What skills pose the most difficulty to your students
- 6 What criteria are considered the most when rating your student writing? Are they changing or constant?
- 7 What, in your views, it means to be academically literate?
- 8 What do you actually do to help your students to master codes and conventions of academic writing?
- 9 What do you think of your students' written work? Are you satisfied with your students' performances in academic writing? Why or why not?

**Appendix 2: Interview sheet for students**

Student: -----Date: -----

- 1 What do you think of your writing course (textbooks, topics, assessment criteria ...)?  
And what have you learned from your writing course?
- 2 Is your writing course meeting your expectations/needs in academic writing skills?  
Why or why not?
- 3 Are there problems in your writing assignments? If yes, can you describe some  
major problems and how you handle them?
- 4 Are your lecturers' writing requirements clear to you? If not, how do you describe  
them, and what do you actually do to cope with your writing tasks?
- 5 Can you understand when you have successfully achieved the writing requirements  
in a piece of writing? If yes, describe. If not, why?
- 6 Are your teachers understand and help you to overcome difficulties you are facing  
in your writing?

### ***Appendix 3:***

#### **Classroom observation: transcript**

17/02/2011

Lecturer:

Number of students: 73

8:14

L. Good morning every body

Sts.: Good morning Prof

L.: We have a guest today, his name is Innocent. He is from Kigali Institute of Education...  
May be he can say something to you as a personal introduction.

Inn: [Expression of gratitude for being welcomed, happiness to be part of the class for  
the research I am conducting...]

L.: Ok, thank you for welcoming our guest and he will be with us for a time from now.....  
Please [with a hand sign toward the guest] have a seat [...].Let's come back to our  
lesson of last week. Who can tell me what we saw last Thursday in our course of Written  
English?

St.1: We were looking at some grammar trouble spots.

L.: Yeah, and what did we learn? Lucie?

St.2 (Lucie): We saw some grammar rules relating to sentence....

L.: What did we see then? Yes [in a sign of green light to a student to speak]

St.3: We saw the sentence structure

L.: Yeah, as I said, sentence structure is the basis for writing, because you can't have a  
text if you don't know how to make a sentence.... So, this is a very important 'aspect'

(sic) of our course. Of course, the course is not intended to make a review of English grammar or to cover everything you need to know to correct all errors in a piece of writing. It's focused on rules..., and will help you apply some principles, and it will then help you examine and evaluate your writing ...in terms of grammar.... [After a moment of a silent reading in the lecturer's documents] In fact, we saw the sentence structure and boundaries...

Tell me, what parts make up a sentence and with what a sentence starts and ends?

Sts: [Silence]

L.: It's something you have been learning since the primary school...

St.3: A sentence has a subject, a verb and a complement

L.: That's it [Nothing on the second part of the question...]. Let's do an exercise [writing on the black board with a chalk]:

**'Which of these sentences are standard sentences (SS) in written English, which are not (NSS)?'**

1. The sun came out
2. When the sun came out, we all went to the beach
3. The beach looked lovely
4. The waves splashing on the sand
5. We, playing games
6. We ate our picnic
7. Ham sandwich ate we
8. We stayed there for four hours, sunbathing and swimming (S.S.)
9. Because we were having such a good time

[The correction is done collectively, and the researcher could notice that students were so hesitating (i.e. uncertain) to characterize the type of sentence concerned].

1. → NSS [to be regarded as an incomplete sentence]

- [A number of students seem to view it as a SS, the lecturer seemed to impose the solution characterizing it as NSS: the issue of verbal tense (i.e. simple past v.s. present perfect) should have been addressed more properly]
2. → SS [No hesitation on the part of students]
  3. → NSS [Some students manifested their doubt to view the sentence as an 'incomplete statement'. The issue might need to be fully addressed]]
  4. → NSS ['Missing of were' was invoked as reason of 'disqualification' [even though the presence of 'were' would put it in the same situation as in 3]
  5. NSS → Missing 'were' [see same issue as in 3 and 4]
  6. NSS → We is missing
  7. NSS → Qualified as barbaric structure [We ate ham sandwiches]
  8. SS →
  9. NSS → [Viewed as a] non complete sentence, as just a fragment ...

[To what extent is it useful to examine such sentences without using them in a particular context? What is in fact a standard sentence in English?]

L.: Note that a sentence can be long or short, simple or complex... There are in fact some standard patterns of English sentences that we will see. But before going to different sentence patterns, let's have another exercise.

[The lecturer is writing on the black board]: Use the sentence in 1 to write a cohesive paragraph

L.: I give an example with the sentence Nr 1 [writing on the b.b. after reading the original sentence] 'When the sun came out, we all sent to the beach which was looking lovely.

L.: You are going to write this type of sentence using the sentence in the exercise No 1. I give you 10 minutes.

[Students spend some time (18 min) working on their own. The lecturer is going through to supervise what students are doing. The exercise is done by every student individually but nothing is done/shared in common (i.e. in plenary).

10:30

L.: It is time for the break [looking at his telephone-watch]?

Sts.: [Many at a time] Yes, it's time for the break.

L.: Let's have a break of 15 min

10:42

L.: [Back in the classroom] Is everyone here?

St.n: Some are still outside

L.: Ok, let's go without them, they'll join...

[Some documents (printed sheets of paper) are distributed (handed out): see photocopies please]

L.: This handout will help you to have an idea [sic] of different types of sentences...

[The number of handouts does not correspond with the number of students; a group of students (2 or 3) is sharing a document.

L.: As I said, there are different types of sentences in English, and these sentences can be grouped into some types which have been analysed grammatically, or may be linguistically and we have different types as you can read on the first page. He is reading [see photocopies, ref to the section 15].

11:25

L.: [With a look on his watch] I'd request you to carry on with these exercises; we'll come back to the exercise next week. Those who didn't get their own copies (cf

handout) will make a photocopy, and I want everyone to read and to write the type of sentence in the blank space. See you next week.

[The class is over, and the lecturer is rushing. No interview is possible].

24/02/2011

Number of students:

75

Lecturer:

08:10

L.: I want you to show me what you did of the exercise I left you last Thursday. [The lecturer is going through different rows where students are seated; the latter are showing the sheets of paper (now completed (i.e. blank spaces filled in as requested last time: see photocopy from students)].

St.1: Some sentences are hard to explain [i.e. to characterize...]

L.: Which one for example?

St.1: Like the sixth sentence

L.: Let's go systematically [All students are implicitly requested to find the right answer]. The first sentence has already got an answer, hasn't? And the next sentence?

St.: The sentence Nr 1? It has not an absolute

L.: Yes. So what to do now? Can you tell me the kind of word or expression used in a place of the absolute?

St.: A subordinate clause has been used.

L.: Which one?

St.: Therefore, we we.....



L: Who can tell me what kind of word 'therefore' is?

St.: It's an adverb

L.: Exactly. It's a conjunctive adverb. So, can we transform the sentence into an absolute phrase?

Sts.: [No answer]

L.: Look at the sentence Nr 3 [He reads the sentence: see Photocopy, please]

St.: Yes, the highway we planned to travel on being under repair, we will have to change our route.

L.: Exactly. Who can repeat the sentence?

St.: [Sentence repeated]

L.: Let's go on following the same pattern. The word used in the following sentence is just "a word of address. And for the sentence 4?

St.: It's an absolute phrase

L.: Is it?

St.1: Yes

St.2: I don't understand why the sentence is called an absolute phrase

L.: Who can tell her? Why is it called an absolute phrase? Anastase?

St. (Anastase): I don't know

L.: As you know, there are different types of clauses; the independent clause, the subordinate clause, etc. Olive, can you give an example of an independent clause?

St. (Olive): [Silence]

L.: When you say “John is cleaning the classroom”. Who can tell me the main parts of such a sentence?

St.: The sentence is made by a subject, a verb...

L.: [Disrupting] The sentence is made of... not by...

St.: ...is made of the subject, the verb and the complement.

L.: Ok, and we can also say that the sentence is made of a subject (John) and a predicate (is cleaning the classroom) ... The type of clause?

Sts: [Silence]

L.: It's an independent clause

Let's take another sentence... ‘You are not around, thus Peter will take your job...’ are 2 different types of clauses, the independent clause (‘you are not around’), and the subordinate one (‘Thus Peter will take your job’). So, comparison with our sentence above...

L.: Who can transform the independent clause into an absolute sentence?

Sts: [After a silence] You being not around, thus Peter...

L.: Yes, but are we going to put thus...?

St.: No

St.: You being not around, Peter will take the job

L.: Exact. You can now see the difference between an independent clause and an absolute sentence.

L.: We'll see different types of sentences.

L.: Coming back to our exercise, let's answer our exercise quickly. The next sentence, please

[The answers are found by all students together → see photocopy]

L.: **Forming absolute phrases** [Written on the black board] Another exercise is consisting in combining two sentences to make one sentence an absolute phrase and another the main clause. Let's have an example:

a. John won the contest b. We were in good spirits

→ John having won the contest, we were in good spirits

6. a. It is a nice day. b. We are going for a walk

→ Being a nice day, we are going for a walk

7. a. Our car was in good consideration. b. We felt ready for the trip

→ Our car having been in good conditions, we have felt ready for the trip

8. a. The skies cleared up b. People began to appear on the beach

→ The skies having cleared up, people began to appear on the beach

9. a. The names of the winning contestants were announced b. The meeting broke up

→ The names of the winning contestants having been announced, the meeting broke up

10. a. The newspaper is late b. I cannot tell you what programmes are on TV

→ The newspaper being late, I cannot tell you what programmes are on TV

L.: Let's also have a look on types of sentence. As I said, a sentence can be simple or complex. But before going to the types of sentence, let's talk about tense. How many tenses do we have in English?

St.1: Six

St.2: Ten

L.: Can you give an example?

St.3: They are six:

Present tense, future tense, past tense, past perfect....

L.: There is nothing as future tense, it's future time, and we say "present time". We have time, but we have also what we call aspects. You also talked about "perfect". That's it? We have perfect progressive... Let's have a timeline: [The lecturer is randomly suggesting verbs and asks students to conjugate them as they go]

	<b>Past</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Future</b>
<b>Simple</b>	I cleaned You cleaned He/She/It cleaned We cleaned You cleaned They cleaned	I clean You clean He/She/It cleans We clean You clean They clean	I will clean You will clean He/She/It will clean We will clean You will clean They will clean
<b>Progressive</b>	I was cleaning You were cleaning He/She/It was cleaning We were cleaning You were cleaning They were cleaning	I am cleaning You are cleaning He/She/It is cleaning We are cleaning You are cleaning They are cleaning	I will be cleaning You will be cleaning He/She/It will be cleaning We will be cleaning You will be cleaning They will be cleaning
<b>Perfect</b>	I had cleaned You had cleaned He/She/It had cleaned We had cleaned	I have cleaned You have cleaned He/She/It have cleaned We have cleaned	I will have cleaned You will have cleaned He/She/It will have cleaned We will have

	You had cleaned  They had cleaned	You have cleaned  They have cleaned	cleaned  You will have cleaned  They will have cleaned
<b>Perfect progressive</b>	I had been cleaning  You had been cleaning  He/She/It had been cleaning  We had been cleaning  You had been cleaning  They had been cleaning	I have been cleaning  You have been cleaning  He/She/It has been cleaning  We have been cleaning  You have been cleaning  They have been cleaning	I will have been cleaning  You will have been cleaning  He/She/It have been cleaning  We have been cleaning  You have been cleaning  They have been cleaning

L.: Are you done with the table? Let's take the verbs to 'write', 'study', 'clean'. Try to use any of these verbs in these different tenses.

St.n: We use each of the verbs in the different tenses?

L.: No, you just choose any, and you try to conjugate it into the tenses above. Let/s use 10 minutes for that.

[The lecturer leaves 10 minutes and students work individually at their own... Having gone out of the class, he is back and starts going through different rows to look at what the students were doing. He is also making corrections as he passes through].

L.: How do we spell 'studying', can we spell? So, like the person who said [i.e. wrote] I have write, this is not correct. Say 'I have written, you have written, he has written, etc.'

The simple present then you say 'I write, You write, He or She writes...'

This was for the affirmative form. For the negative form, who can tell me what we are going to say for the simple past?

St.1: He didn't cleaned

L.: Present progressive?

St.2 – I am not cleaning

Future: St.3: - I will not be cleaning

L.: Or? St.4: - I won't be cleaning

L.: Present perfect? St.n: I have not cleaned

Sts: Or I haven't cleaned

L.: Note that the contradiction is not used in formal English. You only use it in oral.

Otherwise, the meaning is the same. Example in future... 'I will not have finished the report tomorrow at ten'.

Let's look quickly at W.H. [sic] question: Example, 'John does not clean his bedroom as often as he should' [Written on the black board]. Does John clean his bedroom as often as he should? → Subject – verb inversion.

L.: Emmanuel did not come to school today. Then, on the same pattern...?

St.n: Did Emmanuel come to school today?

L.: That was a revision regarding conjugation, just a wrap up.

[No questioning about W.H. from the part of students].

Let's look at some patterns of sentences.

**SENTENCES** [written on the black board]

L.: We can have **S – V – O**, example 'John cleans his bedroom'

On basis of this sentence, who can define a sentence?

St.: A set of words which has a meaning.

L.: ... which has a meaning? What's a meaning?! Let's say a combination of words that ends with a full stop.....and beginning with a capital letter. Example [written on the black board]:

He studies Accountancy

I like to listen to the music

They are sleeping

ii. You can also have a sentence made of a S – V

iii. You may have S – C = Subject Complement Example 'I am a student'

iv. You may also have S + V + D.O+ I.O, Example 'Peter sent a post card to his mother

v. Also a combination of: S + O – O.C, They (S.) elected (V.) him (O.) President  
(O.C.=object complement)

These are the 5 patterns of sentences. Of course, they make a distinction between a simple sentence and a complex sentence. When you say 'John and Peter clean the bedroom, or when you say 'Suzan and Rose have been dancing all night... That is also a simple sentence. When we say 'the tallest student of our class ran the marathon last year', this is also a simple sentence.



Let's ask someone to clean that part of the black board, then we'll look at other aspects of the sentence.

When you say 'Tom and Joy are getting married', you can also describe them 'The tallest and the most handsome boy of our school is getting married with the shortest and not very good looking girl of my village'.

L.: I want to propose you homework. You are going to write a paragraph beginning with these above-presented types of sentence. That's how you write paragraphs, you ask W.H. and you extend it with a paragraph: why, where, when, who, how...

Your paragraph will use all of these different patterns of sentences.

Date: 03/03/2011

Number of students: 76

Lecturer:

08:45

L.: I'm told you have been learning some grammatical elements. This is just for backing up your writing and reading skills. Please note that the most part of the outcomes will be owed to your personal work; just like in any other action undertaken in your life ... Nobody will work at your place. Your leaning system is open now. Let's see [the lecturer writing on the black board]:

Modular system: L. – 30%

Research : 70% (research, reading, group discussions...)

The question is to know whether students are really conducting their independent work. Are you really doing your reading as requested?

Sts: No

L.: Why?

Sts: [No answer]

L.: Is NUR a pace setter? I don't know but you have to know why you are here first. In general, there is a lack of reading culture. [Writing on the b.b.] Are learners acquainted with their learning objectives (knowledge, skills, values...).

Don't worry you have got some hope on horizon. Look, there are different programmes organized for you at NUR:

[Writing on the b.b.] **Postgraduate Professional Language Training Programmes**

Progr. 1. a) Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL)

b) Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (PGDP TESOL)

c) Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (PG Cert TESOL)

Progr. 2. a) Master of Arts in Teaching English for Specific Purposes (MA TESP)

b) Postgraduate Diploma in TESP (PG Dip TESP)

c) Postgraduate Certificate in TESP (PG Cert TESP)

9:50

Let's come back to our reading tips... In your reading you may need some tips to help you reach your reading objective. Don't worry you will have a copy of the document [as the lecturer is reading from a printed document].

**Speed reading tips** [Written on the b.b.]:

11. Reading every day

12. Prioritize your reading

13. Skim the material first for the main ideas

14. Focus questions

15. Jot down notes

St.: What does it mean?

L.: To jot? It means just to write down

16. Read in a proper environment

17. Use a flexible speed

18. Preview before reading

19. Enroll in speed reading

20. Practice timing yourself

L.: As you know, speedy reading is very important in this time where a big amount is produced for reading and people don't really have time for this...

St.a: I think it is difficult to understand well a message from a text when you are reading with speed.

L.: You're right but it depends on the objective and some other constraints especially those related to time. This is the reason why there are some tips to help you cope with such constraints.

St.b.: I wonder whether these exercises can help...

L.: You don't think that one can enhance his reading speed through practical exercises?

Sts: It's possible

L.: Yes, it's possible. There are various types of exercises you can do...

10:22

L.: You can for example try to develop good habits and personal discipline. Some of possible exercises are the following:

1) Read as quick as you can by underlining the word resembling the first one

Heat: Head, heal, hit, heat, heal, head, hate

Form: Farm, form, firm, from, frame, farm, fern

Sand: sand, sent, sound, sent, sand, send

1) Referring to the key phrase, try to circle the same phrase

2) Some of the following sentences contain a mistake. When is the case, underline the word which should be ...

L.: There are some '**References**' [Written on the b.b.]:

Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing Reading Skills*

Ramsay, J.M. (1986). *Basic Skills for Academic Readings*

10:40

**L.: Benefit of reading** [Written on the b.b.+ Lecturing]

What in your views is the main benefit of reading?

St.1.: Reading gives us various information we need.

St.2: Reading can also build our mind

L.: Yes, reading feeds our mind, said one scholar. And the fact is that mental process improves our mind capacity, memory...

St.3: Reading is also a joy for our spirit [sic]

L.: Yes, as he said, texts we read contain various information, a type of benefic input we have to decode, and the findings included help us in terms of discipline, creativity, innovation... In fact, there are two ways of intellect: what you see and what you hear. So, all this builds up your mindset, your enjoyment...

11:10

L.: There are also what we call 'integrated skills obtained from language teaching/learning' [Written on the b.b.]

When you read, you also acquire spelling skills, writing skills, vocabulary...

Let's talk about persuasive writing for example. This one is crucial, essential in academic writing as you have to make argumentation to be convincing when you are defending a position. It is what we do in our academic essays, research reports (research memoirs)...

All is following the western tradition where argument-to-discover is practiced regarding scientific world, scientific writing.

There are also some '**Universal characteristics**' [Written on the b.b.]:

a) Rhetorical stance

*'Persona'*, to mean the image of the writer to you as a reader viewing him or her as a writer... The persona allows the reader or the listener to view the speaker or the writer as a scholar, a salesman, an entertainer...

b) Some universal appeals:

- Emotional, ethical, logical – true and reliable

Universal types of logic:

L.: As you know, 'logic is a very important element in academic writing' [See 'discourse of transparency']

- Deductive

- Inductive

- Fallacies (=a logical error)

L. Chef, I have some handouts for you.

[As the lecturer is talking with the Class Representative, students are unpacking their effects and start leaving the classroom]

10/03/2011

Number of students: 78

Lecturer:

08:10

L.: Today we'll be looking at some tips and conventions related to text composition.

Who can tell us different parts of a composition?

Sts: (Silence)

L.: You don't know the main parts of a complete text?

St.1: A text is made by (sic) title, an introduction, a body and a conclusion

L.: Is it?

Sts: (many voices together) Yes

L.: Who can repeat?

St.2: An introduction, a ....body and a conclusion [expressed with hesitation]

+ [No comment on the "title" mentioned by the first student].

L.: When you are writing an essay for instance, you'll make sure that your title is short and really attractive

St.: The title must be short?

L.: Economy is relevant in nearly every field of life, and it's recommended for the quality of your composition. Quality of text is made by simple sentences, simple statements...., an idea per paragraph...

L.: In fact, there are some principles to write a good composition

## **STUDY SKILLS**

**Advice to write a good paragraph** (The sentences are noted on the Black board in 2 lines)

A good composition usually goes through four basic stages: [A dictation by the lecturer as he is holding a (typed) document]

- Initial thinking
- Revising, and
- Final writing.

L.: Ok? You can't improvise a good writing, you have to prepare....

L: **Focusing on a main idea** (Sentence noted on the B.B.)

Academic writings must focus on a main idea and support that main idea with findings from your research. Your interest and knowledge of the subject matter should help to determine the central focus of your paper.

L.: **Supporting a main idea with research** (noted on the black board)

One (Number loudly voiced): To be convincing, you have to support your main idea with research, either the ideas of others that you have gathered from interviews or your research sources or original data that you have collected.

Two (Loudly voiced): Once you have located your sources, you must read and think critically about your material. Ask yourself how relevant, valid, and accurate your sources are.

**L.: Organizing ideas** (on B.B.)

Once you have a main idea for your paper, you need to organize your information in smaller categories, each of which should be unified by a topic sentence.

Ok?

St.1 (The same as above): What is a topic sentence?

L.: We'll have time to see a topic sentence... A topic sentence is like a sentence of introduction...For example, you can say: "To mention just some examples, Rwanda, Uganda, DRC ...are members of the Nile Basin ..." (Sentence noted on BB and the concerned part underlined).

L.: Stages of writing now:

**STAGES OF WRITING** (Noted on BB)

L.: (Dictating)

a) Planning: [Punctuation ("colon") voiced loudly] In the planning stage, a writer analyses the reader, purpose and the writing situation; gathers information; and tentatively organizes the document. All these activities may recur many times in the writing.

b) Analyzing the reader: In general consider the question wherever you analyse readers and readers need:

One (loudly voiced and noted on BB) 1. Who are my specific readers?

2 (Voiced as above). Why do they need this doc?

3. How will they use it?



4. Do they have a hostile, friendly or neutral attitude toward the subject?

5. How much do they already know about the subject?

5. Do they have preferences for some elements such as tables, headings or summaries?

c) Analysing purpose: Actually a document has two purposes [Hard to distinguish what is comment and what is said to be written] [No punctuation mentioned...] what the writer wants the reader to know or do and what the reader wants to know or do.

In detail the writing activity has the following purposes [As comment or just to be written? Unclear]:

1. [Number voiced loudly] To inform: Presenting information is one of the most common writing purposes.
2. [Voiced as above] To persuade: To present strong views on many issues in order to convince and change the mind of your reader.
3. To express yourself: Almost everything you write offers you a chance to display your mastery of words and to enliven (i.e. [Parentheses indicated by the lecturer] make something more interesting or more fun) your writing with vivid images and fresh turns of phrase.
4. To entertain: Some writing merely entertains; [Punctuation indicated] some writing couples entertainment with a more serious purpose.

10:15

St.: It's time for a break

L.: Ok, a break of fifteen minutes!

10:37 L.: Let's continue with our stages of text writing, please!

L.: Having a specific purpose assists you at every stage of the writing process. It helps you define your audience, select the writing process. It helps you define your audience,

select the details, language, and approach that best suit their needs, and avoid going off in directions that will not interest them.

d) Gathering information: generally you will have some information when you begin your writing project. Information in documents should be:

1. [Numbering loudly voiced] Accurate
2. Relevant to the reader and the purpose
3. Up to date or timely

e) Organising the information: as you gather information, you will probably think about the best way to organize your document so that your readers can use the information efficiently.

f) Consider these questions when grouping information:

1. [Numbering loudly voiced] Does the subject matter have obvious segments?
2. Do some pieces of information share one major focus? For example, data about equipment purchase price, installation fees, and repair costs might be grouped under the major topic cost, with sub-topics covering initial cost, installation costs, and maintenance costs.
3. Does the reader prefer that the same topics appear in a specific type of documents?

g) Arranging information within a topic: consider the following questions to correctly arrange information within a topic:

1. [Numbering voiced as above] Which order will enable the reader to understand the material easily?
2. Which order will enable the reader to use your document?
3. Which order will help the reader accept your document?

h) Multiple drafting: after planning your document, a draft is the next stage. At this stage, develop the information you have gathered and do not worry about grammar,

punctuation, spelling, and fine points of style. When you have a complete draft then think about revision strategies.

i) Revising and editing: read your document and reconsider these elements:

1. Content: Do you need more facts? Are you facts relevant for the reader and purpose?
2. Organization: have you grouped the information into topics appropriate for your readers? Have you put your details in an order that your readers will find easy to understand and use? Can your readers find the data easily?
3. Headings: have you written the descriptive headings that will guide your readers to specific information?
4. Opening and closings: does your opening establish your documents purpose and introduce the reader to the main topic? Does your closing provide a summary, offer recommendations, or suggest actions appropriate to your reader and purpose?
5. Language: have you used an appropriate language for your readers? Have defined terms your readers may not know?
6. Reader usability: can your reader understand and use the information effectively? Does your document format help your reader find specific information?

L. [While students seem to be still struggling with note-taking, some being left behind]

Let's talk also about qualities of a good writing. **The quality of a good writing** [Noted on the black board]

[Dictation continues] To meet your readers' expectations, a piece of prose needs to bear three qualities:

- Fresh thinking: You don't have to surprise your reader with something never before discussed in print. Genuinely unique ideas and information are scarce

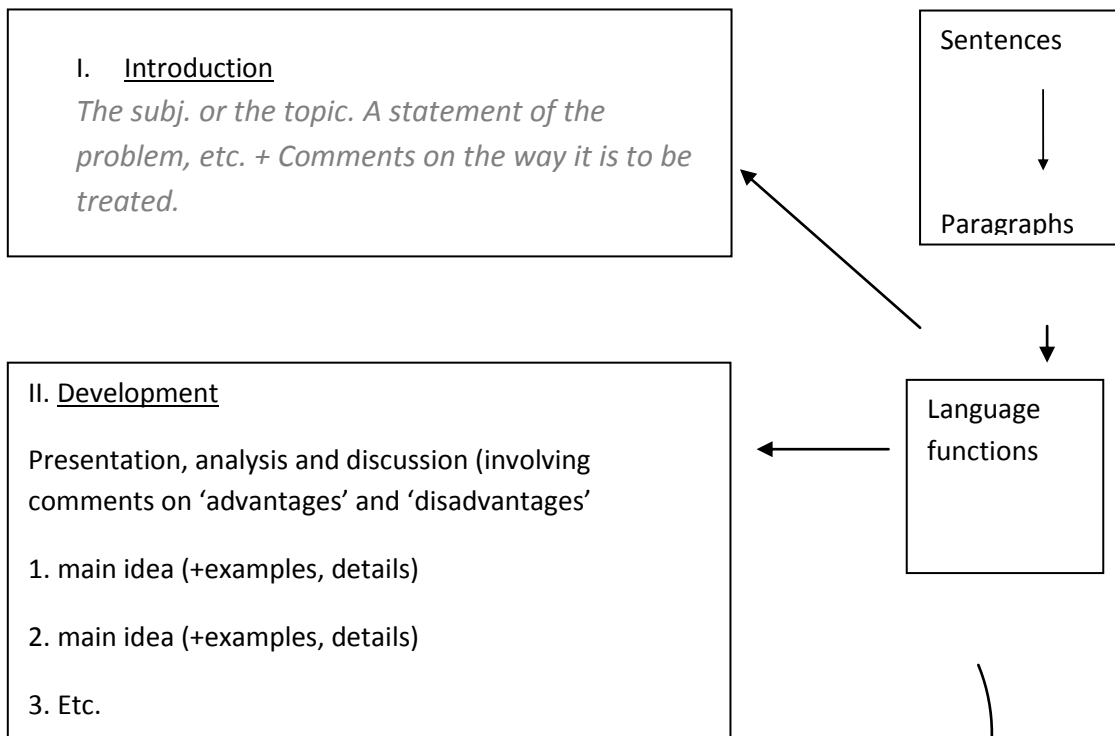
commodities. You can, however, freshen your writing by exploring personal insights and perceptions.

- Sense of style: readers expect you to write in a clear style. And if you strengthen it with vivid, forceful words, readers will absorb your points with even greater interest.
- Effective organization: a paper should have beginning, middle, and end: that is an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction sparks interest and acquaints the reader with what is to come. The body delivers the main message and exhibits a clear connection between ideas so that the reader feels satisfied rather than suddenly cut off. On the whole, your paper should follow a pattern that is suited to its content.

L. Ok? Note that we are looking at the general organization of a piece of writing such as a report, a composition [what is it?], an assignment... As a nutshell, for the overall structure of a composition, let's make a schema: [He is drawing a schema on the black board as he is taking it from some printed sheets of paper].

### Structure

### Content



### III. Conclusion

Perhaps a summary of the main points in II. Own views/opinions and discussions

L.: Note that most pieces of writing are organized the same way with an introduction, a development of main ideas or arguments and a conclusion. Then, particularity will be based on the specific purpose of the writer has in mind to communicate to his or her audience [The declaration is stated as just a comment, thus some students are noting other not].

Ok? I'd also like to give you an assignment for the next session

[Noting on the black board] **Discuss what you feel, think, know about advertising.**

[Orally] Note that the adverts' aim is to provide information about products and goods you want to sell... It is also an act of mobilizing and sensitization for all the population to buy something good for your business.

L. Chef... [Summoning the class representative (with a hand sign)... talk, and some copies of typed sheets of paper are handed over to him]

12:03

INTERVIEW WITH THE LECTURER

[ As the lecturer is rushing, the interview is conducted with anxiety...]

Inn.: The title of today's session is " Study Skills", why such a title and what does it mean?

L.: Just to make reference to the content of the course which is intended to provide students with some tips they need for their texts, be it their composition, their assignment or their exams.

Inn.: Is it just related to the skills they need for their studies?

L.: Exactly

[Silence as he is not willing to give further comment]

Inn: Can you be convinced these tips (as presented) are responding to the students' needs in their academic writing?

L.: I think so. Our students have gone through different problems, you know... Different reforms occurred in the country ... [short pause] like the introduction of English ....[the only example mentioned] and they need some skills like what I have just introduced. It's just an introduction because the course continues.

Inn.: Are you planning some applications for the theories already presented?

L.: Yes of course. I've just left some exercises...

Let's go, time is running...

Inn.: Thank you so much for your time...

17/03/2011

Number of students:

Lecturer:

08:35

L.: Just to complete what we saw last time, can you help hand out this documents. We'll have time to go through [Some students are distributing the documents]

I left you an assignment last week. Let's have a look on these pieces of text [with some document in hand]

[The lecturer is reading] **Study skills No3**

L.: I want 3 volunteers to read the dialogue on the sheet of paper before proceeding to the exercises.

[Pointing at respective readers] You're be playing: Clare, Steve, Li, Ruth.... We'll rather need 4 readers.

The dialogue is read [i.e. loudly voiced by the 4 readers] → Recognizing the writer's purpose [With just some comment. Then, 3 exercises are proposed as written on the sheet of paper. The second one is skipped with no explicit reason]:

1. Discuss what do you think? What do you feel? What do you know? – about advertising.

[Everything is just read by students]

The case for [read by a student]	The case against [read by another student]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adverts provide information</li><li>- Adverts are amusing or attractive</li><li>- Adverts reduce prices</li><li>- Adverts finance radio, TV</li><li>- Adverts support newspapers, magazines...</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Advertisements are confusing and dishonest</li><li>- Adverts Persuade us to buy things we don't need</li><li>- Adverts increase prices</li><li>- Adverts control the media</li><li>- Adverts are silly and appear in too many places</li></ul>

3. Describe: see the sheet photocopied

10:05

St. [Class Representative]: It's time for the break

L.: Ok, let's have a break of 15 minutes

[Break]

10:27

L.: A guess work now! [i.e. for the exercise No4] What do think of the writer of the texts read? (the age of the author, sex, personality...)

[Students just talk randomly about the authors of each text. Example: Ogden Plagh: adult age, male, (high) class? Artist (job)..

10:36

L.: Let's look at another text [as he is handing over a pile of documents for to be distributed to students]. I want you to go to the second page of the document for the SQ3R method for an effective reading [The lecturer reads out the different steps of a good reading]:

S → Survey

Q → Question

R → Read

R2 → Recite

R3 → Review

L.: The exercise number 2 will be done as homework. Let's go now to the last page for 'reference work'. As you know, when reading or writing, there are some elements you



consider to better understand or better make understand your readers the text... It's what has been called '**Meaning markers**' .

Let's read 'Meaning markers' – definition [See photocopies]

1. Introduction markers:

Examples: in this essay I will describe/talk about/look at..... [Some other examples and explanations by the lecturer, students being asked to provide more examples].

From the phrase below, choose five introducing a whole text, and other 5 which introduce a new idea:

Examples:

- To begin with... → whole text
- Turning to the question of ...→ new idea
- Then, there is the problem of... → new idea

[Questions from the lecturer, discussions with students, then decision on the right answer...Most of students are annotating on the sheet of paper received].

2. Importance markers [The point Nr 5 & 6 are left as homework]

12:07 L.: [Writing on the b.b.] 'Assignment for next week:

Prepare 2 letters:

- Formal letter (ex. to SFAR)
- Friendly letter (ex. to a friend, commiseration, condolences, congratulations, etc.)

24/03/2011

Lecturer:

08:07

L.: Last time I had asked you to prepare two types of letters. Did you write them?

[Some students are showing their letters]

L.: Let's see Gratian's letter [see photocopy from Gratian]. Ok, no problem if a formal letter is handwritten!

St.: But it's better to type it [Some discussions erupted about the issue....]

L.: You know, it depends on different parameters. Sometimes it's specified in the advertisement when it's a job letter. Otherwise, it's better to use computer.... What about the writer's address, to what extent has it to be detailed... Look at this one [The lecturer is reading the address of the student]: no telephone number, no email...

St.: [a neighbour to Gratian]: But the department is included

L.: Ok, this may be accepted as a needed detail but when possible put the telephone... Let's look at the receiver details [He is reading]: Don't say at Kigali, please. You don't need this 'at'...

[An example is put on the black board]:

'The Executive Secretary of FARG

Kigali'

L.: Kigali may be either underlined or put in bold.

L.: Put in what?

L.: I said 'put in bold'. You know to put the characters in bold when you are writing on computer?

St.n: Yes [an explanation is given in French by the student]

L.: [Reading] For the reference '(RE)' [written on the b.b.], put 'For payment of tuition fees' [Written on the b.b.]

St.: What is the difference between tuition fees and bursary ?

L.: 'Tuition fees' are money paid for your studies whatever is the source. It can be based on a bursary or not; 'bursary' is just referring to a funds made available not only for the cost of your studies but also for other students' needs...

I think there are mistakes in this in this formal letter from our friend. You can say "I am writing to apply for...", "I am a student at the National University of Rwanda..."

All of this in one paragraph? Please separate for instance "I was in the Faculty of Arts"

Therefore .... → ok

What about the leave-taking formula? → 'hoping that my application will have favorable ..."

'Faithfully' and not 'Faiterfully'!

Note that the sender's name and the signature would better be put close to the left margin.

[...Then, the letter is handed back to the author]

L.: Ok, let's read some tips with our notes here. Please take the documents provided last week [showing a printed copy to the class]. Does everyone have a copy?

St.: [A sort of confusion in the classroom, some are still searching the copy, other are just staring at classmates... As a reminder, the class representative was given a copy to be multiplied, but all students are not served. The lecturer is now seated behind a high wooden desk and is quietly reading the document].

L.: Ok, let's read [Some guidelines are read by students one after another [See the photocopy – '**Letter writing and CVs**']

L.: - You see, do include your home address, telephone number, date... Please read [pointing at a student for reading]:

- The title of the receiver for formal letter is very important
- Don't forget to put details you judge very useful for the canted position: qualification, experience...

L.: Please, don't forget to sign.

9:24 [The lecturer takes over for reading from students who may have been viewed as very slow]

- The receiver's address: below the sender address and toward the left margin;
- Salutation or greeting

St.: Is 'salutation English?

L.: Yes, some of the formal language words used in English are borrowed from French. Like for example 'comprehension, café ...' You say for example 'to pose a question...'

The form of greeting depends on the relation between the writer and the receiver of the letter.

→ Family: Dear Father, My Dear Mother, Dear Peter...

→ Business letter: Dear Personnel Manager, Dear Director General, Dear Sir...

L.: The main part of a letter is the body... Note that a few points apply for all letters as a letter is generally divided into different paragraphs; short sentences are recommended for all letters, concision, and to point. The punctuation must be correct of course.

St.: Punctuation is sometimes hard to know.

L.: Is it? We'll have time to examine punctuation. What about 'Letter-closing, leave-taking? Leave-taking must be polite enough in formal letters.

St.a: What does mean 'leave-taking'?

L.: Who can explain?

St.b: To leave is like to go away from a place...

L.: Ok, 'leave-taking' is about to say 'goodbye' ... For example, you use 'Yours sincerely/Sincerely yours. Note that 'Sincerely is different from 'Faithfully' commonly used for hierarchy.

Sts: Sincerely is used for familiar people?

L.: Yes, 'sincerely' is generally used when there is no hierarchy, for familiar people... but when writing to your superior, it's better to use 'faithfully...'

10:08 Break

10:29 L.: Please, keep quiet [as students are still making noise, an excitement about something...] Let's read an example of an application letter. I just want you to observe different parts of the letter first. What are the main parts of the letter?

St.1: Addresses

St.2: The sender and receiver

St.3: The greetings

St.5: The body

L.: The body? Please note the main parts of a letter's body: there is in fact an introduction (...), a development, and a conclusion. As you can see, the 'introduction' is made of a short paragraph stating the desired job. The 'development' is drawing attention to qualifications, experience.... In order to convince the reader. As for the 'conclusion', it's just a short paragraph stating your expectations, availability... Don't forget your signature, please!

St.: Is it necessary to tell the employer to contact you?

L.: It is possible but not mandatory. The trend especially in our culture is to leave the decision for that at the receiver's discretion. But, in the western culture, it's like a common habit...

L.: The envelop... [...the point is skipped]. All this has been already looked at.

→ [...A rapid wrap up of the remaining points]

L.: Let's look at the punctuation of a letter. The punctuation of a letter [the lecturer is reading]

L.: No comma after the salutation...Note that this concerns a familiar letter...

St.n: There are special punctuation for a letter?

L.: ... I think no. For punctuation in a letter, it's generally the same as in any piece of writing. Please revise the notes I gave you on punctuation. Did you make photocopies?  
Chef?

Chef [i.e. Class representative] : Some have made...

L.: Why some?

Sts: It's in progress...

L.: Please read all of them for next week

11:48

L.: Let's go to the 'Writing of a CV'. Please note that résumé is an American term for CV.

St.: What does mean C.V.?

L.: Who can tell?

St.2: Curriculum Vitae

St.2: So, what does mean 'curriculum vitae'?

L.: Curriculum is a Latin word to mean 'course', it's like the path, the way you used in your background... The trend these days is request for a CV and a motivation letter. A motivation letter is a letter to state your qualifications... and your readiness for the job you are applying for. It's more and more common in NGOs job adverts and even government to request for a C.V. and a motivation letter. You have therefore to be careful when writing the motivation letter as you have to show your suitability for the job. [No example?]

St.n: There are various models of C.V. on the internet...

L.: Beware of internet things. Of course you can find C.V. templates on internet but you have to adapt them to your needs.

[Reading] For the format, the general trend is to include:

1. Personal identification; name, surname, date of birth, matrimonial status...
2. Qualifications
3. Professional experience: starting by your current job...

St.: Do you have to put your address in you CV?

L.: Of course, under personal identification. The address is very important... Please note two types of C.V. format in the handout availed. For the assignment, you will write an application letter accompanied with your C.V.

31/03/2011

Lecturer:

08:06

L.: How are you doing?

Sts: Well...

L.: I am assuming you're familiar with our guest Innocent who is doing research on academic literacy... Who can tell us what is academic literacy.

St.: Academic literacy or academic literature?

L.: There is a difference between literature and literacy.

- Literature [written on the b.b.]: a field of study interested in what has been written like novels, poetry, drama... Professor François is for example a professor of English literature because he teaches stuff such as African literature, drama...

- 'Literacy', what is it?

[Silence]

L.: You know, capacity to read and write has always been considered as literacy. You can say for example that the rate of literacy in Rwanda is? [...with students' inspiration] 58%? Ok? But, over time, the term 'literacy' has acquired a more extensive meaning and included capacity to participate in the global process of production and ... Example, 'Computer literacy', you have even mathematical literacy...

So, what in academic literacy?

Sts: [No answer]

L.: Academic literacy refers on all stuff regarding conventions and practice of academic writing and reading. This includes 'writing in clear', 'knowing how to incorporate ideas from authors or speakers in your writing', 'respect the right structure for an academic text. What else?

[→ Already looked at [Déjà vu, See Karoro]

St.1: Making good introduction and conclusion

L.: Right

St.2: Correct sentences...



L.: Correct sentences are part of a correct structure, isn't it? Academic writing needs stuff like correct referencing... this means to know to appropriately mention the used sources.

St.: I think you need ideas from others

L.: Exactly, but you have to avoid plagiarism. This means you have to distinguish what you think and what is 'someone else's opinion. I think you have got some opportunities to talk about plagiarism, haven't you?

St.n: It was not enough...

L.: Ok, we'll have time to talk about the issue of plagiarism, what is plagiarism, what is not....

In fact, development of writing skills goes hand and hand with reading skills. If you want to become a good writer, you also need to have reading skills, because you have to be aware of things like 'who is writing, what is the type of audience, what is the writing purpose...', what must be the content, the type of message, what tone must be used in your writing...

St.: What means 'tone' when you are writing?

L.: The 'tone' refers to the style in general, and how your ideas or information are being expressed; are you being harsh, friendly... depending on the relationships between the writer and the reader. Readers may be children, or you superior...or you'll need to express your happiness, your sadness... So, the 'tone' will vary depending on all those parameters. Let's talk about the different reading strategies [A handout is distributed...to just some students. The lecturer starts reading]

L.: There are some rules or some cautions for improving your reading skills:

- Is what you are reading relevant?
- Be selective with what you read

- Please practice: you have to train yourself for reading speed

All of this depends on the purpose of reading of course, which may be:

- To gain background information
- To get specific facts
- Identify the structure of an author's argument
- To understand a new concept, etc.

So, the **reading strategies** will include [...reading]:

- A preview: reading the first paragraphs one or two, the first sentences of each paragraph and just the last paragraph
- A skim: which means to be moving your eyes over the page trying to pick up the key words
- Skan: focusing on specific facts or details (data, names...)
- Cluster: this is to consider a group of several words, not one word at a time. You can also choose to put a focus on the
- Identification of main ideas

Note that to develop an effective reading; you may need a dictionary to help you skim over unknown words, make deduction of the meaning from the context of reading...

You sometimes write essays following a question or a topic given by your lecturer. Then, there are some tips to help you, you have to:

- Read the question
- Not to base your answer on your personal opinion; in other words, you need some references or some textual sources...

- Take account of the mark allocation
- Write clearly

Regarding the structure:

- Use unified paragraphs with link to the main argument
- Be coherent
- Use topic sentences
- Supporting ideas must come to give further information, examples or background to the main idea;
- Transitions must be used to bind your ideas together, to contribute to the logical progression of your argument.

10:25

St.n: It's time for the break

L.: Ok, let's have a break

[A break time of 20 minutes ...]

L.: We were done with analyzing the structure...the introduction.... You know already the main parts of a text ...the introduction, the development and the conclusion? Let's go to the process of analyzing the structure of an argument.

For the **style** to be used, when you are writing you must be aware you're just expressing your opinion and not necessarily the gospel truth. Also, don't be full of your own person. Avoid to refer to yourself as an 'agent' or 'performer' when possible. This means when you're writing, you try to be as neutral as possible with regard to you person as a writer. Ok?

St.: The meaning here 'avoid to refer to yourself as an 'agent'...

L.: It means when you're writing, you don't have to say for example 'I think what I am saying is true..., I,I,I...'. If possible use 'one' ..., use the passive voice...

### Regarding **ideas of others**

- Note that the ideas of others are necessary to support your argument
- The opinions or ideas borrowed must come to contribute to the validity, the relevancy of your point.
- Avoid categorical statement, every statement must be likely to be supported or defended...
- Make distinction between facts and opinions: this distinction is very important when you are writing academically, and facts must be always the basis for any opinion you are expressing; then
- Acknowledge possible limitations regarding your knowledge, or just the way the issue you are addressing has been dealt with throughout your text...
- Use qualifiers and quantifiers: this is just referring to some words you use to alleviate the intensity of what you are stating or to enhance accuracy in the information you are conveying....

Let's look at some examples of use of references:

First of all, note that all references must contain the data of publication and inverted commas and page number for a quotation.

[Examples of references are read out by the lecturer from the handout provided]

L.: Any question for all we have just skimmed over?

St.1: It's hard to know whether an opinion has been expressed by someone else

L.:?

St.2: All we say in our writing has already been said by someone else

L.: Ok, s difference between your general knowledge, information and a specific quotation from someone else. An advice, you are allowed to paraphrase someone else, to say his or her opinion in a different way, but not to take the entire sentence he produced... Ok?

Let's look at some rules for referencing and summarizing someone else's opinion [He starts reading...]:

Use of direct quotations:

- Don't make a lengthy direct quote;
- Quote when the idea is expressed in a unique or original way
- Please do mention the writer

**Paraphrasing**, ...meaning to express what has been said by someone in a different way:

- Just focus on a small part of the text
- Paraphrasing tends to be shorter than the original declaration;
- Paraphrasing does not copy the author's words or grammatical structures.

**Summarizing:**

- Summarizing consists in outlining the main ideas of a text
- Summarizing must be shorter than the original text. Note also that the author must be acknowledged

L.: Time is running against us [looking at his watch]

11:02

Let's go to '**Features of a summary**':

- The summary uses the same order of opinions as the original text;
- You have to only use the main ideas (no details, examples or illustrations)
- Summary does not use author's own words or grammatical structure...
- You don't have to include your own opinions.

L.: How to summarize

- Know why you are summarizing
- Skim over the main ideas of a text
- Take notes or underline the key words
- Put the original away and write a summary based on your own notes
- Re-read the original for a checking.

That's just an overview on reading skills or reading strategies. For the practical part of it, please refer to the document provided [the photocopy 'The importance of being a competent reader']

L.: I'd like to talk about some elements of style, but just before going to the style, let's look at some expressions commonly misused. Note also that the quality of style is a subjective question, and there are no rigid regulations for the style to be used. Some references are mentioned in the document provided, p. 39. [Photocopy from the C.P.].

- Aggravate/Irritate [?]
- All right (2 words): see o.k.
- Parentheses: there are some very interesting comment/remarks on punctuation
- Quotations: formal quotations to be introduced by a colon and enclosed in quotation marks.

St.: What is the difference between quotation marks and the inverted commas?

L.: Who can tell us?

St.: [Silence]

L.: Quotations marks are for words or a passage quoted. Inverted commas also informally refer to the punctuation marks used at the beginning and end of a quotation.

[The reading on 'references' goes on just skimming ...]

St.: There is also another type of inverted commas used with one sign [The students shows it on the black board]

L.: Yes, that's what I was referring to, a single comma (') and double comma ("). They are in fact used competitively. But in U.S., the double inverted comma tend to be preferred [Note that the lecture is from US].

L.: Cope: [Lecturer reading] We say "cope with" and not just "cope". For examples, see the photocopy.

Data:

Currently means at this moment

L.: Please read carefully the document as it contains very interesting material for your writing and your English language in general. For the approach to style, I have also availed an interesting document titled *Elements of Style* which we'll go through next week.

11:52

The document provides some hints for writers on how to "maintain good habits":

- To make good sentences
- Preference of passive voice to active voice

- To know your reader
- You have also to eliminate some tired words from your writing vocabulary 'you know'.

For the 'Assignment', please prepare between 2 and 3 pages on one of the following topics:

- Life on campus
- Situation in Libya
- Your plan for your future professional life.

I want them to be ready for next Monday for a possible feedback during the next session

Sts: Don't have time this weekend ... [?]

06/04/2011

Number of students: 68

Lecturer:

08:04

L.: Good morning everyone. How are you doing?

Sts: Good....

L.: Last time we were looking at some elements of reading and writing skills

St.: Elements of style...

L.: Yeah, and I also had a look on your work. I'm afraid everyone did not hand in his or her assignment. You know, I want you to stick with practical activities because, as per this test of text writing, my insight is that you need some practice to improve your



English language. When one is reading your text, the overall feeling is that **most of you need to be capable of in-depth analysis of the topic you're given**. You need to explain fully what you are saying.

Let's take one of your texts [a student text is randomly grabbed]: 'Life on campus' ... I wonder whether this one made a plan before starting to write the text... because a general shape of what is to be written and to pursue that shape. Your paragraphs must give an impression of holding together. This one is introducing his text for example by a narrative of what is going on on campus 'Students are enjoying life on campus, and they are happy to live ....However, student life is tough on the academic side...', and the following paragraph...' life on campus is a mixture of events which every student is enjoying during all the time spent at university...' And the tough side of life on campus does not come back anywhere throughout the text. I won't talk about language and grammar...

Coming back to paragraph organization, the organization of a paragraph is very important for your writing because it will determine the way you place your thoughts on paper. A good paragraph usually adheres to a basic form; it begins with a generalization, a general statement... supporting sentences will follow...

St.a: Can you make a paragraph with one sentence?

L.: I don't know how you define a sentence ...but an ideal paragraph must have certain autonomy or a unity of information or statement. When the writer can feel that his paragraph contains a particular idea, particular information..., a paragraph can be made of what you call a single sentence.

St.a: It's because one of our teachers told us that one sentence paragraph does not exist.

L.: It depends ... but I think that a paragraph is rather determined by the content and not the form. A paragraph usually revolves around an idea to be communicated; it can be

long or short, a paragraph has of course a beginning, a middle and an end, as I said it has a certain autonomy....

[Reading again] 'When it is time for holidays some students prefer to stay on the campus because they are hard workers and want to finish ...'

For the conclusion, 'At the end of my story, you can't imagine how life on campus is now very enjoyable and everybody who lived there always wants to come back on campus to enjoy various events which are always taking place there ...' The end is normally a type of restatement of the beginning, a summing up or just a tying together. You can't end by a further development of the information you are conveying... 'you can't imagine how life is now...' sounds like a new description of life on campus...

Let's take this one...I think many preferred 'Life on campus'... ok 'Plan for my future professional life'. This one is saying 'A global part of my childhood consisted of living with my grandparents in countryside, spending my school days and holidays there...'

Very interesting! It sounds nice... I don't think global is the best word to use. ...

'I witnessed the struggle my parents to ensure that I have a successful life'. [Written on the black board]

Here is an incomplete sentence.

'Thus easing the parents' burden somehow and giving the siblings a better quality of life'.

'Thus' is another word, like global, that seems unnatural. I can ease the parents' burden somehow, and giving the siblings a better quality of life.

[Reading] 'As the genocide surviving generation, there is a greater demand for clinical psychology services. After witnessing my parents struggle, hopefully with the help of SFAR scholarship, I hope to serve my country by becoming a clinical psychologist and specializing in trauma. I plan to first earn a BA in general psychology and then attend clinical psychology with the intent of specializing in trauma. I intend to work hard and

become the greatest clinical psychologist. I would like to work in a small and warm environment, where the focus can be on each patient to give the best care’.

L.: I found another problem with the first one: I plan to first earn a BA in general psychology and then attend...

[Reading] I know that education is something that is extremely important in order to have a successful life. Without a quality education, it is very difficult to reach success in life. My parents have always supported me in all my endeavours and have always been there to encourage me. I've always wanted to be independent and free my parents from some of their financial burdens. Receiving a scholarship from SFAR would give me a good start in lessening my financial problems and allow me to be concentrated on my studies. My parents have given me so much and I'd like to give them something in return’.

L.: I don't think you say quite enough about your career goals. You do explain very well why you are interested in this field, though...

‘How will scholarship funds help me, and why do I feel I should receive a scholarship?’ since they are two separate questions, is the answer below a good answer to the question and did I write enough? I think you can explain in a single sentence that you want to ease the financial burden on your parents. That way you will have room to include some arguments about why you deserve it. Maybe you deserve it because your career plans are so well-developed. If so, share your vision of the future so the reader will be able to get a sense of your career vision.

It's easy: just come up with a detailed career plan that you can express succinctly.

L.: Let's have a look on this one... [Reading] ‘I would like to find a job in ‘Rwanda Information Authority’ as a media specialist. I intend to pursue Media Programme... I have so enjoyed about participating in media research and writing a report on this research that I want to start my career as a media specialist’. What do you think of such an introduction?

St.: It's good...

L.: It's better to begin your paragraphs with a topic sentence so that it generates or leads into the rest of the paragraph... You know, I have put my comment on your text and I want you to read this carefully and revise your texts. These are scholarship essays and they have some rules... I also want you to make sure that you have answered the question properly. Please take your copies and you will have until Monday to finalize your texts which will be part of your assessment.

10:48

St.: (the Class Representative): We'll have to go to the Memorial Site at 11:00

L.: Alright, I want your texts on Monday.

[Class is over as students are rushing for the memorial service]