Original Paper

The Genre of Research Writing: The Value of Personalised Feedback and Instruction

Maya Gunawardena[1]

[1] Faculty of Education, University of Canberra, Australia

Abstract

Non-native English speaker Higher Research Degree (HDR) students or L2 writers encounter numerous difficulties in developing native-like competencies in their research writing. Current research in the systemic functional linguistics argues that students' repertoire of interactive and interactional features enhances their writing process. However, many L2 students are thrown in the deep end in their research writing process. In some universities, Academic Language Learning (ALL) advisors assist these students by reviewing their work and providing necessary feedback. The purpose of this study was to examine the difficulties experienced by such L2 writers as identified by ALL advisors who review their work in their thesis drafting process. The study analysed ten draft chapters from L2 students' theses writing reviewed by ALL advisors. The study found that several discourse and metadiscoursal features have been recognised as impeding factors in effective communication. Personalised feedback and instruction from language experts can influence students' writing and drafting process. Such findings provide insights and implications for developing discourse competencies for both L1 and L2 academic writers. The study also provides pedagogical implications for teachers of all students as academic writing is a genre that needs explicit focus in teaching programs at all levels.

Keywords

Academic writing, L2 writers, discourse features, metadiscoursal features, ESL and EAP pedagogies

1. Introduction

Non-native English speaker students (L2 writers from now on), who are exposed to homegrown English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) pedagogies and diverse varieties in Englishes encounter numerous challenges in writing to native English speaker examiners or examiners from other cultures. Many such students face numerous challenges because of their limited exposure to writing techniques and inadequate skills to write effectively to influence their

readers. The systemic functional linguistics (SFL) framework highlights the importance of writing as "collective social practices" (Hyland, 2014, p. 1). Unarguably, some native speaker writers also may experience challenges in their writing as they may not be familiar with the genre of research writing. Thus, writers should increase the readability of a text adopting appropriate language devices to enhance reader comprehension.

With the phenomenal spread of English as the *academic lingua franca*, Higher Degree Research (HDR) students in non-native speaker contexts are required to write in English in order to increase visibility and gain international recognition of their works. With limited English language proficiencies, such students face numerous difficulties in incorporating large amounts of data and information effectively in their writing. Thus, writing instruction is vitally important to assist novice researchers to write about their research more effectively in English. However, many EAP programs still tend to include traditional pedagogies with much emphasis on sentence level grammar (Bitchener et al., 2005; Aguirre-Munoz et al., 2008).

Ken Hyland in his influential papers emphasises that "communication is just exchange of information" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 3), thus, there is a need for writers to consciously think about writer-reader interaction in writing (2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, and 2005a). Aguirre-Munoz et al. (2008) also show the necessity for developing teachers' capacities by enhancing their knowledge of linguistic features of the academic language to help them to draw effective strategies in their teaching. Research on academic writing genres and rhetorical moves provides useful insights into developing teaching programs for students (Lim, 2006; Fryer, 2012). However, we know little about how teachers apply those pedagogies and how students writing reflect their knowledge of characteristics of such genres. The study reported in this paper examined the features identified by ALL teachers as impeding factors in L2 thesis writing. The main aim of this study is to examine the challenges faced by L2 students in their writing to provide potential pedagogical implications.

The paper will first provide a brief literature review highlighting the need for enhanced reader-writer interaction in academic writing and viewing written academic communication as a social enterprise. It will then illustrate the focus of the study followed by a presentation of results of discourse and metadiscoursal issues identified in students' writing drafts. Finally, the paper provides a discussion of the results accompanied by pedagogical implications and insights for ALL, ESL and EAP teachers.

1.1 Literature Review

There is a burgeoning literature on the analysis of rhetorical moves in expert writing, based on Swales (1999, 2004) models but discourse studies analysing thesis writing is scarce. Some existing studies about thesis writing examine macro issues such as writing an effective literature review (Kamler & Thomson, 2006) and other issues such as examiner feedback on thesis writing (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Paltridge (2002) has analysed published materials that support the process of writing a thesis and argues that such materials tend to consider thesis writing as fixed traditions. Paltridge advocates the materials that acknowledge the variation that occurs in authentic writing. Students work on diverse

12

range of topics and the texts fall into different disciplines and therefore, students should be granted freedom to choose their macrostructure to compile their thesis, but they often face difficulties finding resources and examples that guide them with the microstructure such as discourse and lexico-grammatical aspects. This study is an attempt to provide guidelines to support their writing process.

Writing or compiling, particularly a large document, in a second language is challenging and L2 writers experience numerous difficulties in communicating in an unfamiliar language, as conventions and practices are different from language to language. Any writer tends to have a general assumed and implicit understanding of their readers. But such an understanding is inadequate for many writers to engage in successful communication with their readers (Thompson, 2001). On the other hand, reader's visibility is not a common feature in all languages. A study by Mauranen (1993, p. 3) identified that readership is more visible in English than in Finnish. The author examined texts written by Anglo-American writers and Finnish writers and found that a "significant intercultural variation in the rhetorical preferences of writers" where American writers use different rhetorical features compared to Finnish writers. She found that "Finns do not explain their text directly to the reader with the help of reflexive expressions; they establish the common ground between writer and reader by giving plenty of background information before they to the most important matters" (p. 169). Both L1 and L2 writers may not necessarily equipped with default rules of textual features used by expert writers.

Therefore, overt focus on interactionist or dialogic or language rhetoric features is useful and has proved to have an impact on effective communication (Hyland, 2004). Particularly, in academic writing, as Hyland (2004, p. 5) argues "…every successful text must display the writer's awareness of both its readers and its consequences" because effective communication is desirable in academic texts and assessment of students' knowledge achievement and their understanding of concepts are judged or measured on the basis of reader's ability to understand the writer. Therefore, L2 writers need to be familiar with strategies that expert native speakers adopt in their writing. Working as a teacher in the ALL area, the author of this paper has seen students benefit from discussions on writing and functions of language resources used in writing to facilitate reader comprehension. They often forget the presence of the reader but try to unpack the cognitive load that they have in mind. Wilson and Sperber (2002) show the importance of Gricean principles such as relevance and clarity that impact as important aspects in both verbal and written communication.

1.1.1 The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Written Communication

Many studies in applied linguistics illustrate how a language behaves in the communication of experience and knowledge (Hyland, 2004a, 2004b). Of many linguistic theories, SFL research highlights the need for students to understand different functions of the language used in social contexts. Fryer (2012) identified generic discourse features of research articles using SFL framework. Such studies provide more insights into developing effective teaching programs for ESL and EAP students.

The spoken language is spontaneous while the written language is carefully self-monitored (Halliday,

1993) and these two registers (written and spoken) differ mainly from lexical density and grammatical intricacy. Emerging discourse studies show distinct characteristics of written registers used for different social and communicative purposes. Some studies, such as those conducted by Lim (2006, 2011, 2012, 2014) and Lim et al. (2014, 2015) and Soler-Monreal et al. (2011), have examined semantic moves in academic writing with reference to communicative functions and linguistics features. These studies show the effectiveness of both linguistic and non-linguistic features that contributes to enhancing meaning in social contexts.

The systemic functional linguists argue that language learning and learning through a language is complex because learning involves interpretation of the languages (Halliday, 1993). Language learners study language as a text where 'metafunctions' can be distinctly identified as ideational, interpersonal and textual functions (Martin, 1996). Such functions are "highly generalised semantic components which shape paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships (Martin, 1996, p. 39). Halliday's ideational metafunction shows the importance of a language to view the world and explain human experiences and ideas. Language does not directly represent the world, but the language is used to construe the world. Thus, SFL regards the semantic function of language more useful. Interpersonal function illustrates the importance of language for communication with one another which is one of the main purposes of having a language. Language is enacted in the social context with a purpose, based on writer-reader or listener-hearer relationships. Therefore, language is meaningful as a text (not just as in one utterance or sentence) because complete meaning can be understood from a text consisting of several sentences or utterances which have structural repercussions (Bache, 2010). Therefore, "systematists are interested in how entire texts are produced and understood as discourse" and thus "text is regarded as a semantic or functional unit" (Bache, 2010, p. 2565).

While structural linguists attempt to concentrate on sentence level grammar, SFL linguists show the importance of evaluating language as in a discourse. Language is enacted for a communicative purpose. In written communication, the writer needs to provide adequate information in a certain order to help the reader comprehend the message that the writer intends to convey. The reader may not understand the message just by examining a singular clause or sentence where he/she is provided little about the theme. The concept of 'theme rheme' (Thompson, 2001: Ping, 2004) shows the importance of presenting information in a rational order to help the reader understand the message. This illustrates the significance of the metadiscoursal features in written communication, apart from the discourse features that impact on effective communication. The distinction between discourse and metadiscoursal features is illustrated later in this paper.

The SFL approach to teaching a language highlights the importance of learners' ability to interpret the language as semiotic symbols to communicate meaning in a particular context. According to SFL, in order to make the written communication effective, appealing and persuasive, writers must choose linguistics resources carefully to inform, negotiate, and argue with the reader (Thompson, 2001). As such, the SFL model has influenced the genre approach to academic writing (Swales, 1999) and also

14

other interesting principles in 'interactive' and 'interactional' strategies in academic writing (Thompson & Thelela, 1995).

In line with the SFL framework, Canale and Swain (1980) reinforce the need for students developing not only grammatical and communicative competencies, but also several other competencies such as discourse competence (cohesion and coherence in texts), sociolinguistic competence (genre appropriateness) and strategic competence (audience/reader awareness) in mastering a second language. This argument illustrates the complexities of learning to write in diverse social contexts. Thus, sociolinguistic awareness is vital in communication. Society and culture are important aspects of communication. The social constructionist framework further highlights the need for understanding language and communication as a holistic endeavour. Moreover, writer-reader interaction is no longer solely associated with the metafiction of tenor in the SFL approach. In fact, the concepts of genre found in the three traditions (i.e., ESP, SFL and New Rhetoric traditions) have been so well integrated that they can hardly be separated today. Such traditions have emerged, embracing the principles embedded in the social constructionist framework,

1.1.2 Social Constructionist Framework in Writing

The constructionist framework challenges the theory of knowledge as "data-driven and/ the cognitively necessitated domains" (Gergen, 1985, p. 272) as it evolves as a form of social participation (Hyland, 2005a). Based on these perspectives, language plays a vital role, Therefore, when producing texts in academic contexts, inter-relationships are vital. SLF framework reinforces ideational, interpersonal and textual functions take place simultaneously and therefore, writers "produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations" (Hyland, 2001, p. 5).

In academic writing, we anticipate "the development of new theoretical departures, metatheory for a new conception of science, and general refurbishment intellectual resources" (Gergen, 1985, p. 273). Reinforced by SFL perspectives and social constructionist framework, recent studies (e.g. Hyland, 1999-2007) have focused on the interactive and interactional resources that enhance interpersonal function in academic writing. Such literature emphasises the need for writer's awareness of his or her reader and the language resources used to facilitate such interactional and interactive functions and their consequences.

1.1.3 Defining Discourse and Metadiscoursal Textual Features

It is the writers' effective use of discourse and metadiscoursal features that makes a text more or less readable and engaging for the reader. These features are somewhat complex and distinguishing them is difficult as there are various levels of definitions. For example, Vande Kopple (1985, p. 83) defines discourse level as the surface level where the writer provides propositional content using language devices and to him, metadiscourse is a deeper level "discourse about discourse or communication about communication". This indicates that discourse features are the writers' choice of syntactic features and lexico-grammatical features. Expanding Halliday's metafunctions, Vande Kopple (1985) identifies

metadiscourse as interpersonal features and he says, "In this category I would tentatively include the illocution markers, validity markers, narrators, attitude markers, and bits of commentary" (p. 87). Also, as he further explains "they form a cohesive and coherent text and how individual elements of those propositions make sense in conjunction with the other elements of the text in a particular situation" (p. 87). In contrast, in their quantitative linguistic analysis of the corpus of *TOEFL* student essays, Biber and Gray (2013, p. 18) included vocabulary distribution (lexical frequency), collocational differences (patterns of the use of high frequency verbs), phraseological patterns or lexical bundles such as linking words where a phrase consists of four words or more and grammatical and lexico-grammatical patterns. They call these features linguistic features or discourse features in written essays. They do not have a category for metadiscoursal aspects but seem to include them in the 'discourse' category. The studies by Hyland (2005a) consider Vande Kopple's 'tentative features' as metadiscoursal features. Therefore, Hyland's (2000b) metadiscoursal analysis he includes textual, interpretive and interpersonal functions of writing and also other stylistics devices and rhetorical choices. However, Thompson (2001) found another level of analysis which is the theme-rheme that can be considered as a metadiscoursal feature. Such features also contribute to making communication more effective in social contexts, other than the linguistic features, as identified by scholars such as Hyland.

Despite the confusing definitions provided in research for specific research purposes, researcher agrees that both metadiscoursal and discourse features provide a co-operative effect on the reader and therefore, isolating them is difficult as they are a "complete package" (Hyland 2005a, p. 22). They also contribute to demonstrate writers' passion, scholarship, authority, power and identity as writers (Gee, 2014) and these features may vary based on individual choice. A "language serves both propositional and non-propositional functions" (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015. p. 53). To date, not many linguistic studies analyse non-linguistic issues that are crucial in writing.

For clarity's sake, this paper examines propositional discourse features such as sentence structure choice (syntactic), and lexical choices. It also includes non-propositional features such as chapter structure, the order in which ideas are presented, theme-rheme, paragraph breaks and Grecian features which can be regarded as **discourse features.** Hyland's (2004c) metadiscoursal features such as interactional and interactive features were considered. These were cooperative elements that contribute to effective communication in any kind of writing genres.

The current study examined ten non-native speaker HDR students' thesis writing draft chapters reviewed by literacy experts to identify discourse and metadiscoursal resources that experts have seen as problematic in their thesis writing. This study aims to answer the following research questions.

1. Based on ALL teachers' feedback, what in HDR student writing may impede reader comprehension?

2. What suggestions do ALL teachers offer to improve students' written communication?

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The study selected ten mixed groups of non-native speakers HDR students' thesis writing chapters reviewed by Academic Language Learning teachers. They were mainly from the literature review and the discussion chapters. The participants were invariably non-native speakers of English from countries in the Southeast Asia. Seven students were from the schools of business, and they were close to their thesis submission and the other three students were in their second year of PhD study and from the school of engineering. They were generally competent users of English and had obtained overall 6.5 or above IELTS scores in their previous testing. University ethics committee granted permission to conduct this study and accordingly, students' consent was obtained to use their reviewed writing drafts for analysis. The ALL teachers who provided comments on students' writing were experienced literacy teachers. During the consultation sessions, teachers gave both written and verbal feedback. This study has analysed the areas noted and the written feedback provided.

2.2 Procedures of Data Analysis

The selected reviewed samples were subject to discourse analysis to identify the discourse and metadiscoursal features that would impact reader comprehension. The analysis carefully examined teachers' comments and the associated students' samples. Selected sections of student drafts with ALL staff comments were included in a table. Then, the samples were analysed to examine the issues impacting on reader comprehension. The recurrent issues were noted based on their frequencies across student drafts. The students' simple grammar mistakes such as tenses, incorrect prepositions and typos were not taken into account to only examine the discourse and metadiscoursal features that impact on writer-reader interaction and writing clarity.

3. Result

3.1 Discourse and Metadiscoursal Features in L2 Students' Thesis Writing:

It was difficult to distinguish between metadiscoursal and discourse features of writing as they are cooperative elements that contribute to the overall communication. However, in the study, they were categorised based on ALL teachers' comments about their writing and their explicit instructions; discourse features were elements such as 'rephrase the sentence', 'word order', 'word choice', 'incorrect pronouns', 'what does 'this' refer to' and so on and for metadiscoursal items were non-linguistic features such as 'voice not clear here', 'logical order to help the reader', 'confusing order here', 'change the order' , 'delete', 'not relevant', 'too much detail', 'clear transition here' and so on.

Discourse features in academic writing

- o Sentence structure choices impacting the clarity of meaning (grammatical, but awkward and confusing or alternation provided more emphasis on the intended message)
- o Sentence flow in a paragraph or theme-rheme (this is not necessarily the explicit use of transitions, but making sentences flow either referring to the same topic or expanding and

17

anaphoric and cataphoric references)

- o Flow between paragraphs (explicit makers as 'the above section', 'another problem')
- o Vocabulary choice and complexity (grammatical but, genre specific, and level of formality and sophistication)
- o Writer's clear voice (synthesis of information borrowed from other writers)

Gricean features:

- o Relevance principle (too much detail, assuming reader has no idea)
- o Clarity principle (assuming too much, not providing adequate information to allow reader to understand the specific topic or context)

All ten students in the chosen sample had issues with using the appropriate sentence structures and ALL teachers had asked them to 'rephrase' or 'change the order of this sentence'. These directions seemed to have been given to students to help them to express messages clearly and to get them to use an appropriate style for their thesis. The analysis also shows that the majority of them were little sensitivity to the textual cohesion which impacts on overall coherence of their writing. Most of them seemed to have struggled with effectively communicating a large amount of data; thus sometimes ordering seems to have confused the reader. This could have occurred due to their cultural communication styles, but this study did not provide much information about how people from other cultures communicate.

Metadiscoursal features in academic writing

Interactional metadiscoursal features: "Involve the reader in the argument" (Hyland, 2004c, p. 139)

- o Hedges (might, perhaps, possible, about)
- o Boosters (in fact, definitely, it is clear that)
- o Attitude markers (unfortunately, surprisingly)
- o Engagement markers (consider, note that, you can see that)

Interactive metadiscoursal features: "Help to guide reader through the text" (Hyland, 2004c, p. 139)

- o Transitions (in addition, but, thus, and)
- o Frame (finally, to conclude, my purpose is to)
- o Endophoric markers or directives (note above, see Figure, see the graph below)
- o Evidentials (according to , based on X, Z states)
- o Code glosses (namely, e.g., such as, in other words)

While a few students seemed to have overused linking words or transitions, other students used only used a few of them in their drafts. Some students had more issues than others in using the interactional and interactive metadiscoursal features such as hedges, engagement markers, and directives. The main problem was not necessarily students' lack of awareness of the above features, but using them where necessary to satisfy their functions. ALL teachers had either included some of them or deleted some. Therefore, the study sees the appropriate use of such markers as the main issue. Teachers had questioned about the clarity of their writing. These features seemed to have impacted effective

18

communication with the reader.

3.1.1 Examples of Students' Drafts Demonstrating Discourse and Metadiscoursal Issues

Excerpt 1 from S1: Logical order (discourse)

This chapter empirically examines the critical need for land tenure reform in post-conflict xxxxxx. The security of tenure for land used to grow tree crops is critical to investment. There are three main reasons. Firstly, cocoa production outputs from the current customary land tenure are suboptimal. Secondly, although household income generated from the cocoa production addresses the immediate need for demobilisation of ex-combatants and a broad-based agriculture led recovery, further output growth remain non-existent due to lack of access to credit and tenure insecurity. Finally institutional building in the form of formalising informal customary land arrangements distorted during the conflict. Chapter 6 documents the transition taking place in xxxxxx for land held under customary title so as to provide the requisite security for expansion of cocoa production.

This chapter is organised as follows. It provides a brief overview of the importance of institutional building post conflict. Then a brief overview of the property rights regime in xxxxxx. This will be followed by the constraints on the expansion of cocoa production identified during the survey.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results obtained from the survey, particularly on the land tenure security and its contribution for investment on tree crops such as cocoa. It will also examine how tenure security had impacted on demobilising ex-combatants promoting agricultural investment that had led to economic recovery in household basis. The chapter will first provide a brief overview of the importance of institutional building in post conflict settings and flowed by a description on property rights regime in xxxxxx. It will then present the results of the current survey on A, B, C and D. Finally, it closes with a discussion on constraints on the expansion of cocoa production and implications followed by a chapter summary.

Comments from the teacher: think about the themes in each section, logical flow within a paragraph, paragraph structure, confusing sentences, repetition, incomplete sentences (This section is not reader friendly)

Excerpt 2 from S7: Sentence structure choice (discourse)

In this chapter, the configuration of the optical system used for flow diagnosis in T-ADFA shock tunnel will be described in detail, followed by a discussion on the factors affecting the accuracy of these results. The experimental results will be presented along with a comparison of these results with the simulation. ...

Comments from the teacher: generally, well written but think about writing the first sentence in active voice for better emphasis and reader focus.

Excerpt 3 from S9: pronouns and their antecedents (discourse)

Line 1 at 7179.75 cm is too weak to be detected at the low freestream temperatures of condition E, which is typically around 180 K at the axial position of the sensor. Hence, this line is not a good candidate to be targeted at condition E. Line 2 and line 4 are the strongest of the remaining three lines.

19

However, it can be seen that that have a similar trend in their line strength variation with the temperature, and their line strength ratio does not change considerably over the temperature range considered, as inferred from figure 6.3 (blue line). This is because their lower state energies are not very different from each other. ...

Comments from the teacher: use correct pronouns to help the reader to get the message clearly and to avoid collision

Excerpt 4 from S7: genre specific vocabulary (discourse)

The AFM imaging investigation is no longer confined with the material surfaces but also extended to biological specimens [23]. Biologists were dreaming to manipulate the investigations of biomolecules and by the invention of the AFM, their dream came true. Recently, the AFM is using rather than x-ray diffraction or electron microscope (EM) for imaging individual molecules and their manipulations as well, because of its high signal-to-noise ratio [23]-[26]. ....

Comments from the teacher: think about your sentence structure that makes the meaning clear; avoid using figurative language (genre choice)

Excerpt 5: randomly chosen examples for vocabulary and comments from ALL staff (discourse)

These results claim ...(S2)

comments: Inappropriate collocation

Biologists were dreaming to manipulate the investigations of biomolecules and by the invention of the AFM, their dream came true. (S7)

comments: Genre inappropriate lexical choice

No study has uncovered the relationship between peace and access to finance and the impact on entrepreneurial decision. (S2)

comments: Lexical: Incomplete lexical meaning; impact of what?

Likewise, Kenyan, Ghanaian and Nigerian entrepreneurs' motive was to ...(S1)

4. Discussion

Almost all discourse and metadiscoursal issues identified in this study interfere with creating an effective and meaningful writer-reader interaction in thesis writing. However, results showed that the number of discourse issues were significant compared to the metadiscoursal problems identified which was the focus of many previous studies. In line with Mauranen's (1993) observation, the written corpus analysed in this study demonstrated that L2 English writers show little sensitivity towards the textual features, but they were more focused on the ideational function of the language (Halliday, 1993; 1994): they attempt to embed too many facts and information in one sentence or in a single paragraph without much awareness of their readers. Gricean principles such as relevance and clarity are also major contributors of effective communication (Wilson and Sperber, 2002). Some sentence structure choices were also noted as complicated and incomprehensible, though they were grammatical in their structure. In such situations, ALL teachers had advised students to rethink and rephrase their sentences to make

20

the intended message clear.

The study saw information flow was a major problem that impacted effective communication in L2 writing. The major reason was the adequate use of effective discourse strategies to keep the flow. For example, the correct use of pronouns and their antecedents also helps to keep the message clear without any obstruction to the reading flow. Recurrent problem demonstrated in the sample is not having the theme in the rheme (Ping, 2004). They seem to have little knowledge about "the text about texts" (Mauranen, 1993, p. 3). Informal discussions with these students about this problem showed that they adopt different ways in writing in their mother tongue and they are not familiar with English style of putting information together concisely. Thus, the logical flow is hampered, at times, for not having a clear organisation of ideas in a paragraph. For example, in student draft 1(see above example 1), the writer does not make the message clear. S1 assumes much from the reader. S1 seems to have two purposes in mind: first to tell his/her reader about the purpose of this chapter and second, to emphasise the importance of the land tenure security in his research context. In the example, S1 tries to achieve these purposes without helping the reader focus on one idea at a time (perhaps English writing style). Thus, theme-rheme is an important concept that helps students understand the need for communicating one idea at a time to avoid reader collision and confusion (Hyland, 2005b).

Another minor, but an important aspect that the study found was students' use of word collocations. Occasionally, reading was interrupted by improper use of word collocations (e.g. 'results claim', 'discuss about', 'earning income', 'significant room remains', 'mentioned that', etc.), genre inappropriate word choices (e.g. 'dreaming', 'dream came true', 'guys', 'a lot of', 'like' (meaning 'such as'), 'talk about', 'big mediation'), and other related incorrect vocabulary choices for academic writing such as idiomatic expressions (e.g. 'once in a blue moon researchers work on', 'Shakespeare in the field', 'economy is doing well', 'turned the city into a magnet' etc.). These errors seem to occur as ESL learners do not necessarily study EAP to understand that some ESL rules or practices are not applicable to academic writing and also as a result of the interference of their mother tongue in writing. Results show students' sound awareness of the interactive and interactional metadiscoursal features. However, some of the written samples showed they had overused linking words such as 'however', 'therefore', 'hence', 'since' and so forth. This shows that they need to have an awareness of the contextual use of such words to keep cohesion.

As seen in this analysis, most of the ALL-teachers' written feedback aimed at encouraging students to think about their reader and to make their writing more reader friendly. The study does not include their verbal feedback. While these suggestions can be subjective, it seemed to have helped the students revise their writing. This study does not include revised drafts, but the comments may have helped the writers to develop their awareness and sensitivity to their reader which is crucially important in thesis writing. In future research, it is important to see how much of this feedback helped the students to improve their writing. However, our anecdotal evidence suggests that ALL consultations are useful for many L2 writers. The study also sees ALL teachers' majority of feedback relate to cohesion and

21

coherence of students writing. Cohesion and coherence are the two important properties that impact on writing quality and "cohesion and coherence interact to a great degree, but the cohesive text may be only minimally coherent" (Witte & Faigley, 1981, p. 200).

The problems noted above may have occurred in relation to pedagogies used in students' native contexts. As systemic functional linguists argue, if teachers adopt socio-linguistic approaches in writing instruction, students are likely to understand the purpose of writing to communicate with their readers. Therefore, English language teaching approaches need to move away from traditional approaches to accommodate discourse related issues in writing (Hyland, 2004a). Therefore, as Canale and Swain (1980) argue, students need to be equipped with discourse level competencies, apart from the grammatical competency that most language teaching programs attempt to enhance student learning. Such discourse competencies would allow writers to engage their readers by using both explicit and implicit strategies to continue writing about the same topic and changing topics relevantly and effectively not distracting their readers. Changing and connecting topics are two different functions and thus, students require language strategies to meet these functions.

This study has seen the need for students' knowledge of communication styles and strategies used by native English expert writers to facilitate reader comprehension (Hyland, 2004a, 2004b). As Aguirre-Munoz et al. (2008) argue teachers themselves also need to be aware of the discourse features used in writing to make writing more reader friendly. Their study has seen positive impacts of raising ESL, ESP, and EAP teachers' awareness about systemic linguistics features and genre differences. The knowledge in this would enable teachers to help students to adopt effective devices in written communication by giving useful feedback on their writing. The authors argue that ESL and ESP teachers often pay attention to the grammaticality of writing, but not necessarily to the linguistic and discourse level features that are highlighted in this study. Therefore, it is vital to help students identify discourse and metadiscoursal features that contribute to making the meaning more effective, particularly in writing. Further, Wray (2002) points out those ESL students seem to learn vocabulary as individual words, which have had a negative impact on their language development as they do not seem to conceptualise the relationship between words as semantic units. Thus, she shows the importance of helping EAP students learning words as in phrases as whole sets (lexico-grammar) to use them correctly in the right context in their own writing. Teachers could use language corpuses to teach words in their concordances as they appear in natural language (Ellis et al., 2008).

Thesis writing is an arduous process and keeping attention to all the discourse features shown here, when writing each paragraph or section, can be a difficult and a challenging task for novice writers. However, explicit attention to all such features, at least at a certain point in time of their writing process, can help them to make their writing more reader friendly and reader-oriented (Hyland, 2004a). Conscious attention to the linguistic resources that enhance interactivity is essential for any novice writer. Therefore, writing programs must address these competencies apart from grammatical competencies that many programs are loaded with (Aguirre-Munoz et al., 2008).

Despite the useful insights from the study, it has several limitations. The written feedback given by the ALL teachers is short and can be subjective. Students may have received verbal feedback which was not included in the study. The students were also not consulted to see whether the feedback has been useful. A more comprehensive study that would include students and teachers views would be useful to further confirm the observations made in this study and the practicality of the pedagogical recommendations presented.

5. Conclusion

ALL teachers' feedback for students participated in this study was mostly in relation to textual features to make writing interactive and reader friendly. L2 students' opportunities to extend the textual features may be limited in their ESL learning programs. Researcher of this study has anecdotally seen that such instructions on L2 writing has been beneficial to many learners who come from various L2 contexts. The study has provided useful insights and implications for enhancing reader comprehension and interaction in L2 thesis writing using appropriate discourse and metadiscourse features. Other than the simple occasional grammar mistakes, the most challenging problem that advanced L2 writers encounter is adopting the interactional features.

Hence, we argue that EAP and ESL programs should include the discussion of the discourse and metadiscoursal features mentioned in this paper. While some students may implicitly acquire such features through their exposure to academic reading and writing, some may not develop such autonomous skills to write effectively. Rhetorical strategies mentioned above strengthen both cohesion and coherence in academic writing and thus teachers should raise students' awareness of linguistic resources that facilitate reader engagement and interaction. We also argue that both L1 and L2 students should develop a sound repertoire of discourse and sociolinguistic competencies to enable them to be more competent in academic writing. Students can explore writing mechanisms used by expert writers and adopt their devices effectively to make their writing reader friendly. Students also must be aware of the differences between individual styles and deliberate choices of language resources to make writing more effective. L2 students should be provided with numerous opportunities to identify discourse patterns, and the role of language in discourse contexts to develop agency and scholarship in writing. This level of personalised feedback can have a greater impact on their writing.

Acknowledgments

References

Aguirre-Munoz, Z., Park, J., Amabisca, A., & Boscardin, C. (2008). Developing teacher capacity for serving ELL's writing instructional needs: A case study of systemic functional linguistics. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *31*(1), 295-322. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235880802640755

Bache, C. (2010). Hjelmslev's Glossematics: A source of inspiration to Systemic Functional Linguistics? *Journal of Pragmatics*, *42*(9), 2562-2578. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.03.005

Biber, D., & Gray, B. (2013). *Discourse characteristics of written and speaking task type on the TOEFL iBT Test: Lexico-grammatical analysis*. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2333-8504.2013.tb02311.x

Bitchener, J., Young, S., & Cameron, D. (2005). The effect of different types of corrective feedback on ESL student writing. *Journal of second language writing*, *14*(3), 191-205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2005.08.001

Canagarajah, A. S. (2002). *Critical academic writing and multilingual students*. University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.8903

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theatrical bases of communicative approaches second language teaching and testing, *Applied Linguistics*, *1*(1), 1-47. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.1.1

Ellis, N. C., Simpson-vlach, R., & Maynard, C. (2008). Formulaic language in native and second language speakers: Psycholinguistics, corpus linguistics, and TESOL. *Tesol Quarterly*, *42*(3), 375-396. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2008.tb00137.x

Fryer, D. L. (2012). Analysis of the generic discourse features of the English-language medical research article: A systemic-functional approach. *Functions of language*, *19*(1), 5-37. https://doi.org/10.1075/fol.19.1.01fry

Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (4th ed.). New York, USA: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315819679

Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American psychologist*, *40*(3), 266. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.40.3.266

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). Spoken and Written Modes of Meaning. Media texts, authors and readers. In D. Graddoll, & O. Boyd- Barret (Eds.), Media *Texts Authors and Readers* (pp. 51-74). Great Britain: The Open University, WBC, Ltd.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, *5*, 93-116. https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898(93)90026-7

Halliday, M. A., & Hasan, R. (1985). *Language, context, and text: aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*. *Oxford*: Oxford University Press. http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-13-04.pdf

Hyland, K. (1999). Disciplinary discourses: Writer stance in research articles. *Writing: Texts, processes and practices*, 99-121. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315840390-6

Hyland, K. (2002). Authority and invisibility: Authorial identity in academic writing. *Journal of pragmatics*, *34*(8), 1091-1112. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00035-8

Hyland, K. (2004a). Patterns of engagement: Dialogic features and L2 undergraduate writing. In L. J. Ravelli, & R. A. Ellis (Eds.), *Analysing academic writing: contextualized frameworks* (pp. 5-23). London: Continuum.

24

Hyland, K. (2004b). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. University of Michigan Press.

Hyland, K. (2004c). Disciplinary interactions: Metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *13*, 133-151. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.02.001

Hyland, K. (2005a). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse studies*, *7*(2), 173-192. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605050365

Hyland, K. (2005b). *Metadiscourse*. London, UK: Continuum.

Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of second language writing*, *16*(3), 148-164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.07.005

Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2007). Is there an "academic vocabulary"? *TESOL Quarterly*, *41*(2), 235-253. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb00058.x

Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2006). Doctoral writing: Pedagogies for work with literatures. *In AERA annual meeting*, April 2006, San Fransisco (pp. 5-7) https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Barbara_Kamler/publication/253923167_Doctoral_writing_pedagogies_for_work_with_literatures/links/5426a0bb0cf2e4ce94089b17.pdf

Kumar, V., & Stracke, E. (2007). An analysis of written feedback on a PhD thesis. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *12*(4), 461-470. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510701415433

Lee, J. J., & Subtirelu, N. C. (2015). Metadiscourse in the classroom: A comparative analysis of EAP lessons and university lectures. *English for Specific Purposes*, *37*, 52-62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2014.06.005

Lim, J. M. H. (2006). Method sections of management research articles: A pedagogically motivated qualitative study. *English for Specific Purposes*, *25*(3), 282-309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.07.001

Lim, J. M. H. (2011). Delineating sampling procedures: Pedagogical significance of analysing sampling descriptions and their justifications in TESL experimental research reports. *Iberica*, *21*, 71-92.

Lim, J. M. H. (2012). How do writers establish research niches? A genre-based investigation into management researchers' rhetorical steps and linguistic mechanisms. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *11*(3), 229-245. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2012.05.002

Lim, J. M. H. (2014). Formulating research questions in experimental doctoral dissertations on Applied Linguistics. *English for Specific Purpose*s, *35*, 66-88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2014.02.003

Lim, J. M. H., Loi, C. K, & Hashim, A. (2014). Postulating hypotheses in experimental doctoral dissertations on Applied Linguistics: A qualitative investigation into rhetorical shifts and linguistic mechanisms. *Iberica*, *27*, 121-142.

Lim, J. M. H., Loi, C. K., Hashim, A, & Liu, M. S. M. (2015). Purpose statements in experimental doctoral dissertations submitted to U.S. universities: An inquiry into doctoral students' communicative resources in language education. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *20*,

25

69-89. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2015.06.002

Loi, C. K., & Lim, J. M. H. (2013). Metadiscourse in English and Chinese research article introductions. *Discourse Studies*, *15*(2), 129-146. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445612471476

Martin, J. R. (1996). Types of structure: deconstructing notions of constituency in clause and text. In E. Hovy, & D. Scott (Eds.), *Computational and conversational discourse* (pp. 39-66). Springer Berlin Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-03293-0_2

Mauranen, A. (1993). *Cultural differences in academic rhetoric*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Paltridge, B. (2002). Thesis and dissertation writing: an examination of published advice and actual practice. *English for Specific Purposes*, *21*(2), 125-143. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(00)00025-9

Ping, A. L. (2004). *Theme and rheme: an alternative account*. Burn, Switzerland: European Academic Publishers.

Soler-Monreal, C., Carbonell-Olivares M., & Gil-Salom, L. (2011). A contrastive study of the rhetorical organisation of English and Spanish PhD thesis introductions. *English for Specific Purpose*s, *30*, 4-17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2010.04.005

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, G. (2001). Interaction in academic writing: Learning to argue with the reader. *Applied Linguistics*, *22*(1), 58-78. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/22.1.58

Vande Kopple, W. J. (1985). Some explanatory discourse on metadiscourse. *College Composition and Communication*, *36*, 82-93. https://doi.org/10.2307/357609

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2002). *Relevance theory. Handbook of pragmatics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Witte, S. P., & Faigley, L. (1981). Coherence, cohesion, and writing quality *College composition and communication*, *32*(2), 189-204. https://doi.org/10.2307/356693

Wray, A. (2002). *Formulaic language and the lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511519772