# Interests, opportunities and challenges in research writing practices in English: an exploratory case study

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# Multilingual writing practices

- Much work in academic writing analyzes challenges posed by English as second/additional language for research purposes

- Academic publishing – consequences of research/linguistic policies
  - cf. Bennett (2014), Englander (2014), Flowerdew (2009), Pérez-Llantada et al. (2011), Curry and Lillis (2013)

- This project examines research-oriented practices and academic (bi)literacy development
  - Genre learning (following Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Swales, 1998, 2004)
  - Academic literacies (Lillis & Curry, 2010; Lillis & Scott, 2007)

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# Plurilingual academic writing

- Sociocultural context of research knowledge production
- Widespread perception of unfair linguistic inequity
  - 'publish <u>in English</u> or perish' (Englander, 2014; Englander & Uzuner-Smith, 2013)
  - 'core vs. <u>semi-periphery</u> writers' (Bennett, 2014; Liu, 2004; Uzuner, 2008)
  - '<u>stigmatized</u> vs. non-stigmatized scholars' (Flowerdew, 2009)
- Problematic categorizations:
  - 'good vs. awkward' scholarly writing features (Englander, 2010)
  - 'canonical vs. non-canonical' grammar usage (Rozycki & Johnson, 2013)
- Quality of English may cause or lead manuscripts written by researchers from non-Anglophone linguacultural backgrounds to eventual rejection from journal publication (cf. Hanauer & Englander, 2011)

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# L2 English writing "additional effort"

- Constructs/theorization validated
  - 'unfair linguistic play' (Van Parijs, 2008)
  - 'asymmetrical market of knowledge production' (Corcoran, Englander & Muresan, forthcoming)
- linguistic challenges associated with semi-peripheral writers' use of ERPP are attributed to the existing differences across academic writing cultures at both linguistic and rhetorical levels
  - e.g. Duszak (1994), Duszak and Lewkowic, 2008), Kourilova (1998), Loi & Evans (2010), St. John (1987)
- Academic Englishes: a standardised knowledge?
  - Academic English**es** (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada & Swales, 2010)

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# A 'biliteracy agenda' (Gentil, 2011)

- gained momentum at a time when current HE internationalization processes and institutional/research policies favour the use of English for global knowledge production and dissemination

- many non-native speakers of English can acquire high quality academic writing skills, learn how to write publishable texts and succeed in their publication endeavours (Belcher, 2007; Swales, 2004)

- we would like to illustrate the value of SLA constructs for describing and better understanding L2 English academic writing processes and literacy development
  - e.g. biliteracy, L1/L2 writing development, writing expertise, second language proficiency, communicative competence

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# The case study

- A database of international scholars' experiences
  - Following Lillis and Curry (2010)
- Two university contexts, ASE (Romania) and UZ (Spain)
- Zoom into an individual subject's case study to describe
  - how academic literacy in English as a second language is acquired & learned
  - how aspects such as genre knowledge, rhetorical awareness and disciplinary/writing expertise scaffold the process of composing L2 academic texts

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# Accounts of academic literacy experiences

- shed additional light into the nature of L2 writing and the interrelating factors influencing it

- approach 'text as process'

- literacy encompasses the sociocultural, cognitive and linguistic dimensions of writing (Lillis & Scott, 2007)

- prompt insiders' reflection and perceptions of the context of academic text production, the relationship between research (disciplinary content and research interests) and writing for publication

- we initially hypothesised that academic language competence, genre knowledge and disciplinary writing expertise underlie successful academic bi-/multiliterate writing practices

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# The Romanian academic context

- Building on the experience of training professional researchers (Bardi & Muresan, 2014; Muresan & Nicolae, 2015)

- researchers participating in the English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics (EDU-RES) Master programme

- an interdisciplinary master designed to support the development of integrated competencies in communication in EAP and for a variety of international professional settings, integrating language and culture, as well as in research practice

- awarded the European Language Label 2011 by the EU Commission DG Education and Culture

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Linked in.

Initiated in 2006, **_Research and Teacher Education for Business & Economics (EDU-RES)_** is the first of its kind in the Romanian academic context and has been awarded the European Language Label 2011 for innovation and creativity in education.

This **interdisciplinary master programme in English** promotes professional development, with a focus on

# Case study methodology

- we wanted the study to be "explanatory, exploratory and descriptive"
  – Following Creswell (2013, p. 97)

- methods proposed by Johns (1997) and Paltridge, Starfield and Tardy (2016) to enquire into aspects of individuals' academic literacy learning and development
  – studies of cohorts of non-Anglophone academics across world regions (Buckingham, 2014; Chiu, 2001; Corcoran, 2015; Englander, 2014; Flowerdew, 2009; Lillis & Curry, 2010; Muresan & Pérez-Llantada, 2014; Pérez-Llantada, 2012; Phothongsunan, 2016)

- Instruments: a self-reflective questionnaire and a semi-structured interview

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# Self-reflective questionnaire

- appropriate for initial interaction with the individual subject and pedagogically effective and designed with the idea of prompting self-reflection on past/current writing practices and written commentary on individual literacy skills learning and academic writing development

- the insider's view of key contextual aspects of research communication, the impact of language and research policies, the geopolitics of ERPP and the role of English in today's academia

- past and present literacy experiences, perceptions of text as both process and product

- self-perceived competence in linguistic and rhetorical aspects for text-composing and use of composing strategies (how to go about it, linguistic resources at hand, reliance on prior genre knowledge, approach to self-assessment, techniques for text improvement, etc.), both at text-linguistic and rhetorical levels

# Semi-structured interviews

- Close to the think-aloud protocols and the narrative account format (Lillis and Curry (2010) with European scholars and Phothongsunan (2016) with Thai academics) and adapted them to the academic setting investigated
- Questions
  - the scholar's formative literacy experience
  - clarification and elaboration on aspects that the researcher had mentioned in the initial questionnaire
  - approaches to writing: how the researcher went about doing research and about publishing research results
  - the relationship between research (disciplinary content and research interests) and writing; the intrinsic relationship between content, research objectives, and writing, as dissemination of research results.
  - preparation stages and approach adopted prior to starting the writing process, the researcher's commitment to values and high standards

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# Additional data source

- Data analysed thematically and contrasted with an additional data source
  - following Creswell (2013)
- a sample of the researcher's published texts (i.e. three articles from her own written production that she liked best), approximately 10,000 words of textual material
- written discourse produced by the individual (and her co-authors)
  - overall communicative competence
  - use of discourse/linguistic resources and strategies to make texts appealing to the target readership (rhetorical moves, authorial identity, hedging, metadiscourse, intertextuality/citation, text structures)

# The global reach of EAW

- English explicitly referred to as the main international language of science
- the researcher's responses included numerous references to aspects of English-medium text production and to journal article writing in English
- Interests associated with writing for publication in English
  - sharing science with peer colleagues
  - finding solutions to large-scale societal problems
  - carrying out research to cater to the particular needs and demands of private and public companies
  - reaching the international scientific community
- although no references to writing in the national language were made, she considered locality in scientific dissemination important, as it responded to local/national-based needs.

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# The global reach of EAW

- For the researcher, <u>publishing internationally</u> was not ideologically-laden. In her narrative there were no explicit references to the importance of rewards or regulations regarding ERPP and feelings of 'English-dominance', 'linguistic disadvantage', 'unfair play' or 'stigmatization'

- When asked specifically about her reasons for publication and her decisions regarding <u>staying local vs. going global</u>, in the two ethnographic protocols the researcher underlined personal satisfaction, together with opportunities for scientific knowledge exchange with peer colleagues and participation in a particular disciplinary culture

- Further, she stressed that her research was motivated by the <u>preoccupation of having an innovative idea</u> that could contribute to the pool of existing knowledge and be valuable for other scholars in the field

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# Changing writing practices

- The researcher commented that she engaged in biliterate practices early in her career (in the mid-1980s) ("read in English and wrote papers in Romanian") and eventually shifted to English-only
  - English-language shift has been consistently reported in studies of cohorts of researchers from non-Anglophone linguacultural backgrounds as a result of implemented research and internationalization policies in higher education institutions (see e.g. Englander & Uzuner-Smith, 2013; Ferguson et al., 2011; Uzuner, 2008)
- She stressed that the role of writing in the global context was disseminating research and that this was mainly done through English-medium journal publications.
- She viewed writing for publication in high-profile journals as highly competitive and persuasive, hence requiring that the writer highlights the value, contribution and implications of the research

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# Academic literacy learning

- The researcher's literacy skills had mainly developed thanks to her <u>high level of perceptiveness</u>
  - She described herself as "always inclined to reflect and learn from all possible situations as well as from interactions with others"
- Her considerable efforts to acquire research communication abilities turned over time into a very systematic approach to the process of carrying out research and preparing for writing, always seeking to continuously improve
- She had become highly perceptive of
  - macrostructural information organization conventions for journal article writing
  - interactional metadiscourse resources deployed by writers to negotiate claims and engage with their readers

Aware of differences across genres, publication standards, audiences and communicative purposes guided her preparation for writing

*As compared to Procedia, a journal is more difficult 'to penetrate', the requirements are higher, you don't know the people of the editorial board directly, or even if you know them, you don't know who will be doing the peer review, and I also don't think they [a journal] would publish work in progress. This is why you have to follow a lot of issues of that journal, to read several issues and articles in that journal and to feel you can fit with your research within the journal's thematic field and that your research approach aligns with that of the journal.*

# Approaching the writing process

- The researcher reported several strategies for approaching the process of writing, setting herself very high standards also in the intermediate steps (e.g. preparatory work prior to the writing process)
  - reading texts from the target journal in preparation for writing
  - peer-reviewing for journals and analysis
  - understanding of the reports received form peer reviewers on her own texts
- Language brokers' feedback was perceived as having an educational goal, i.e. she used it for critically reflecting on her own writing
- A literacy learning process towards advanced academic language competence drawn on <u>continuous critical reflection on genre aspects</u> (rhetorical organization of texts, recurring phraseology and style)
- Efforts made in this process were "considerable, but not frustrating"

# The context of research knowledge production

- Main space of academic enculturation > her disciplinary community

- As an insider of it, she identified collaboration and team complementarity as crucial aspects for decision-making processes. She underlined that collaborative work served to select a topic to investigate and a target journal and assess their chances of publication — "discuss publication possibilities"

- She attached more value to the research process itself and viewed texts as "only the end-result of a research process".
    - "[t]he article comes only in the end, after I have done the research. If you don't have your research there's no article to write. That's the way it is in my case, in my mind it is very clear"

- Her main argument for writing directly in English was that while writing in the L2 "comes naturally" out of extensive reading of the scientific literature in English

- Writing academic texts in her L1 was more time-consuming and involving greater effort than in English, she had more practice and wider literacy skills in English than in academic Romanian

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# Disciplinary enculturation

- Learning "the content of disciplinarity", namely, "registers, textual genres, rhetorical features and semiotic forms" used in communicating science within the disciplinary field (Prior, 2008) was crucial for achieving advanced literacy skills

- Enculturation involved familiarisation with
  - the requirements of the different types of publications
  - the work she put into getting to understand the style
  - the topics addressed and the readership of a particular journal

- As expected from an experienced writer, her textual production as a co-author exhibited advanced competence in the use of genre conventions in writing

- The researcher herself overtly stated that over time she had developed an ability to relate language patterns to discourse and rhetorical functions and learn the textual organization conventions in her disciplinary field

# Conclusions

- This case study illustrates a possible framework for examining individual subjects' experiences of plurilingual writing development

- idiosyncratic development patterns, but also commonalities

- Keep track of literacy development, esp. how much knowledge is transferable from the genre knowledge background in their first language to communicate effectively in another language (following Gentil, 2011)

- We hope to propose theoretically-grounded innovative pedagogic approaches to assist individual subjects' academic writing/literacy needs and train them in non-formal, independent lifelong language learning

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# Supporting and monitoring learning

- Following The Eaquals Teacher Development Framework and Languages for Academic Purposes (Prince & Rossner, 2017)
- Academic English Writing Hub (Moodle format)
  - Audio/video tutorials
  - Online tools and resources (including corpora and DDL)
  - Online training (webinars)
  - One-to-one advising
  - Virtual space for disciplinary enculturation and interdisciplinary enc.
    - Audio/video recordings of scholars' narratives if informed consent is given
    - Use of open forum
  - Validated tools for self-assessment (CEFRL, AIE)

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## Acknowledgements

www.genresandlanguages.org

*All sources agree that ability to communicate is more important than "perfect", native-like fluency*

http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/

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