

## **Advanced Academic Literacy and the Role of Academic Editors in Research Writing.**

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### **Abstract**

Advanced academic literacy often underscores the role of faculty as supervisors and examiners in research and thesis writing processes. Academic editors are unfortunately often not mentioned in these socialization processes. The aim of this paper is to underscore the role of this group of professionals in advanced academic literacy, as it particularly pertains to graduate research writing. I draw on my experiences in offering editorial services to graduate research students in English-medium universities. In doing this, I am guided mainly by my experiences and observation, rather than the theoretical perspectives that inform advanced academic literacy. In this paper I touch briefly on the requirements of research writing and present my brief profile and that of my clients (graduate students). This is followed by a description of my *modus operandi* in editing the research writing of students. The difficulties graduate students encounter in writing their research are then discussed. The paper concludes with the implications of my findings for the role of academic editors, advanced academic literacy, and graduate research supervision.

**Key words:** academic editor, advanced academic literacy, research writing, supervision

### **Introduction**

The last thirty years has witnessed considerable attention on advanced academic literacy (AAL) in English-medium universities. Although AAL often and narrowly conjures the graduate student's ability to read and write various texts assigned in the university (Spack, 1997; Braine, 2002), it actually refers to a complex set of skills, accomplishments, and expectations of graduate students in various disciplinary contexts (Johns, 1997; Johns & Swales, 2002). An important aspect of AAL is the dissemination of research findings in the form of pedagogic genres such as the thesis or dissertation (depending on whether one is in the UK, USA or any university which identifies with practices of universities in these geographical regions). Other equally important genres in graduate research include the research proposal (or research prospectus) and conference papers (Swales & Feak, 1994; Swales, 2004).

There is no denying the fact that the supervisor (or advisor) is key to the success of the graduate research process. A supervisor may either suggest a topic to a graduate student or, in the case of the Sciences, get a graduate student to work on an aspect of a project that is being funded by an organization. In this way, the supervisor becomes associated with a student's research right from the conceptualization of the research to the successful defence of the research report. Findings in the last decade have also underscored the role of examiners (both internal and external) in the assessment of theses or dissertations and, in some cases, the *viva voce*. Indeed, Johnston (1997), Kiley and Mullins (2002), and several other scholars have been prominent in highlighting the work of examiners in universities in the UK and Australia. Thesis examiners act essentially as gate-keepers for the various disciplinary communities in which graduate students, not wanting to remain on the fringes of academia as peripheral members (Lave & Wenger, 1991), eventually seek to be full-fledged members and ultimately experts.

While the role of the two categories of scholars (that is, supervisors and examiners) are frequently alluded to in the Higher Education (HE), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Postgraduate Pedagogy (PP), and AAL literature, there is one group of professionals whose association with both the process and product of the graduate students' research is less discussed. This paper, therefore, discusses the role of this emerging professional group of scholars (that is, academic editors) in the research process by drawing on my own experience and observation as an academic editor (AE) for international and local graduate students. While I am aware of the theoretical underpinnings of AAL, ESP, and PP, which greatly influence the services of this group of scholars, I pay very little attention to them in this paper, except for purposes of illumination.

The rest of the paper is structured along the following lines. I first provide my profile together with that of the graduate students (or my clients) to whom I offer editorial assistance. This is followed by a brief discussion of the writing requirements of research writing. The expected role of academic editors (AEs) and the *modus operandi* adopted in my editorial services are the next to be discussed. I then focus on my observation of the writing difficulties of my clients. In the concluding section, I draw implications from these observations.

## **Profile of Writer (Academic Editor) and Students**

As an AE for graduate students who write various research genres (that is, research proposal, thesis and dissertation, conference paper, and journal article), it might be appropriate to cite my credentials.

I started my academic career by obtaining a B.A. (Hons.) in English Language and a Diploma in Education at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Ghana after completing a four-year programme in 1988. At the time (1988), Ghana was experiencing brain drain: many of its academics and teachers in universities as well as elementary schools and secondary schools (now called Senior High Schools) had gone to Nigeria and several other countries to seek 'greener pasture'. Nonetheless, faculty members of the Department of English where I had had my undergraduate education insisted on the highest standards of excellence in both spoken and written communication. On completing my undergraduate education, I taught in three different secondary schools (now called Senior High Schools) for five years as a professional teacher. Convinced about my ambition to become an academic and challenged about the demands of English language education in the country (that is, Ghana), I pursued a master's degree in Applied English Language Studies at the same university. Thereafter, I was employed as a lecturer at my *alma mater*.

In 2002 I commenced doctoral studies in Applied Linguistics at the National University of Singapore (NUS), where I explored an aspect of AL; that is, the interface between rhetoric and disciplinary variation in undergraduate writing. At NUS I developed research interests in postgraduate pedagogy, multiliteracies, critical discourse studies, and narrative enquiry. After my doctoral education, I served as Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) in South Africa. It was in NUS and WITS that I began to assist many international students in presenting their research in various forms, from research proposals to research articles. Since arriving in Ghana after my postdoctoral research in South Africa, I have continued to offer editorial services to graduate students.

These students have been from varied backgrounds in Applied Linguistics, Political Economics, Economics, Computer Science, Building and Construction, Philosophy, Sociology, and

Development Studies. What was common, however, to all these students was the demand that was made on them to produce research writings in almost impeccable English. Moreover, these students, especially those from NUS, were mates I often met at restaurants and other recreational places on campus and who expressed interest in me to offer editorial assistance. They were graduate students from countries in Asia such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, South Korea and India and countries from Africa such as Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa.

### **Research Writing Requirements**

Writing at the graduate level takes into account the general characteristics of academic discourse, which are scattered in the ESP and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) literature (e.g. Swales & Feak, 1994, 2000; Hyland, 2000; Flowerdew, 2000; Paltridge, 2002). These requirements include, but are not restricted to, clarity of language, intertextuality, evidence, discipline-specific phraseology and idioms, appropriate tone, demands of various academic genres, and the acceptable combination of various semiotic forms such as text, tables, charts, and graphs.

In exhibiting clarity of language, graduate students are enjoined to avoid ambiguity, vagueness, padding, verbosity, circumlocution, clichés and unnecessary obfuscating jargon. Ultimately, clarity of language is expected to be achieved through systematicity, non-contradictoriness, conciseness, and coherence. A further research writing requirement is intertextuality, which is the recognition of the interdependence of knowledge construction, sharing, and dissemination. Graduate students are expected to follow acceptable conventions in modes of documentation such as footnotes, endnotes, in-text citation, and bibliographic citation. In addition, given the different epistemological and rhetorical dispositions of various disciplines (Becher, 1989; Hyland, 2000), graduate students are required to use appropriate phraseology and other semiotic devices in presenting their research. Thus, it is fairly easy to distinguish a thesis or dissertation in the field of Chemistry from one in History as the former valorizes mathematical symbolism while the latter cherishes causation and emplotment. Further, research writing requires that attention be paid to evidence. Various forms of evidence such as statistics, interview data, narratives, artifacts, and views by authorities are utilized by general academic and discipline-specific communities in order to make logical and valid claims and generalizations in research

writing. Appropriate tone is also expected to be employed in research writing; a register which is largely objective, formal, and impersonal, but not inflated or pretentious or pedantic, is largely acceptable. Finally, adherence to acceptable standards and current usage of both macro and micro-rhetorical conventions (Craswell, 1993) is necessary. The macro-domain involves the overall architectural structure of the text, which is described by Atkinson (1991: 65) as ‘overall design coherence’. On the other hand, the micro-domain conventions concern grammar, spelling, punctuation, amalgamation, and paragraphing,

In practice, graduate students (like faculty) are likely to demonstrate varying degrees of knowledge and use of these linguistic/rhetorical features of academic writing briefly sketched above. The extent to which students successfully employ these features in their research writing speaks volume of their scholarly rigour.

### **Role of Academic Editor and My Modus Operandi**

Besides showing awareness of the above-mentioned research writing requirements, the AE needs to recognize the specific tasks that ought to be performed in responding to a student’s research writing and to adopt a specific *modus operandi*

As an AE, I consider the extent and nature of editorial intervention permissible, especially in editing graduate students’ research writing. I am aware of editing practices in Canada, Australia, the USA, and the UK. I tend to be influenced by the practices of the Editors Association of Canada (EAC). This association identifies three levels of editorial intervention: Level 1: technical (non-intrusive copy-editing; minimal intervention); Level 2: structural (more intrusive, but constituting rephrasing, rather than rewriting); and Level 3: substantive (reconstruction and rewriting). Within each level is a comprehensive description of what a competent structural and stylistic editor should be able to do. My approach is to largely utilize the interventions prescribed at levels 1 and 2 by EAC. My unwillingness to adopt the third level intervention stems from the practical concern that the AE may often not be a specialist in the discipline in which the text is found. Any attempt to adopt such an interventionist approach can, therefore, lead to misinterpretation and misrepresentation.

My *modus operandi* in editing graduate research writing takes into account the following. First, I am generally wary of commenting on content, other than to indicate obvious factual inaccuracies and anachronisms. I extend this to inconsistencies and incorrect or incomplete in-text referencing (to which much attention is paid later in this paper). Although I accept the general practice of AEs not to question a candidate's argument, statement of fact, findings, or conclusions, incidental factual errors are noted. The temptation to do so arises when I am editing theses in my research areas. Second, my knowledge of various writing styles (e.g. simple/elegant, nominal/verbal, formal/informal) enables me to comment on a candidate's writing style. Where I suspect instances of plagiarism, I draw the candidate's attention to this and advise him/her to acknowledge his or her sources and to adopt various means of referencing source (summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting). Third, I often decline proofreading/editing any piece of research writing that, in my judgment, requires major rewriting as I feel this raises ethical concerns in respect of the originality of the work.

With these three broad 'policies' or understandings underpinning my editorial services and practices to graduate students, I commence my work by requiring the client to provide me a hard copy of the research writing, though in a few cases I oblige when students insist that I accept electronic versions due to the lack of money to print the copies. Once I am presented with the hard copy, I take a quick read of the abstract, table of contents and bibliography or reference list. Reading these apparent 'peripheral' aspects of the research document enables me to obtain a quick and impressionistic view of the quality of work. Whereas, in particular, the front elements (abstract and table of content) simply offer a summative account of the entire work, I consider the bibliography as a prompt way of gauging the scholarliness of the work. Thereafter, I read the introduction and the conclusion to see whether there is a close fit between them and whether what the student sets out to do is accomplished. I spend a relatively greater amount of time reading the conceptual framework, methodology and analysis and discussion and keep moving from one rhetorical section to another to find out whether they are logically connected to one another and whether the claims being made in the analysis and discussion sections are valid.

In general, I read various research writings with an eye for clarity and sophistication of language, effective development of points and coherence, while ensuring that I do not go beyond my mandate as an AE. I remain restricted to issues related to language, logical sequence, and format.

### **Graduate Students' Writing Difficulties**

Although there are several infelicities I have noticed in my clients' research writing over the years, for reasons of saliency and lack of space, I focus here on the following: rhetoric/organization, citation practices, and common language solecisms.

#### **Rhetoric/Organization**

Regarding rhetoric/generic issues, some students seemed not to have any knowledge of the requirements for writing genres such as the abstract, table of content, and acknowledgements. Earlier studies (Paltridge, 2002; Swales, 2004) have pointed to students' difficulty with genre requirements. Some students did not know the distinction between the abstract and summary; in some universities both were required in the thesis or dissertation. As I also learned later, students who had difficulty writing an acceptable abstract had not undertaken any undergraduate research. Engaging such students in the effective way of presenting abstracts through discussion of the rhetorical move analysis, as found in applied linguists such as Salager-Mayer (1992), Santos (1996), and Samraj (1998), often provided a useful way of empowering my clients whenever there were opportunities. Moreover, given the recent attention given to the table of content as a site of identity creation (Starfield & Ravelli, 2006), I consider it necessary to help students to construct their table of content when it has been given a sloppy treatment.

Regarding the writing of the acknowledgement section in theses, I noticed some issues related to cultural differences, consistent with an earlier study by Bloor and Bloor (1991) and Al-Ali (n.d) (1993). Indeed, the issue of cultural differences evokes the Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) hypothesis, which in its original sense refers to the existence of different writing conventions

across cultures (Kaplan, 1966, 1988; Connor, 1996). Unsurprisingly, I found that my clients, many of whom were Asians and Africans, tended to use ‘indirect’ rhetorical pattern in their English writing in contrast to the expected English writing convention which is ‘linear’ and direct rhetorical pattern. Recognizing this, I often assisted my clients to re-organize their content. In writing the acknowledgement section in a dissertation/thesis, a few students either would not indicate clearly, or are mute on, the exact contribution of their supervisors to their thesis writing due to some personal differences, contrary to published (Hyland, 2004) and pedagogic advice (Swales & Feak, 2000), which requires students to explicitly include the exact contribution of their ‘benefactors’.

It is also heartening to note that many of my clients (graduate students) seemed to have received considerable support from their supervisors with regard to the organizational format of their theses/dissertations and research articles. For instance, I noticed that the Science theses and research articles I edited conformed to a well-defined, conventionalized patterning of the text: Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, and Discussion (IMRD). There were some variations on this institutionalized schema, though. As the Humanities and Social Sciences graduate students generally adopt a more flexible institutionalized schema for their theses and research articles, those in specific fields such as Political Economics, Sociolinguistics, Development Studies, and Building Construction found structuring their research writings quite difficult. In such cases, I needed to help them to see the theses as a spatio-semantic structure and to encourage them to view several other theses in their disciplines.

Further, within the overall architectural structure of students’ dissertation/theses (as well as research articles, research proposals, and conference papers), I observed various errors associated with paragraphing. The errors in paragraphing often consisted in, first, what Craswell (1993:5) calls ‘paragraph rupture’ and what for better expression, I would call a ‘hanging paragraph’. Concerning the first, students constructed paragraphs in such a way that the reader’s expectation is set up through some sentences although within the same paragraph this expectation is either not met or directed outside the paragraph. There is thus split focus. Hanging paragraphs were not related to either the previous or the subsequent paragraph. In other cases, there was free association of ideas and rumbling ideas. Still, some paragraphs appeared choppy and jazzy. To



construct respectable paragraphs, I advised students to either remove some sentences, or rework them into a paragraph that requires further developments, or introduce sometimes logical connectives to ensure more explicit signaling of both intra- and inter-paragraph linkages. Some underdeveloped paragraphs also needed to be elaborated.

The use of metatextual elements (see Bunton, 1999) as a rhetorical device also bears mention. In a more sustained and lengthy writing such as the theses, metatextual elements help to reduce the cognitive load on readers. Metatextual elements are expressions that assist the thesis or research article writer, therefore, to direct the reader's attention in terms of how the text is organized. On one hand, such devices as appropriate headings, sub-headings, previews and overviews at the beginnings of chapters or sections were often not used in the research writings I edited.

Transitional markers and other advanced labels were often left out. On the other hand, in a few research articles and conference papers, metatextual devices such as previews and overviews were overused, thus making the devices intrusive and the piece of writing irritating. My task, since I noticed students were not aware always of the usefulness of this rhetorical device, was to provide them with a list of some of these, use a few of them to illustrate their use, and request that they look more closely at how these and similar ones are used in their disciplines, as the use of metatextual elements could be discipline-specific.

Yet another rhetorical device to discuss is repetition, where students repeat themselves, often at some length, because of the way in which they had structured their argumentation in various chapters or sub-sections in theses and research articles. Often the repetition did not involve only lexical items but stretches of sentences that had been used in earlier sections of the work. Thus, though it is often argued that the benefit of lexical repetition lies in its contribution to thematic salience and thematic development, repetition tended to be a labored device at all levels (word, phrase, and clause, and sentence) in the hands of graduate students. Where repetitions were sentential, radical restructuring was required. At other times, by clarifying sub-sectional focus it was possible simply to omit repetitious material altogether, or to substitute some phrase.

The final issue related to rhetoric is problems of justification; that is, providing inadequate or implausible evidence for arguments or claims made. Thus, such textual inadequacies were not simply a 'content' issue; they were rhetorical in so far as by not providing adequate or plausible

information, the graduate students failed to persuade readers about the claims and assertions being made. Generalized assertions were given without any further information. Writing problems of this nature were easy to deal with. These required no more than a ‘how?’ or ‘why?’ in the margins; interestingly, sometimes in the discussions with my clients, they always had the answers in hand. This exclusion of evidential information could suggest students’ incomplete acculturation to the conventions of argumentation.

### **Citation practices**

One manifestation of ritualistic academic behavior expected in research writing relates to intertextuality, which is evidenced in footnotes, endnotes, in-text citation and bibliographic citation. This is an important mode of socialization into the academic tribes, as Becher (1989) aptly names them. My concern in the rest of this section relates to students’ use of in-text citation for purposes of space constraint and saliency.

First, one clear difficulty I have on reading students’ research writing is determining ‘who is speaking’ in the text, and, for that matter, possible charges of lack of comprehension and plagiarism. This often arises when students think that a single reference somewhere in a paragraph is sufficient. I deal with such instances of unclear referencing by encouraging students to correctly make references to the scholar/s involved as they get along in a paragraph to avoid the charge of plagiarism, if even it requires repeating the names of authors or the use of pronominal references.

Also, a common in-text citation difficulty I notice in the research writings of my clients concern the use of secondary sources. As much as possible, students are encouraged to read every source material referred to in their writing. In few cases, where students are unable to access the primary source referred to by an author whose work a student is privy to, students can cite as ‘Author X 1997, as cited by Author B’. The worry is when students are constantly making such references without taking time to look for the primary texts involved and to read them. The alternative is for students to delete such references to avoid being charged with ‘academic dishonesty’.

A further difficulty students have with in-text citation is the use of paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting. Some students do not seem to know when to utilize these. I, therefore, have to

explain to students the value of each, stressing that both summarizing and paraphrasing provide the opportunity to showcase their understanding of the ideas in texts they have encountered in their reading, whereas quoting often suggests that there is no better way of expressing an original idea except by maintaining its original expression or form. Some Humanities and Social Sciences research students used quotations rather excessively, thus making their writing pretentious and showy. In such a case, the voice of the writer (that is, the graduate student) becomes ‘drowned’ in a sea of other voices. The way out, when I had the opportunity of a discussion with graduate students, was to alert them to the rhetorical functions of quotations, drawing on Krishnan and Kathpalia (2002) and to encourage them to summarize or paraphrase as much as possible.

Closely related to the referencing skills mentioned in the previous paragraph are the types of in-text citation, commonly described in the ESP and AL literature as the integral in-text citation and non-integral in-text citation. In integral in-text citation the name of the scholar is part of the sentence elements (e.g. ‘Author K (2006) postulated the theory being used today’) whereas non-integral citation places the name of the scholar or the evidential material together with the date in parenthesis such as “Address terms can be a means of constructing one’s identity (Author J, 2006)”. Studies in Higher Education, AAL, and ESP (e.g. Hyland, 2000; Thompson, 2001) have further shown that the extent to which integral in-text citation and non-integral citation are used could be influenced by different disciplines. Far too often in the research writings I proofread, students used the non-integral type or its variants, with a cursory use of the other type. And when a few students used the integral type, they restricted the evidential marker (that is, the reference source) to the subject or initial position. Placing the evidential marker in the medial position or at the rear in sentences requires more effort on the part of the students. To many graduate students, however, this is a luxury, which they can least entertain. I had to get students to understand the rationale and communicative effect of using both types of citation.

Using the integral in-text citation or non-integral in-text citation may call for the use of either single author or multiple authors. The use of the latter means that one is generalizing from a set of texts or scholars; and this has implications for the ordering or sequencing of the authors’ names. Many students do not seem to be aware of the need to adopt an organizing principle and to adhere to it throughout the text. Students could choose any one of the following organizing

principles: recency, alphabetical arrangement, and chronological order. Lack of such knowledge of the organizing principle of multiple authors in in-text citation makes students' research writing less professional and scholarly. When students' attention is drawn to this requirement for consistency of the organizing principle in multiple in-text citation, they willingly oblige.

To a large extent, one cannot employ in-text citation without considering reporting verbs. Reporting verbs allow the writer to demonstrate his/her attitude towards the proposition being referred to, and thus enables the reader to identify, what is popularly known in studies in rhetoric and composition as, 'voice'. Hyland (2000) has already established that the use of reporting verbs is susceptible to disciplinary influence. Nonetheless, in the various research writings I edited I noticed that students seemed to have a narrow range of reporting verbs and a lack of knowledge of the semanticity of the various reporting verbs (e.g. 'posit', 'postulate', 'said', 'assert', 'agree'). Too often students used denotational reporting verbs such as 'said' and 'mentioned', rather than evaluational speech act verbs such as 'argue', 'claim', and 'aver'). To help students improve on their use of reporting verbs, I either refer students to some pedagogic materials such as Weissberg and Buker (1990) and Swales and Feak (1994, 2000) or, out of kindness, I give them a list of reporting verbs which I had compiled from my own reading over the years.

### **Common language infelicities**

My engagement with the research writing of graduate students convinces me that there is ample evidence of language infelicities. These tended to be both lexical and syntactical: grammar (e.g. tense choice, cohesion, and sentence order), spelling, and formality.

Specifically, there were repeated errors related to the use of the logical 'however', or 'therefore' thus confounding the flow of argument. In a number of cases, the logic of sentences in which they are found appears bizarre. In several cases, students' use of connectives is excessive and intrusive. There are also frequent problems with the determiners 'it', 'this', and 'these'. This problem arises because of floating or missing referents. Referring to this linguistic defect, Clanchy and Ballard opine (1989: 21) 'where the reference is imprecise, the entire vessel of reasoning can become unstable'. In regard to the unclear determiners, there is the need for a

repetition of either the referent or an addition of the referent to disambiguate the vague determiner.

Where an expression is very problematic and off-registral, I ask students to rewrite what is intended after I have had discussions with them about what they are trying to say, or I would help in rewriting or reformulating it. While I often do correct textual error, I am hesitant about expressional errors; only when I was convinced about the expressional error was off-registral would I encourage students to look for a more appropriate expression acceptable in their disciplinary community. I am concerned that students should learn themselves to overcome the more common expressional problems.

My comments related to the use of tense issues from the fact that some graduate students use the past, rather than the present, tense to show results in the discussion sections. My discussion with students on the correct or appropriate use of tenses often draws on the rhetorical uses of the various tenses, as in Wissberg and Buker (1990) and Swales and Feak (1994; 2000).

There are various errors related to sentence constructions. The first is sometimes the long and convoluted ones, leading to difficulty in meaning. At the extreme end is sometimes a series of short sentences, thus making them jerky and choppy. In the former the solution lies in breaking the sentence into meaningful units whereas in the latter I offer reformulations to serve as examples to students on how they can use both coordination and subordinate as effective sentence combining processes. Still, there are some sentences that are awkward. Students would use one structural type of sentences such as either a simple sentence or compound sentences or, from the functional perspective, only a loose or periodic sentence over a number of pages. Only rarely do I have to suggest the movement of sentences from one part of the paragraph to a more prominent part of the paragraph to give the information its due weight.

The final language issue that is prominent in graduate students' research writing concerns lexical choice. I focus here on formality. There were times students used idiomatic expressions instead of more formal words. For instance, 'put up with' was substituted with 'tolerate'. In a number of cases, nominalised expressions were preferred to verbal ones. But this was always not insisted on as in some cases a more verbal style was suggested because of its more vigorous and dynamic

nature. It would appear that if the suggested changes or reformulation did not involve words that were lexically incorrect, the changes seemed to be matters of stylistic preferences. In general, the reformulation or changes in expression suggested were meant to make a particular sentence or phrase more elegant or, at least, less clumsy.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

As noted above, graduate students' research writing evinces several writing challenges. These are generally linguistic, rhetorical, and discoursal in nature. These have some notable implications.

The first implication concerns the role of AEs in the entire research writing process. Knowledge of discipline-specific and generic demands of academic writing as well as cross-cultural meaning (or the more trendy CR) is helpful to the AE. Where the AE has knowledge of the generic demands of writing requirements of research, s/he can confidently offer editorial advice. Further, if the AE is aware of the discipline-specific nature of knowledge construction and dissemination of research, s/he could always ask the graduate student to refer more closely to the several theses and research articles published in his or her discipline.

Indeed, editing the research writing of international students from different countries has implications for CR. Although the CR hypothesis in its original sense (Kaplan 1966) and further elaborated by Connor (1986) and Hinds (1983) has been challenged by other scholars for its oversimplified generalization of the rhetorical patterns, it is worth considering as AEs. The point is that cross-cultural variables can strongly influence graduate students' research writing (Ventola & Maranen, 1996; Cadman, 2002; Canagarajah, 2002). CR has provided insights lately to suggest the possibility that graduate students in English-medium universities from non-native settings are more disposed to using rhetorical conventions other than the more linear ones (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). An awareness of this, together with sociolinguistic and genre approaches for AEs need to be an essential aspect of their work, for such a perspective enables better understanding of student writing, thus enhancing cross-cultural written communication. My own experience of working with international graduate students suggests that the cross-cultural differences cannot be wished away. Yet, getting students to adopt the English rhetorical

pattern raises the larger issue of privileging one rhetorical pattern over the other, an issue flagged by Critical Applied Linguists such as Canagarajah (2002) and Pennycook (2001).

The second implication relates to postgraduate supervision and pedagogy. This takes us to the long debated issue, the extent to which thesis supervisors must be involved in the research writing process of their students. While there seems to be no agreement on the role of supervisors in the research writing process there is an unwritten assumption by many supervisors that teaching students to write effectively is not part of their mandate. Admittedly, academics are not necessarily language or writing specialists although they are aware of writing for publication, as demanded by the dictum ‘publish or perish’. It is not strange for lecturers or supervisors, especially in non-native-speaking contexts, to be unaware of the subtle distinctions between ‘due to’ and ‘owing to’, ‘less’ and ‘fewer’, among others. Supervisors should, however, be alert to consistency in respect of English versus American spelling, usage (e.g. ‘data are’ or ‘data is’), hyphenation (‘co-ordinate’ or ‘coordinate’, ‘macro-economics’ or ‘macroeconomics’).

Supervisors should also be conversant with various aspects of rhetoric and language issues. They should at least have a nodding acquaintanceship with the conventions of usage such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, symbols, and citation. Thus, it is likely that students who are not penalized for, for example, their citation errors, form poor writing habits and continue with infelicitous writing habits throughout their degree programs. If instructors had made graduate students more accountable from the onset of their writing, the numerous citation errors noted in several graduate research writings would be minimal. In this regard, I concur with Chang and Swales (1999) who argue in favour of raising students’ rhetorical consciousness with, for instance, the personal pronoun, reporting verbs, and appropriate and sufficient use of evidence. It is suggested, for instance, that an initial identification and typologizing of reporting verbs in terms of degrees of affect, certainty and doubt when students start writing their literature review sections may, through directed instruction, assist student writers in projecting an informed and convincing evaluative stance, given the relative importance of the literature review section in research writing (Boote & Beile, 2005).

As a corollary of the above, and based on my interaction with graduate students while offering editorial services to them, merely dotting comments such as ‘what is the point of all this?’, ‘how

does this discussion relate to the sub-heading?', 'what is the focus here/' a goofed argument', and 'sloppy argument', as I myself unreflectively had written on some research proposals, theses/dissertations, and research articles become bewildering to graduate students. The meaning of these questions and comments reside in an academic writing culture to which graduate students occupy a peripheral place (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students can only decode such highly contextualized messages when they are talked to in intimate fashion. When this is done, I believe, it will greatly reduce the temptation of AEs to operate in the third interventionist level, as found in the CAE guidelines.

The third broad implication concerns the graduate students themselves; they have a role in forging an active engagement with the various research genres, either spoken or written, in order to demonstrate their advanced academic literacy. My interaction with graduate students, as I sought to assist them in presenting polished (but by no means impeccable) theses, research articles, and conference papers, convinced me that some graduates do not take language matters (and rhetorical matters) seriously enough. It is as though their responsibility is to write and that of the supervisor or academic editor is to 'fix' the problems that arise in the course of their writing. One way is for graduate students to actively read pedagogic material on thesis writing and engage in activities related to advanced academic literacy. They can also be encouraged to take peer review of their research writings more seriously. Ultimately, graduate students need to be aware that more and more demands are being made on them for sophisticated writing, language use, and oral communications – advanced academic literacy.

Thus, although in this paper I set out to underscore the role of AEs in the research writing process as part of the socialization process in various discourse communities by describing my own experiences as an AE for international graduate students in their research writing, there have arisen three important implications. Indeed, international graduate students are generally understood as facing three kinds of transition issues when entering study programmes in a second language: language issues, cultural issues and pedagogic issues. The AE too has to be reminded of these three issues if s/he is to effectively discharge his or her professional task of offering editorial assistance to graduate students in their research writing.



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