Role of Language Teachers in the Teaching of Academic Writing
Analysis Based on Multinational Academic Writing Literature

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ABSTRACT

2016 witnessed the inclusion of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) into "College English Curriculum Requirements" by the Ministry of Education. Writing ability, essential for EAP, matters much for international academic activities and professional exchanges. To satisfy the cultivation of students' academic writing, language teachers should reflect and brave up for challenges in a timely manner during the transition from English for General Purposes (EGP) to EAP, and actively plan their own professional development. Responses of 38 teaching institutions from 27 countries to this survey are pooled in this paper to analyse the role of language teachers in the teaching of academic writing, providing insight for promoting EAP in China.

Keywords: Language teacher, Academic writing teaching, Teacher's role.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan" was issued in October 2010, proposing to "train a large number of international talents with international vision, familiar with international standards, and able to participate in international affairs and international competition", thus facilitating the reform of college English teaching. "College English Curriculum Requirements" issued in 2016 by the Ministry of Education included EAP into college English, writing that "English for Specific Purposes (ESP) aims to enhance students' ability to use English for professional and academic communication and work, as well as to enhance their academic and professional qualities." Writing ability as one essential part is vital for international academic activities and professional exchanges. However, writing ability is not "naturally acquired ability", but "ability acquired through specific education" (Yang Luxin, 2015). In order to better cultivate students' academic writing skills, language teachers should reflect and meet challenges in a timely manner, and actively plan their own

professional development.

"Teachers preach, impart knowledge, and solve doubts", Han Yu's point in "On Teaching" has long been a perfect portray of teachers' role. However, the development of information technology and the society's new requirements for talents change the role of teachers. EAP can be subdivided into EGAP and ESAP (Cai Jigang, 2012). As for EGAP, teachers focus on train students' communication ability and improve students' academic quality. In terms of ESAP, teachers emphasize students' EAP ability with specific subjects as the medium. Either EGAP or ESAP, they both require students to "directly engage in their own professional studies and future work in English, as well as strong international communication skills in their own professional fields" (Cai Jigang, 2012). Therefore, the role of language teachers is enriched, and new challenges should be met.

2. CURRENT SITUATION OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH WRITING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE CHINA

Countries except China including British and America set foot on language training since the 1960s because of the mounting international students to

facilitate their professional studies. Such language trainings are application-oriented academic English teaching, which leads to subsequent research on academic language teaching including theory and practice, and guides academic language teaching. As for academic writing, pedagogy, discourse analysis and construction, writing practice, etc. are involved.

In China, Shu Dingfang (2009) first discussed the teaching model introduced by the University of Nottingham, Ningbo from University of Nottingham, UK, that is, the implementation of academic English teaching and the provision of academic English writing. In 2013, the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee promulgated the "A Framework of Reference for EFL Teaching at Tertiary Level in Shanghai (Trial Implementation)", which clearly proposes that "EGAP courses should be set as compulsory." The Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and the College English Steering Committee of Shanghai Universities organized five teacher training sessions concerning EAP. Since then, academic English courses are available in colleges and universities including "985" and "211" key universities and universities in developed areas such as Shanghai. Such courses are implemented in multiple forms: the one for students with high English proficiency and passing graded examinations; and the one for certain majors, such as medicine and finance. All these courses highlight academic writing, thus cultivating students.

Since 2006, the research team led by Chris Thaiss of University of California has carried out an international survey on academic writing (International WAC/WID Mapping Project), collecting responses from 38 teaching institutions in 27 countries. Factors including the historical evolution, scale and characteristics of these teaching institutions, student structure and theoretical basis of writing courses, financial status, teacher structure, curriculum, student feedback, success and challenges, etc. are included in the survey. Responses collected are elaborated in the paper to sort out academic writing teaching around the world, and analyse the role of language teachers in academic writing teaching.

3. ACADEMIC WRITING TEACHING AROUND THE WORLD

According to the collection and discussion by the research team of Chris Thaiss, academic writing teaching in the world falls into two camps based on teaching objects: (1) Writing courses provided uniformly for students of all majors in teaching institutions, such as Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento and Universidad de Burnos Aires in Argentina, Alpen-Adria-Universitat in Austria, Universidad Sergio Arboleda in Colombia, American University in Cairo in Egypt, and University of California in the United States; (2) Writing courses provided for specific majors, colleges or specific students. For example, Universite libre de Bruxelles in Belgium offers academic writing courses for freshman French majors; University of Copenhagen in Denmark offers academic thesis writing courses for masters; Universite Stendhal in France offers academic writing courses for liberal arts students; University of Alberta in Canada arranges students based on majors considering the professional needs of academic social workers and guides students' academic writing in a targeted manner.

As for the purpose, they can be divided as follows: (1) To improve the academic literacy of students. For example, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento in Argentina provides academic writing courses for the whole school to improve the academic literacy of students; the University of California in the United States regards the academic writing ability of students as criteria for evaluating university rankings and qualities of graduates; (2) To facilitate the study of professional courses. Universidad de Burnos Aires in Argentina provides academic writing courses for biology majors, so as to promote information accumulation, reading and professional output in biology through academic reading and writing related to their major. In addition, the American University in Cairo in Egypt, the University of Madras in India, and the University of California in the United States have all set up relevant academic writing for students' professional learning; (3) To eliminate language barriers. Universite libre de Bruxelles in Belgium provides academic writing and reading courses for freshman international students majoring in French to help students overcome language barriers, and better use language and improve reading and writing in subsequent studies. (4) To help obtain the certificate. University of Copenhagen in Denmark provides academic writing courses for master students of various majors to help students complete the writing of graduation thesis. (5) To improve writing skills. Oxford Brookes University and Coventry University in England provide academic writing guidance to different groups such as undergraduates, graduate students and teachers. The purpose is to create a common writing-oriented atmosphere so that teachers and students can make continuous progress in writing; In France, Universite Stendhal focuses on

liberal arts. The career of students after graduation is highly demanding in writing. Therefore, the university offers writing courses at all levels to cultivate and train the writing skills of both students and teachers. They can also be categorized based on institutions that provide academic writing courses: (1) Provide writing guidance to students through writing centers. For example, Xi'an International Studies University in China has established a language learning center. The teachers are part-time teachers, and language teachers are generally employed to provide regular writing guidance to students. Students can participate independently and interact with teachers to improve certain writing assignments or individually specific writing materials. In addition, American University in Cairo in Egypt, University of Copenhagen in Denmark, and Oxford Brookes University and Coventry University in England have all set up writing centers to provide students with various forms of writing guidance. (2) Providing writing training or writing courses based on writing projects. Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento University in Argentina launched the "Program to Develop Academic Literacy across the Curriculum" (PRODEAC) project. The project focuses on the detailed analysis and practice of various academic articles, textual structure, and language characteristics of writing related to specific fields, in collaboration with teachers of various subjects. Germany's RWTH Aachen launched the Tik project, which aims to combine engineering and communication skills to improve students' technical writing skills. In this way, students learn how to write technical articles and pass their own knowledge to others; PLEA (Program of academic reading and writing) of Colombia's Universidad Sergio Arboleda offers reading and writing courses for freshmen and sophomores in the school.

4. ROLE OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN ACADEMIC WRITING OUTSIDE CHINA

4.1 Language Teachers Are the Initiators, Promoters and Designers of Academic Writing Teaching

Language teachers focus on language and students' grasp and application of language. They first discover students' problems in language application during teaching process, prompt them to reflect and explore, and solve such problems through teaching activities. Université Stendhal in France excels at liberal arts. In the 1980s, social factors such as politics and economy posed challenges and requirements for university enrolment and student training. Since 2000, language teachers in colleges and universities, as language and writing researchers, have realized students' drawback in writing, so they put forward new requirements for language teaching and writing, making writing skill necessary for graduates. The academic writing of Université Stendhal emphasizes language itself, that is, the writing and grammar of the language. Besides, the narrative (Thaiss et al. 2012) teaching method is used to help students acquire knowledge concerning academic writing. Language teachers at Université Stendhal are the initiators, promoters and designers of academic English writing: they discover the problems students face in learning, promote teaching reforms, and propose learning methods that adapt to students.

4.2 Language Teachers and Teachers of Other Subjects or Majors Are "Equal" in Cooperation on Academic Writing Teaching

Language teachers that excel in language are employed in many universities to cooperate with teachers of various subjects, thus conducting academic writing teaching. Such approach is adopted in Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento and Universidad de Buenos Aires University in Argentina, Australia's University of Wollonong, Canada's University of Alberta, etc. Students of these universities encounter problems in their professional studies: their academic writing skills fail to meet the needs of professional studies. As a result, these universities initiated a project to allow cooperation between language teachers and teachers of other subjects, thus improving the academic writing skills of professional students. They jointly decide on curriculum design, content, classroom activities, reading and writing assignments, grade evaluations, and so on. Academic writing course aims to provide assistance in planning and judging students' writing tasks, and to improve the academic quality of professional teachers.

4.3 Language Teachers Are Tutors Who Meet the Academic Writing Needs of Some Students

The launch of academic writing courses often depends on the characteristics and needs of the universities. Some universities do not offer compulsory academic writing courses for all students, but targeted tutoring for students with varied

demands. University of Copenhagen in Denmark, Oxford Brookes University and Coventry University in England and other universities set up special writing centers. Oxford Brookes University and Coventry University in England set up CAW (Centre for Aacademic Writing) to provide students with writing guidance of various forms, including: specific writing tasks with individualised/small-group writing tutorials, writing guidance with fifty-minute tutorials, during which students can discuss specific writing topics with teachers, and twenty-minute bookable-on-the-day tutorials, which provides help for students who are in urgent need of writing advice. Writing centers in these universities are teaching institutions with clear functions, providing targeted, diverse and flexible help for students' academic writing. Among them, language teachers serve as part-time instructors of the writing center, providing clear guidance and assistance to some students who have a clear purpose in learning writing or who encounter specific problems in the writing process.

5. ROLE OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN ACADEMIC WRITING IN CHINA

As a late comer in academic writing, China employs personnel with academic backgrounds in language-related majors such as English and American literature, linguistics, and translation as language teachers (Cai Jigang, 2012). The reform of college English requires more from language teachers. They should change their roles from the imparter of knowledge to the promoter of student knowledge learning, and the "executor" of classroom teaching activities into "designer" (Yuan Xiaolu, 2006). Besides, most language teachers face challenges in conceptual change, that is, teachers of academic English writing are not necessarily equipped with professional knowledge of other subjects (Cai Jigang, 2014). They should provide written or spoken language guidance to students rather than professional knowledge.

6. ENLIGHTENMENT FOR CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS

6.1 Re-examining the Responsibilities of Language Teachers Based on the Actual Teaching Situation of School

The development and setting of school-based curriculum must be based on the implementation of national curriculum and local curriculum. School-based curriculum can be created according to

students' needs and growth, as well as college resources. (Li Ji, 2006). Universite Stendhal, Grenoble in France focuses on liberal arts. After fully assessing students' deficiencies in writing and considering the higher writing requirements for students' future employment, language teachers initiated the development of academic writing courses, resource integration and curriculum design. Given students' academic quality and qualification, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento in Argentina encourages cooperation between language teachers and professional teachers of specific subjects, to discuss the materials, activities, tasks and evaluation standards of students' reading and writing in class. As a result, language teachers are no longer passive in the development and setting of school-based curriculum. They are no longer a single knowledge imparter, a mechanical executor of the curriculum plan, or an inspector of students' performance, but are active participants of the development of the curriculum, and the "decision maker" or "decision partner" of school-based curriculum development and setting, participating equally in school-based curriculum planning.

6.2 Developing Language Teachers' Awareness and Ability of Academic Writing Teaching from Macro-framework to Micro-design

Language teachers are the participants and reviewers of the academic writing curriculum from the macro framework to the micro design. Coventry University in England is an innovative university whose mission is to cultivate students' comprehensive academic and practical abilities. The purpose of its writing center CAW (Centre for Academic Writing) is as follows. As a writing center with innovative and R&D capabilities, it aims to train students to become independent writers, to give full play to the potential of professional teachers, so that they can become authors or teachers of academic writing. Therefore, after fully considering the needs of different teaching objects, language teachers coordinate the curriculum resources of the school and tailor appropriate curriculum for undergraduates, graduate students and professional teachers, including one-on-one tutoring system, two-hour seminar each week for ten weeks, credit-bearing writing modules, group workshop, and protected writing time session, and design corresponding class lengths, teaching materials, classroom design, curriculum implementation, and inspection evaluation for different lesson types. The class hour, teaching materials, classroom design,

curriculum implementation, and inspection evaluation for different classes can also be designed.

It's proved that language teachers are conscious and active in teaching. On the one hand, they should strengthen the macro awareness of school development and school-based curriculum construction, take into account the social needs and students' needs of curriculum construction, and become the coordinator of curriculum resources and the instructors and administrators of curriculum development. Their awareness of cooperation and communication with other professional teachers should also be improved. On the other hand, they should consider the needs of learners in the course design, and strengthen their own abilities in teaching methods, teaching design, teaching resources integration and curriculum evaluation.

6.3 Language Teachers Need to Balance Role Conflicts and Adjust Themselves

Language teachers shoulder multiple roles in academic writing courses worldwide. Therefore, language teachers in colleges and universities are confronted with multiple role conflicts in the development of Chinese academic writing teaching. In academic writing courses around the world, language teachers are not only curriculum planners, curriculum syllabus designers, but also the implementors, evaluators and revisers of actual teaching activities. First of all, language teachers should enhance their initiative in curriculum development, and strengthen their motivation in curriculum development and planning. Language teachers should actively participate in the training of curriculum planning to improve their macro awareness of curriculum design and enhance their ability and say in curriculum planning. What's more, how to juggle their priorities in different periods of macro and micro work in academic writing courses also worth attention. Teachers are supposed to be responsible for the implementation and practice of teaching activities. On the micro level of teaching, language teachers should constantly update their teaching ideas, enrich their teaching design and summarize their teaching experience, so as to exert their subjectivity in teaching practice.

7. CONCLUSION

The objectives of academic writing courses vary based on the needs of the society and students. Language teachers serve as multiple roles in the course, either in macro or micro front. It is an effective way to develop academic writing courses that language teachers can be taken as subjects and attach importance to such position. The review of teachers' roles in academic writing teaching worldwide has important implications for the professional development and role adjustment of language teachers in China during college English teaching reform and transformation.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Xiaofang Cong is responsible for experimental design, analysed data and wrote the manuscript, while Xiangyu Jiang contributed to data analysis, revising and editing.

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