

Research on Worldwide Academic Writing Course

Based on the Analysis of Multinational Academic Writing Literature

Xiaofang Cong

School of Languages and Literature
Harbin Institute of Technology
Weihai, China

Dan Wang

School of Languages and Literature
Harbin Institute of Technology
Weihai, China

Jiixin Zou

School of Languages and Literature
Harbin Institute of Technology
Weihai, China

Abstract—According to an international WAC/WID Mapping Project on the academic writing having been conducted since 2006 by the research Team of Chris Thaiss in the University of California, the responses of 38 educational organizations from 27 countries to the investigation are analyzed. The current situation of teaching on the academic writing at home and abroad, and the teaching objectives and curriculum provision of the academic writing course in the worldwide college teaching are discussed, in order to enlighten the academic writing course in China.

Keywords—*academic writing; teaching objectives; curriculum provision*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, under the guidance of the College English Test 4 and 6, the leading position of English for general purpose in the college English education has never been shaken. The English for general purpose relates to the simple language learning, in order to improve students' basic ability in listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the turn of the century, Hu Zhuanglin^[1] and Zhang Zhenbang^[2] propose the meaning of academic English on the college English teaching. The competition between the English for general purpose and the academic English has begun in colleges since then. Different from the English for general purpose, the academic English trains students' ability in English application and teaches students how to use language in major learning and future work. In October 2010, the Outline of the National Program for Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development was formally issued, proposing "train the international talents that have an international view, thoroughly understand international norms and participate in the international affairs and competition" and guiding the college English reform. A Guide to College English Teaching newly issued by the Ministry of Education in 2016 brings the

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academic English in the contents of college English teaching, proposing "the course of English for specific purpose (ESP) takes the English use field as the orientation, in order to strengthen students' ability in using English to conduct the professional and academic exchange and work, at the same time improve students' academic and professional quality". Since then, the academic English has won a place in the college English teaching of our country.

As an important index of academic ability, the academic writing ability can effectively "reflect the learners' comprehensive language ability"^[3:29], and reflect students' level in "professional and academic exchange" and "academic quality".

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING AT HOME

Academic writing is a branch of academic English teaching and research as well as an important part of writing teaching and research. The academic writing teaching refers to writing practice that centers on academic discourse, involving article type, text structure, language feature, data collection and reference citations, etc. In China, Shu Dingfang^[4] introduces the University of Nottingham Ningbo China established in 2004 completely adopts the teaching model of the University of Nottingham in Britain and introduces the academic English and provides the academic writing teaching. Later, it is more striking that the Reference Frame of College English Teaching in Shanghai (on Trial) issued by Shanghai Municipal Party Committee in 2013 stipulates "the general course of English for Academic Purpose (EAP) shall be required course". Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and Shanghai College English Instruction Committee have organized five trainings for teachers of EAP^[5]. Key universities of "985" and "211" and universities in developed areas in Shanghai provide the courses of EAP. The courses are provided for students with a higher English level through placement test; some colleges specially provide EAP course in majors like medicine, finance and economics. In the courses of EAP, the academic writing becomes one of the skills trained through teaching activities.

Since China has the “low efficiency of the writing teaching”^[3:29], the current academic writing teaching shall be researched.

III. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING AT ABROAD

In foreign countries, because the number of international students has increased since the 1960s, America and Britain conduct the language training and provide language support for them to adapt to the professional learning. The language training refers to the application-oriented teaching of EAP and causes the research on academic language teaching, the scope of which includes the theory and practice, in order to guide the academic language teaching. The academic writing mainly involves the teaching method, discourse analysis and construction and writing practice.

The research team of Chris Thaiss in the University of California has conducted an international research (International WAC/WID Mapping Project) on the academic writing since 2006. The project has collected the responses of 38 teaching organizations from 27 countries, investigating the teaching organizations’ historical development, scale, characteristics, students’ structure and the theoretical basis of writing course, financial situation, teachers’ structure, curriculum provision, students’ feedback, success and challenges, etc. This paper organizes the responses collected in the project, in order to enlighten the development of academic writing in China.

IV. THE WORLDWIDE ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE

In the responses to the academic writing received by the research team of International WAC/WID Mapping Project, the countries that provide the course of academic writing scatter around the world, including Asia, Europe, North America, South America, Africa and Oceania. Some countries like Britain, America, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa provide the academic writing in native language (English), some like China and Egypt provide the academic writing with foreign language; some countries like Argentina and France provide the course of academic writing with native language (non-English); some countries such as Denmark, Austria, Brazil and India provide the course of academic writing in native language and foreign language or official language. Different teaching organizations in each country retain characteristics of their own. However, the purpose of the course and the curriculum provision are explicit.

A. *The Purpose of Academic Writing Course*

There are three purposes to provide the academic writing course worldwide: First, improve language competence through academic writing; second, improve academic quality and writing ability through academic writing; third, take academic writing as an important means of professional learning.

First, the teaching of academic writing to improve language ability mainly appears in: 1) the teaching organizations with a complicated language situation or students’ structure on campus. The universities use the

language application in academic writing course to help students to remove language barrier, such as Université libre de Bruxelles/The Free University of Brussels in Belgium. A total of 29% of students in the university comes from abroad, while students at home have different French levels because of the absence of united entrance examination or different regions; 2)The academic writing course provided by language colleges. The courses are provided for students of language major, to promote language acquisition, such as Xi’an International Studies University in China. The characteristic of the university is foreign language education. All majors related to language provide the writing courses (the language of writing depends on the major), in order to improve students’ language ability.

Second, at present, universities in the majority of countries and areas train students’ academic quality and writing quality through the academic writing course, such as Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Columbia, England, France and America. The writing ability is regarded as one of the objectives of student training in these universities. For example, in the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, students whose writing level cannot meet the demands of teaching program are regarded as having a problem. Teachers providing writing guidance for students are to “fix the problem”^[6]; besides, the University of California, Davis in America attaches great importance to the course of academic writing, because “These colleges make the writing process a priority at all levels of instructions...”^[7]. Students’ writing ability becomes the evaluation criteria of university ranking.

Third, some universities take the academic writing as the means of professional learning, including Argentina, Canada and Egypt, etc. For example, in Argentina, the Universidad de Buenos Aires provides the course of academic writing for students of biology major and takes writing as the resource of learning courses in biology major, in order to know about the professional knowledge, train the professional cognition ability and strategy and build the disciplinary knowledge.

B. *The Setting of Academic Writing Courses*

1) *Writing depends on reading*: Different purposes in providing the academic writing courses lead to various curriculum provisions. However, the academic writing must depend on reading. Reading is the essential and conventional input path of writing. Reading makes students know about the core elements of academic writing, such as the features of language, text structure and text type, in order to build the text.

Many universities worldwide take the academic writing as an independent course, but text reading becomes the learning resources of writing. For example, in the University of Wollongong in Australia, on the writing course, the writing practice of texts (such as summary, report and adaptation) is realized through critical reading and discussion of sample texts. Besides, universities combine academic reading with writing, which are taught simultaneously. For example, in the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente of Columbia, in the reading chapters, teachers provide students with academic reading materials, and the theories or skills obtained from

reading materials will be applied to explain the academic writing.

2) *Types to provide the writing course*: The curriculum provision refers to the setting and arrangement of courses, involving the plan, performance and evaluation of courses^[8]. The curriculum provision of academic writing worldwide comprises three types:

a) *Academic writing courses provided for all students in the school*: These courses are not provided for special majors, but provided for students of all majors at the same grade or at the same level, such as the University of California, Davis in America, the Universidad Sergio Arboleda in Columbia, and the Alpen-Adria Universitat Klagenfurt in Austria and the University of Aalberta in Canada.

Instead of being designed for special majors, these courses are provided to improve the language or writing level. They are often provided for students of lower grades or students whose language and writing ability fails to meet the course demands. Therefore, the classification of students' language or writing ability must be prior to the course provision, such as the University of California, Davis in America. The school grades all students' writing level through a timed essay examination, AWPE (Analytical Writing Placement Examination) to provide academic writing courses at different levels.

The composition of teachers who participate in the course teaching in schools is different, but without exception, the language teachers participate. Some universities completely depend on language teachers. In some universities, the language teachers take the lead and the specialized teachers collaborate to jointly complete the teaching tasks in course contents and course evaluation.

b) *Academic writing courses provided for students of special major and departments or specific students*: These academic writing courses are provided for special majors. According to the requirements of students in different majors, the academic writing ability required in the future career or learning research for students in special majors are trained. For example, the Université Stendhal, Grenoble in France specially provides the writing courses for students major in humanities (including language, literature and communication), in order to meet students' requirements in taking social activities related to humanities; the University of Madras in India divides students according to the subject nature and sets academic writing courses with different contents according to different requirements of major; the University of Copenhagen in Denmark specially teaches thesis writing for postgraduates who write thesis.

Majority of the teachers teaching these courses are professional teachers. They assume all the writing teaching. Or, some universities invite language teachers to participate in the arrangement of course contents and the language guidance.

c) *Provide guidance of academic reading for students who have a clear requirement in writing*: These courses are provided for students who have an explicit and pressing

demand in writing. The number of students taking the course is limited, the learning time is disperse, the learning objectives are diversified and the writing ability is uneven.

With the above characteristics, the courses are taught by the writing centers established by universities. For example, the Oxford Brookes University and Coventry University in England guides students in learning of various forms and characteristic contents for students through Centre for Academic Writing (CAW), including one-to-one guidance and seminar, the guidance on writing homework and writing training on the basis of students' demands; the Queensland University of Technology in Australia improves students' writing ability through workshop and one-to-one writing consulting.

The composition of teachers in the center for writing includes: First, no full-time teachers but part-time language or professional teachers exist in the center for writing, and the courses are arranged rationally according to the time of teachers and students; second, the center for writing has a perfect teaching body and management system.

V. ENLIGHTENMENT ON THE WRITING TEACHING OF EAP IN CHINA

The discussion on the teaching objectives of academic writing and the curriculum provision worldwide enlightens the teaching of EAP in China:

Make the teaching objective of EAP clear. Universities at all levels shall clearly know about the students' structure and levels and the teaching objectives. According to the characteristics and requirements, combine English (or language) learning with academic activities and give play to the advantages of academic writing in improving students' language acquisition, thinking development, academic quality, knowledge construction and writing skills and establish appropriate academic writing courses.

Make the best of the relationship between reading and writing. The language feature of academic texts, the text structure and generic features shall be concrete and visual through the guidance on reading to make the writing practice operational.

Reasonably establish the teaching body of academic writing. Language teachers in universities shall realize their advantages in language; text and writing skills analyze mentally and have a creative spirit. At the meantime, they shall excavate the role of professional teachers in professional vocabularies, context and material, and cooperate with professional teachers in the academic writing courses.

VI. CONCLUSION

When college English turns to EAP, in the establishment of academic writing courses, we shall first make the purpose explicit and make its value conform to the objectives of higher education and the characteristics of school. Besides, we must value the design of academic writing courses and give full play to the function of academic reading in leading-in,

interpretation and model, bringing in diversified models of curriculum to advance the teaching practice of writing.

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