

BOOK REVIEW



THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN ACADEMIC WRITING IN EUROPE

Ramón Plo Alastrué and Carmen Pérez-Llantada (Eds.). ENGLISH AS A SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH LANGUAGE. DEBATES AND DISCOURSES: ENGLISH IN EUROPE, Volume 2 (2015), Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. 366 pp., ISBN 9781501501111 (Electronic), ISBN: 9781614517498 (HB).

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A review of available literature regarding the role and function of English in academic settings reveals that the English language maintains the position of being the lingua franca used for communication among speakers of languages other than English (House, 2003; Mauranen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2005). Moreover, there is strong support for the idea that the English language is an essential tool enabling the exchange of academic and scientific content across languages and cultures (Kachru, 2009; Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada, & Swales, 2010).

The volume *English as a Scientific and Research Language* is the result of the likewise-titled conference, the second in a series of five consecutive international conferences held in Zaragoza (Spain) as part of the project “English in Europe: Opportunity or Threat”, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and running from January 2013 to October 2014. The main objective of the project was to evaluate the role of the English language in different domains (business, higher education, research, etc.) across various locations and settings in Europe. Similarly, the conference “English as a Scientific and Research Language” discussed the role and status of English in academic and research settings in different fields.

A total of 15 authors who presented their papers at the conference submitted their chapters that now comprise this exceptional volume. The book consists of

three parts, each pursuing one of the three scenarios of communication exchanges and social interactions occurring in academic and research settings supported and enabled by the English language: 1) the “socio-cultural”, 2) the “discourse community”, and 3) the “language policy/language planning”. A common aim evident in the chapters is that they examine and discuss the extent to which multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks and analytical methods (both quantitative and qualitative) may aid the understanding of the role of English in contemporary European settings.

Part 1 starts with the editor’s introduction to the whole book whereas the subsequent chapters in it pursue the “socio-cultural” scenario and the papers focus on culture-specific standpoints as well as various cultural approaches to the role of English as a medium in both scientific and science communication. The difference between the two is evident in the fact that the former is addressing a specialised audience and the latter a rather non-specialised audience.

In the chapter “Towards an epistemological monoculture: Mechanisms of epistemicide in European research publication”, Karen Bennett shows that the primary discursive mechanisms (translation, revision, editing), aimed at creating a unified norm of English for academic purposes, actually yield an epistemological monoculture eliminating alternatives. After analysing and presenting discursive and non-discursive mechanisms, she concludes that English academic discourse is an excellent example of “discursive formation” identified by Foucault as constituting both the object it explores and constraining the range of things to be said about it (2002: 34-85). The second chapter, “Citing outside the community? An investigation of the language of bibliography in top journals” by Ruth Breeze, explores the extent to which cultural diversity in academic writing, within the social sciences especially, is sacrificed because journals tend to cite publications in English only. Based on the analysis of 83 articles from ten issues of an English-medium research journal, the author shows that articles published in a language other than English are rarely cited in indexed journals, which seems to lead to an English-only academic world. Claus Gnutzmann, Jenny Jakisch and Frank Rabe in “Resources for publishing in English: Strategies, peers and techniques” explore the extent to which resources are being used by multilingual researchers. By interviewing German researchers, the authors of this chapter argue that researchers with an L1 other than English can benefit from learning and writing strategies, peer-review and various writing techniques developed by non-natives of English just as much as when they rely on English natives as long as resources are deployed properly. In the final chapter of Part 1, “Language policy in web-mediated scientific knowledge dissemination: A case study of risk communication across genres and languages”, Marina Bondi explores the relationship between language choice and communicative genres in the dissemination of expert scientific knowledge. The case study presented in the chapter focuses on food risk communication and it shows that rather than choosing a particular national/international variety of a language for the dissemination of risk factors,

authors, editors and publishers tend to opt for English thus enhancing its dominance in scientific writing.

In Part 2, the “discourse community” scenario is presented. The primary focus is on the effects of English-only research publishing, a common practice in almost all European contexts where researchers with a different L1 background want to internationalise their research. A rather prominent problem occurring within this area is that researchers who are not native speakers of English do not face only the challenge of conducting and validating their research, but also of disseminating it via Anglophone publishers.

In the first chapter in Part 2, “On cross-cultural variation in the use of some text-organizing devices in research articles”, Renata Povolna explores whether there is cross-cultural variation in the use of conjuncts (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). Based on two specialised corpora of research articles (Anglo-American academic texts and academic texts from the Czech discourse community), the author shows which semantic relations tend to be expressed overtly by conjuncts and which semantic classes of conjuncts contribute to the interactive and dialogic character of written academic discourse. Based on a corpus of 120 samples written in English and Spanish, Sonia Oliver in “Spanish authors dealing with hedging or the challenges of scholarly publication in English L2” explores the relationship between the Spanish language and 3 main genres in scientific discourse (the research paper, the case report and the book review) in order to describe and analyse hedging expressions and attitude markers from a cross-linguistic (English vs. Spanish) and cross-disciplinary (medicine vs. linguistics) approach. Based on various text types and linguistic aspects, in the chapter “Academic writing in English in comparison: Degree adverbs, connecting adverbials and contrastive/concessive markers in the ChemCorpus and comparable data-bases”, Josef Schmied explores the differences between academic texts written by natives and non-natives. Along with recommendations regarding teaching techniques, the chapter suggests the possibility of introducing a (Non-native) Standard European Academic English. Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova in “Cross-cultural variation in citation practices: A comparative analysis of citations in Czech English-medium and international English-medium linguistics journals”, investigates the differences between citation practices based on a corpus of linguistic research articles from two journals. One of the aims is to identify the degree to which Czech authors have adopted citation conventions dominant in English academic discourse. The research indicates that Czech authors try to find a balance between English and Czech resources when referring to them in their own writing. In the final chapter in Part 2, “Peer reviewers’ recommendations for language improvement in research writing”, Ana Bocanegra-Valle examines a corpus of peer reviews from 119 contributions by Anglophone and non-Anglophone scholars to an English-medium journal. Particular attention is paid to the outcome of the review regarding language use in the manuscripts. The final

aim is to determine the extent to which English language influences acceptance or rejection of an article submitted for publication in international journals.

Part 3 examines the “language policy/language planning” scenario focusing on academics’ perceptions and attitudes to English as a shared language as well as to their native and other foreign languages, which might also serve as *lingua francas*. The papers explore the extent to which language policies may be affected by shifting attitudes and perceptions regarding English as a shared language for international research. In addition, the authors in this last part offered suggestions directed at both methodology and pedagogy of teaching and learning languages for academic and research purposes.

The first chapter in this part, “English as a *lingua franca* in linguistics? A case study of German linguists’ language use in publications” by Jennifer Schluer, shows that scholars are guided by three factors (the target audience, the object of research and their own language competence) when deciding which language to use for the publication of their own research. Based on interviews with 16 linguists at a German university but of three different linguistic backgrounds (English, German and Romance), the author concluded that the three factors identified as crucial represent great hurdles for the scholars of German and Romance studies. Maria Kuteeva in “Academic English as ‘nobody’s land’: The research and publication practices of Swedish academics”, presents the findings from two surveys conducted among scholars at major Swedish universities. Interestingly enough, the participants in the research did not regard themselves as disadvantaged in the world of the academia because of their non-native status; they believe to be full members of their respective academic communities, they see English as a *lingua franca* and they state that Swedish is more adequate for publications exploring topics of a local character. Laura-Mihaela Muresan and Mariana Nicolae in “Addressing the challenge of publishing internationally in a non-Anglophone academic context: Romania – a case in point”, investigate the internationalisation trends in the Romanian academia in comparison to the perceptions of Romanian researchers and journal editors. Despite the small scale of the study and the fact that it is restricted to mainly one academic community, the conclusions do impose the necessity of further revisions in the institutional framework to provide scholars with higher proficiency in the use of English for academic writing. With the aim to explore prevalent attitudes to English-medium instruction (EMI) in Croatia, Branka Drljača Margić and Tea Žeželić conducted a questionnaire-based study among 177 Rijeka University (UNIRI) MA students. In their chapter “The implementation of English-medium instruction on Croatian higher education: Attitudes, expectations and concerns”, they show that the large majority of the respondents believe that either no or few university courses should be in English as they are sceptical about the quality of the teaching and they fear EMI would be time-consuming and thus affect their grades. Last but not least, the respondents fear that Croatian might in time become inadequate as a medium of transferring knowledge. In the final chapter of this volume, “Teaching English as a

lingua franca in a multilingual environment at the academic level”, Joanna Lewińska explores the role of English as a medium of communication among non-natives of English who share English as a language of academic instruction but come from different cultural backgrounds. Based on a study conducted among Polish university students with the aim of exploring their attitudes to native and non-native teachers of English, the author comes to the conclusion that the teaching approaches designed for multilingual learners should not only include the linguistic needs of students, but also meet the needs of heterogeneous groups of students as students represent different linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds.

The volume *English as a Scientific and Research Language* provides three interdependent yet convergent scenarios representing the role of English in academic writing. All the chapters clearly show that the current position of English in Europe is very complex and much more research will have to be directed at determining not only the role of English for academic purposes, but also methodological guidelines as well as a relevant pedagogical approach to help non-native scholars in all disciplines to become more proficient in English and thus gain a better position in disseminating their work in an international context.

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