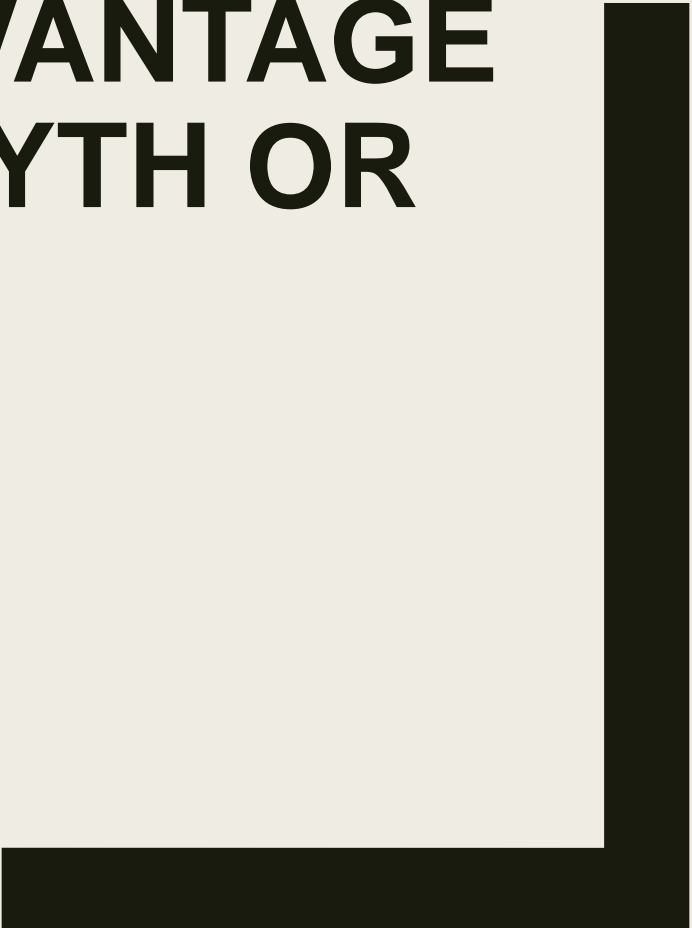# THE LINGUISTIC DISADVANTAGE OF EAL SCHOLARS: MYTH OR REALITY?

John Flowerdew

Lancaster University &
Birkbeck, University of London

Introduction

- research on writing for scholarly publication mainly focussed on EAL writers

- implicit understanding that this group may face different difficulties from L1 writers

- English is not their native language

- PRISEAL: *Publishing and Presenting Research Internationally: Issues for Speakers of English as an Additional Language*

- many studies focussed on the particular linguistic difficulties of EAL writers and how EAL writers may seek to overcome them (e.g. Swales 1990; Flowerdew, 2000; Ammon, 2007; Lillis and Curry, 2010)

- new journal – *Journal of English for Research Publication Purposes*

Hyland (2016)

- Hyland (2016) "*Academic publishing and the myth of linguistic injustice*"

- Native-Speakers of English encounter the same difficulties as Non-Natives when writing for publication

- requires "deliberate learning" by both Native and Non-Native-Speakers

- Native and Non-Native writers on a level playing field

- more significant disadvantages such as '"physical, scholarly, and financial isolation"

Hyland (2016) (cont.)

- *"framing publication problems as a crude Native vs Non-Native polarization functions to demoralize EAL writers and ignores the very real writing problems experienced by many L1 English scholars"*

- *"assertions that EAL authors have greater difficulties in writing than their Native English counterparts are* **largely speculative**—*while self-reports tell us it is, we just don't know if it is the case or not"*

- **"largely speculative"?**

- **"we just don't know"?**

- **self evident? – maybe not to everyone**

Hyland (2016) (cont.)

- *"[A]lthough the idea of Native-Speaker might imply the advantages gained by having internalized the language through 'natural acquisition,' rather than through deliberate learning, academic English is no one's first language"*

- *"… 'Nativespeakerhood' refers more accurately to the acquisition of syntactic and phonological knowledge as a result of early childhood socialization and not competence in writing, which requires prolonged formal education"*

- *"We don't learn to write in the same way that we learn to speak, but through years of schooling"*

Problematic issues in Hyland's argument

- **first**, Native-Speakers <u>are</u> likely to have received the "lengthy formal education" in English Hyland refers to, whereas EAL writers will have spent most time learning to write at school in their L1

- **second**, Hyland is too dismissive of what he refers to as the acquisition of "syntactic and phonological knowledge"
  - *dismisses "syntax" as not relevant in this debate*
  - *underestimates what he refers to as "syntax"*

Problematizing "syntax"

- as Hyland concedes, syntax is naturally acquired by Native-Speakers

- it follows: additional burden here for the EAL writer who would have to devote many hours of schooling to consciously learn this system

- reducing the language to syntax to massively underestimate the domain of the language competence that is naturally acquired in both informal and formal settings by mother tongue users

- syntax refers to language form

- also need to consider meaning and use

- subtle features of meaning and use attaching to syntactic forms

- naturally acquired by the L1 writer in the home and at school

- takes many years for the EAL learner to be formally taught

Meaning and use

- functional categories vary according to specific disciplines

- L1 writers will have a broad (non-discipline-specific) command of these language functions before embarking on disciplinary writing

- not a case of these functions operating only in specific disciplines

- Yes - discipline-specificity, but also broad general competence

- L1 writers likely develop such general competence in the home, in reading media materials, and during schooling

- EAL writer more likely have to learn this common core in the classroom

Some examples of what I mean concerning meaning and use

Example 1: modality

- important function in scientific research articles "identifying the appropriate level of claim" (Myers, 1990)

- likely disciplinary variation

- in general terms writers will need to have a good command of the modality system in English

- L1 writers acquire general command of this system through everyday life and schooling

- L1 writers later have to develop a command of the particular ways modality is used in their target discipline and genre of the research article

- but they would start out with a general competence in the use of modality

- EAL writers would need to develop such a competence formally, when they learn the language

Example 2: the verb system (tense, aspect, voice, transitivity)

- sentence fragments analysed by Williams (1999) in his study of results sections of medical research articles:
  1. *The results of this analysis **are given** in Table 3 …* (simple present tense passive)
  2. *… since by design **we used** a lower dose of the nephrotoxin …* (simple past tense active)
  3. *A significant correlation **was found** between PLI and nodal status in the TNM classification …* (simple past tense passive)
  4. *Proteinuria in Adriamycin-treated animals **evolved** from a value at two weeks of …* (simple past tense active (intransitive/middle voice))
- the range of verb forms (in bold above) performing different functions:
  1. *referring the reader to a table*
  2. *describing a procedure*
  3. *reporting a specific result*
  4. *describing a process*

Example 2: the verb system (cont.)

- both L1 and the EAL writers have to learn how to <u>use</u> these patterns
- L1 writer at an advantage over the EAL writer:
  - *command of this verb system before coming to these discipline-specific uses*
  - *able to intuitively make judgments as to the appropriacy of these various patterns*
- *EAL writer less confident*
  - *learned in school, but not much opportunity to apply in real-world uses*
  - *may need to seek assistance*

Example 3: lexis

- discipline-specific terminology needed by both L1 and EAL writers
- also considerable academic vocabulary not specific to any particular discipline
- Coxhead's academic word list https://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist .
  - not disciplinary vocabulary but general academic vocabulary
  - frequent e.g.s:
    - *area; benefit; define; environment; factor; issue; research; vary*
  - less frequent e.g.s:
    - *adjacent; forthcoming; integrity; levy; notwithstanding; panel; persistent; so-called*

Example 3: Lexis (cont.)

- also referred to as *semi-technical* or *sub-technical* vocabulary
  - *occurs frequently across academic disciplines*
  - *also belongs to vocabulary of general educated person*
  - *but EAL user would have to learn these items*
- many discipline-specific uses of these items metaphorical extensions of core meanings
  - *e.g.* benefit(s) *in the context of social security payments*
  - *e.g.* integrity *(of a system) in the context of information technology*

  knowledge of core meaning may assist comprehension of discipline-specific meaning

Example 4: collocation, colligation and lexical bundles

- high levels of competencies of only the very advanced EAL user
- average EAL writers may struggle
- EAL writing often contains non-standard collocations
  - *Li & Schmid (2009)*
    - "(their longitudinal study of MA ELT student) reinforces previous findings that learners tend to rely too heavily on a limited repertoire of phrases, which indicates that pedagogies need to be developed which can help learners to build up more diverse phrasal lexicons"
  - *Pérez-Llantada (2015)*
    - "L2 academic writers find it particularly difficult to acquire Native-like formulaic sequences"
- L1 writers confident of appropriacy and accuracy
- EAL writers need to check with a dictionary or corpus or ask an expert writer
- some EAL writers resort to language re-use (Flowerdew and Li, 2007)

Example 5: Connected discourse

- reviewer comment cited by Moreno (2012:15):

    – *It would be useful to have the article carefully read by a Native English speaker to check for consistency in register, **appropriate use of anaphoric reference** and transfer from Spanish. (emphasis added)*

- L1 writers likely to have developed this discourse feature when writing essays etc. at school and university

Example 6: Cultural style

- EAL writer's cultural style may contrast with that of the standard Anglophone rhetorical style
- appropriate cultural style in an EAL writer's L1 may be problematic in English (Moreno, 2012)
- the way EAL writers perform certain rhetorical functions in their writing may vary (Pérez-Llantada, 2012)
- Spanish writers:
  - *"the construction of persuasive arguments, the degree of critical stance, the construction of an authorial persona through personal pronouns, or the use of implicit and explicit modes of criticism" (Pérez-Llantada, ibid)*
- Polish writers (Duszak, 1994):
  - *comparative study* of *introductions of research articles in language studies*
  - *variation between the amount of information revealed and amount of face work*
  - *"there exist potential areas of (in)compatibility between the two writing styles"*

Example 7: Janus-like academic identities

- need to:
  - *write and publish in both English and L1*
  - *cultivate two academic identities rather than just one*
  - *juggle two sets of values and expectations (Casanave,1998; Ling Shi, 2003)*
  - *keep identities apart (Breeze, 2015; Hewings et al., 2010;)*

Summary

- there is a certain set of challenges in writing for publication which are shared by EAL and L1 writers

- EAL writers have an additional set of linguistic challenges, which do not apply (to such an extent) to L1 writers

- these challenges may or may not be the most important variable in achieving successful publication

- such variables are likely to depend on the individual situation, including linguistic competence

Conclusion (implications)

- FOR EAL WRITERS
- is it not demeaning for EAL writers to be told by an L1 writer (who has never written or tried to publish a research article in a second or third language) that there is a level playing field (when they know there is not)?
- FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE POLICY
- Hyland a very influential leader in the field
- (some) people are taking his argument at face value
- danger of new orthodoxy?
- this could be very damaging:
  - *EAL writers may be encouraged* to *underestimate the need for linguistic competence*
  - *university administrators may cut down on provision of courses in EAP and ERPP and other support systems such as writing centres*

Conclusion – affordances of EAL writers

- don't want to perpetuate a so-called deficit model

- there are many strengths that EAL scholars have that L1 scholars do not have

- the privilege of the non-native speaker (Kramsch, 2003)
    - *e.g. (unlike many Anglophone applied linguists) they can communicate effectively in more than one language – "multiple possibilities for self-expression in language"*
    - *e.g. they can see through spurious, attention-seeking arguments such as those of Hyland*

- Thank you -

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