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## ENGLISH IN THE DISCIPLINES: ARGUMENTS FOR SPECIFICITY<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In 2012 Hong Kong totally reformed its educational system by removing a year from students' school experience and adding it to their time at university. For those of us responsible for English language provision it presented an opportunity to reconsider the kind of English that we should be teaching and how we might create courses which best prepared students for their studies. At Hong Kong University (HKU) we decided to redesign our courses to focus on "English in the Discipline". This recognizes that because the conventions of academic communication differ considerably across disciplines, identifying the particular language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target groups becomes central to teaching English in universities. Teachers therefore had to devise courses around the principle of 'specificity'. In this paper I will discuss something of this process, but mainly focus on evidence supporting the idea of specificity, exploring the ways that genre features, personal bio claims, assignment types and tutor expectations differ across fields.

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### Key words

specific EAP, genre, assignment types, tutor expectations.

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## Sažetak

Hong Kong je 2012. godine u potpunosti reformisao obrazovni sistem ukidanjem jedne godine srednjoškolskog obrazovanja i njenim prenošenjem na univerzitetski nivo. Nama zaduženima za nastavu engleskog jezika to je pružilo priliku da ponovo razmotrimo koju vrstu engleskog treba da predajemo i kako bismo mogli da osmislimo kurseve koji će na najbolji način pripremiti studente za studiranje. Na Univerzitetu u Hong Kongu (UHK) odlučili smo da preoblikujemo kurseve i usredsredimo se na “engleski u naučnim disciplinama”. Ovim smo uvažili činjenicu da, pošto se konvencije akademske komunikacije znatno razlikuju po naučnim disciplinama, definisanje određenih jezičkih svojstava, diskursnih praksi i komunikativnih veština ciljnih grupa postaje ključno za nastavu engleskog jezika na univerzitetima. Nastavnici su zato morali da osmisle kurseve na principu “specifičnosti”. U ovom radu govorim o tom procesu, ali se uglavnom bavim dokazima koji podržavaju ideju o specifičnosti istraživanjem načina na koje se svojstva žanrova, tvrdnje u radnim biografijama, vrste zadataka i očekivanja nastavnika razlikuju po naučnim poljima.

## Ključne reči

specifičan engleski za akademske potrebe, žanr, vrste zadataka, očekivanja nastavnika.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

What sets English for academic purposes (EAP) apart from general language study is its focus on specific, purposeful uses of language. Cummins (1982) refers to specific purposes texts as using ‘context-reduced’ language which relies less heavily for its coherence on an immediate context than the language of everyday interaction. Students are studying English for a particular practical need, which means curriculum designers study target language features in specific academic contexts, and teachers focus on these features in their classrooms. The idea of specificity, then, has come to influence EAP, the kinds of data researchers collect, the ways they collect it, and the theories they use to understand it. In this paper I want to discuss the application of these ideas in the context of a major curriculum overhaul in Hong Kong, but principally I will provide some evidence for the idea of specificity which underpins them.

## 2. UNIVERSITY ENGLISH AND HONG KONG CURRICULUM REFORM

First, I will provide some background. In September 2012, universities in Hong Kong launched a four-year undergraduate curriculum to replace the existing three-year system. This reduced the secondary school experience by one year and refocused on a more student-oriented approach to undergraduate education. The change is a major shift in educational philosophy. It is an attempt to move away from a specialized British undergraduate curriculum and adopt a more holistic approach to the educational experience. Instead of selecting their major on arrival, students enrol in a broad disciplinary area and take a variety of first-year courses before they choose a major. This first-year 'Common Core Curriculum' is a range of optional courses designed to facilitate the transition from school to university and to provide students with a humanistic education. This is a huge leap in the dark – very few countries have totally restructured their secondary and tertiary education systems in such a radical way all at once. Almost 30,000 new students entered university in 2012, admitted under two different systems, following two different curricula and spanning two different time frames. This was a considerable challenge to all teachers involved.

English is the medium of instruction in HK universities, and central to students' study and academic success, although students often find study in English to be a struggle. A major part of the new curriculum, therefore, is the provision of English. At HKU this was increased from 6 to 12 credits, boosting class time from 48 hours over two courses to 80 with an additional requirement of 120 out of class learning hours. The changes encouraged us to think about the kind of English that we should be teaching and the kind of English which would most benefit our students. At the University of Hong Kong our answer to this question was to help them in their academic studies by taking the idea of specificity seriously. Half the credits students take in English were going to be in the form of 'English in the Discipline'. This recognizes that, because academic communication conventions differ hugely across disciplinary communities, identifying the particular language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target cultures becomes central to teaching English in universities.

To prepare for their specific courses, all 3,000 first-year students at HKU now take a Core University English (CUE) course for 6 credits. This is a programme designed to bridge the gap between school-based English and the disciplinary studies students will encounter in their second year and beyond. Making a virtue of heterogeneity, classes are deliberately composed of students from a range of faculties and programmes and courses ask students to draw on content material from their common core courses in developing their understanding of spoken and written texts. There are obviously difficulties in identifying anything which might be considered a 'core' in the language used across the university, but here we want students to see that writing at university is very different from writing at school.

We want them to take responsibility for clarity in their writing and give them the resources to do this. This means helping them to see that academic writing in English, compared with other contexts and languages, tends to:

- be more explicit about its structure and purpose;
- use more citations to support arguments;
- focus on actions rather than actors;
- use fewer rhetorical questions than students tend to use in school essays;
- be intolerant of digressions;
- be cautious in making claims;
- package processes as things by presenting actions as noun phrases;
- spell out steps in an argument and connections between sentences with metadiscourse.

So in this course we introduce students to central concepts like nominalisation, impersonalisation, hedging, citation, and so on.

Thus CUE is a 'bridging course' in English which provides students with a good understanding of general academic English and the abilities they need to make the best use of the instruction they will receive in their specific courses. After the first-year core curriculum, students select and study for their majors and take one of the 30 new 'English in the Discipline' (ED) courses which are offered in the second, third or fourth year depending on the preference of the client faculty. Examples include the following:

- Academic English for Exercise Health Students
- Communication Course for Real Estate & Built Environment Students
- Language and Style of Narrative Journalism
- Technical English for Industrial and Manufacturing Systems Engineering
- English for Clinical Clerkship for Chinese Medicine Students
- Academic English for Applied Child Development Students

These focus on the specificity of the language students need to successfully navigate through their disciplinary courses. These ED courses either run parallel with a particular course or collect courses together from a particular discipline. The idea behind this is to try and offer students a more discipline-sensitive approach to English through collaboration with faculties and research-informed course design. An example will be provided in section 4 below.

### 3. EVIDENCE FOR SPECIFICITY

Having provided a sketch of the context, I will offer some evidence for the value of a specific approach. Essentially, my argument is that each discipline draws on different lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical resources to create specialized knowledge. Wignell, Martin, and Eggins (1993), for instance, characterize the sciences as reworking experience technically by establishing a range of specialist terms which are ordered to explain how things happen or exist. This technicality is then used to create further technicality through defining, classifying, and explaining. The humanities, like history and philosophy on the other hand, employ abstraction rather than technicality, moving from instances to generalizations by gradually shifting away from particular contexts to build ever-more abstract interpretations of events. In other words, literacies are not just tools we pick up and put down as we need them, but are central to community epistemologies and personal identities. This means that students have to deploy a repertoire of literacy practices appropriate to different settings, and gain control over the social meanings and identities that each evokes.

It is, in other words, difficult to separate completely the teaching of specific skills and rhetoric from the teaching of a subject itself because what counts as convincing argument, appropriate tone, persuasive interaction, and so on, is managed for a particular audience. Students do not learn in a cultural vacuum but are judged on their use of discourses that insiders are likely to find effective and persuasive.

In the following discussion I will draw on four very different sources: how the linguistic features used to create a single genre vary across disciplines; how academics seek to project a disciplinary identity in their bios; how the expectations and feedback practices of writing by tutors' in different disciplines differ; and how the writing assignments which confront undergraduate students differ by discipline. While only the last two of these feed directly into the design of our undergraduate programme, all reinforce the importance of specificity as a core principle which informs our understanding of teaching EAP and which underpins our approach to teaching and learning.

#### 3.1. Genre features

First, a massive literature now shows that rhetorical choices vary enormously across disciplines because they express very different epistemological and social practices (e.g. Anderson, Evans, & Harshorn, 2014; Hyland & Bondi, 2006; Swales, 2004). This means that students learn a discipline as they learn its discourses. While the hard-soft distinction is a blunt instrument to elaborate these differences, it helps reveal some of the ways that authoring involves writers relating their rhetorical choices to wider social and academic understandings. Some examples of

these differences are shown in Table 1. These are based on the analysis of features in a corpus of 120 research articles from the 10 leading journals in eight disciplines, comprising 1.4 million words (Hyland, 2004, 2005).

FIELDS	SELF-MENTION	CITATION	SELF-CITATION	HEDGES	BOOSTERS	DIRECTIVES
Arts/Humanities	34.2	11.1	0.4	17.5	6.9	1.2
Science/Engineering	12.1	5.8	0.6	10.25	4.5	2.5

**Table 1.** Selected features across fields (per 1,000 words)

Most predictably, we find that authors in the soft knowledge disciplines intrude into their texts through use of 'I' or 'we' almost three times more frequently than scientists. This allows them to claim authority through personal conviction and to emphasize their contribution. It sends a clear signal of the writer's perspective and distinguishes that perspective from others. But, while self-mention can help construct an authoritative self in the humanities, authors in the hard sciences generally downplay their personal role to establish the objectivity of what they report uncontaminated by human activity. They are concerned with generalizations rather than individuals, and this is done by distancing the writer from interpretations using the passive, dummy 'it' subjects, and attributing agency to inanimate things like tables, graphs or results. So, in subordinating their voice to that of nature, scientists rely on the persuasive force of lab procedures rather than the force of their writing.

Similarly, citation practices also differ enormously, reflecting the extent to which writers can assume a shared context with readers. 'Normal science' (Kuhn, 1970) produces public knowledge through cumulative growth; problems emerge from earlier problems and this enables writers to rely on readers recovering the significance of the research without extensive referencing. They are often working on the same problems and are familiar with the earlier work. In the humanities and social sciences, on the other hand, research is less linear, the literature more dispersed and the readership more heterogeneous, so writers cannot presuppose a shared context to the same extent, but have to build one far more through citation. This also helps account for the much higher proportion of self-citation in the sciences (12.5% of all citations in the sciences compared with 4.3% in the humanities). The linearity of research means that scientists are constantly building on their previous work far more than writers in the soft knowledge fields (cf. Becher & Trowler, 2001).

Table 1 also shows that hedges and boosters index disciplinary practices, with both occurring more frequently in the arts and humanities papers. *Hedges* are devices which withhold complete commitment to a proposition; they imply that a claim is based on plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge, while

*boosters* stress certainty and commitment to statements. Because they represent the writer's direct involvement in a text, they are twice as common in the social sciences than in hard sciences. So hedges indicate the degree of confidence the writer thinks it might be wise to give a claim while opening a discursive space for readers to dispute interpretations. One reason they are more common in the soft fields is that there is less control of variables, more diversity of research outcomes, and fewer clear bases for accepting claims than in the sciences. Writers cannot report research with the same confidence of shared assumptions so papers rely far more on recognizing alternative voices. Arguments have to be expressed more cautiously by using more hedges. But because methods and results are also more open to question, writers also use more boosters in some circumstances to establish the significance of their work against alternative interpretations, using forms like *definitely*, *prove* and *certain* to restrict alternative voices.

In the hard sciences positivist epistemologies mean that the authority of the individual is subordinated to the authority of the text and facts are meant to 'speak for themselves'. This means that writers often disguise their interpretative activities behind linguistic objectivity. Scientists put greater weight on the methods, procedures and equipment used rather than the argument to suggest that results would be the same whoever conducted the research. Less frequent use of hedges and boosters is one way of minimizing the researcher's role, and so is the preference for modals over cognitive verbs as these can more easily combine with inanimate subjects to downplay the person making the evaluation. Modals, then, are one way of helping to reinforce a view of science as an impersonal, inductive enterprise, while allowing scientists to see themselves as discovering truth rather than constructing it.

The final feature reflects the difference between hard and soft knowledge areas regarding the extent to which succinctness and precision are valued, or even possible: directives. These instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer and are expressed through imperatives (like *consider*, *note*, and *imagine*) and obligation modals (such as *must*, *should*, and *ought*). They direct readers to three main kinds of activity:

- **textual acts** direct readers to another part of the text or to another text;
- **physical acts** direct readers how to carry out some action in the real-world;
- **cognitive acts** instruct readers how to interpret an argument, explicitly positioning readers by encouraging them to *note*, *concede* or *consider* some argument in the text.

They are not only more frequent in science texts, but also function differently. So while directives represent a writer's intrusion into a text and might be expected to be more frequent in the soft fields, they are also a potentially risky tactic as they instruct readers to act or see things in a certain way.

If we exclude Philosophy, 60% of directives in the soft knowledge texts direct readers to a reference or table rather than telling them how they should interpret an argument. So examples like these are common:

- (1) See Steuer 1983 for a discussion of other contingencies' effects. (Marketing)
- Look at Table 2 again for examples of behavioristic variables. (Marketing)
- For transcription conventions please refer to the Appendix. (App. Linguistics)

Those in the sciences, on the other hand, largely guide readers explicitly through an argument, emphasizing what they should attend to and the way they should understand it:

- (2) What has to be recognized is that these issues... (Mech. Eng.)
- Consider the case where a very versatile milling machine of type M5... (Elec. Eng.)
- A distinction must be made between cytogenetic and molecular resolution. (Biology)

This is because the linear, problem-oriented nature of the natural sciences enables research to occur within an established framework, allowing authors to presuppose considerable background knowledge among their readers. Arguments can therefore be formulated in a highly standardized code. Moreover, directives facilitate directness, contributing to the succinctness which is valued by both editors and information saturated scientists.

These variations suggest that, although a general academic English programme can go some way to sensitizing students to key rhetorical features of research writing, it can never hope to accommodate the very distinctive ways that disciplines have of seeing and talking about the world. Such differences point to the advantages of seeking to align our courses as closely as possible to these epistemological variations in academic practices.

### 3.2. Disciplinary identity in bios

Another argument for the significance of disciplinary specificity is the different ways in which individuals present a scholarly identity. Clearly this is not directly related to the development of our ED courses, but it does provide an indication of how members of different disciplines understand themselves in relation to their communities. This is, in turn, a powerful indication of the value of treating the university as structured by specific fields of study. It not only points to the very clear dissimilarities in what disciplines value in their members and which individuals aspire to achieve, but also reflects what subject tutors might look for in the ways that students present themselves in their writing and behaviour.

The expression of identity can be most clearly seen in academic bios, a genre where, in 50 to 100 words, academics present a narrative of expertise for

themselves. It is particularly interesting as it sits in stark contrast to the article itself, which has been stripped of identifying information for blind review. In this section I refer to a study of 600 bios, with 200 from leading journals in each of Applied Linguistics, Electrical Engineering, and Philosophy (Hyland & Tse, 2012). The corpus was also stratified by status, using four categories from senior academics to technicians and students.

First we looked at what aspects of themselves writers included, as these show kinds of identities likely to be approved by peers. Table 2 shows that virtually everyone mentioned employment and together with research interests this comprised over half of all moves in the corpus. While there was increasing mention of research, employment, publication and achievements with increasing status, discipline was the most significant influence on what authors included in their bios.

	APP. LING.	ELEC. ENG.	PHILOSOPHY	TOTAL
Employment	16.5	8.3	14.9	13.2
Research	13.1	9.2	8.7	10.3
Publications	6.7	2.1	11.9	6.9
Education	5.1	8.2	4.0	5.8
Achievement	1.5	2.7	0.6	1.6
Community service	1.1	2.2	1.4	1.5
Personal Profile	0.6	1.4	0.8	0.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>40.2</b>

**Table 2.** Acts by disciplines (per 1,000 words)

The biggest disciplinary difference was the weight engineers give to education. For them, this was typically linked with the area of study, thereby demonstrating a specific expertise and insider-competence:

- (3) She received the PhD degree (on thin-oxide technology and novel quasi nonvolatile memory) from the University of California, Berkeley in 1999. Irene Ntoutsis received her PhD in Informatics from the Department of Informatics, University of Piraeus, Greece.

This reflects a hard science apprenticeship-model, where the education of PhD students is also an opportunity to research and publish as part of a team, making education more central to their bios. We also find engineers giving more importance to personal information. Interestingly, almost all engineers mentioned their birthplace and often the year of birth. In contrast, applied linguists crafted identities around their research interests, with claims for credibility through

insider expertise comprising about a third of all acts in their bios. Philosophers, on the other hand, tend to emphasise their publications. Generally these are monographs and involve a greater investment of time than the multiply authored and frenetically paced hard sciences articles, thus perhaps counting for more when constructing a self.

Identity is expressed not only in terms of *what* academics say about themselves, but also about how they say it, and one way of understanding identity in this way is to look at verbs, or process types. Systemic Functional Linguistics recognizes a distinction between *mental* and *material* processes:

- mental processes – verbs relating to sensing (e.g. think, belief, feel);
- material processes – verbs concerned with doing (e.g. work, write, study);
- a third form are *relational* processes and these express *being*.

These choices matter in identity performance so, for example:

- a) 'she is interested in...' (a mental process), constructs the author as an active, thinking being exercising conscious choice in a research interest, whereas
- b) 'she works in the area of....' (a material process), suggests a highly visible and energetic researcher acting on the world, and
- c) 'her research interests are...' (a relational process) is more impersonal, downplaying the author's role to highlight something that belongs to her.

Overall, writers used relational and material processes in 95% of all clauses, stressing what they *are* and what they *do*. This is because bios have something to say about *who the author is*, or rather, how he or she wants to be seen. Other process types are far less significant in this corpus (Table 3). Philosophy, the most individualistic of the three disciplines studied, contained a higher proportion of relational processes, while engineering, the most collaborative, contained the least.

	AL	EE	PHIL	TOTAL
Relational	30.8	23.7	32.6	<b>27.9</b>
Material	23.6	23.6	22.0	<b>23.2</b>
Mental	2.1	0.7	1.4	<b>1.2</b>
Verbal	1.1	1.4	0.7	<b>1.1</b>
Behavioural	0.1	0.0	0.1	<b>0.0</b>
Existential	0.0	0.0	0.1	<b>0.0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57.7</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>53.4</b>

**Table 3.** Process types by discipline (per 1,000 words)

Relational clauses present identity claims as they construe 'being', where a writer claims to *be* something, such as an assistant professor, doctoral student, etc. These claims are strengthened by use of *identifying* over *attributive* choices, particularly among professors, where they are over twice as frequent:

- (4) Bonnie Urciuoli is Professor of Anthropology at Hamilton College (AL)  
She is the author or co-author of over 40 technical papers and is the holder of two patents. (EE)

These choices give a definiteness and uniqueness to what is being claimed. They *identify* the writer by signalling that this is an important part of who they see themselves as. The bios of students and support staff, in contrast, use attributive options to signal class membership rather than a unique identity:

- (5) Sampath is a member of the Institute of Industrial Engineers. (EE)  
He is a Ph.D. student in Teaching English as a Second Language at UBC. (AL)

So status has some impact on identity representation but, once again, it is discipline which is the major influence on choice. Applied linguists often used mental types, representing themselves as thinking academics rather than as intellectual workers grinding out a quota of papers and presentations:

- (6) Her recent work considers the intersections of civic rhetoric and digital spaces. (AL)  
His fascination with computers leads him to examine why some technologies are taken up while others are abandoned. (AL)

While this projects a distinctively intellectual identity to the writer, Engineers used more verbal forms to present themselves as arguers and talkers:

- (7) She is now lecturing at Sanjesh College of Computing and Statistics, Tehran, Iran. (EE)  
He proposes the use of selectively grown epitaxial layers... (EE)

Verbal choices highlight agency, helping to construe the author as an active scholar. The biggest variations, however, were in relational processes. Interestingly, philosophers used identifying relational clauses twice as frequently as linguists and 4 times more than engineers. Explicitly naming themselves as something is obviously key to identity and perhaps reflects the more individualistic ethos in philosophy. Here research represents the creative insights of the author and this is very different to the more humble scientific ideology, which sees results as the collective endeavours of a team using appropriate procedures.

So, while the bio seems a standardized genre with a limited range of options, these apparently bland descriptions are cross-cut by rank and gender but, most

significantly, by discipline. These unconscious and largely neglected identity practices thus, once again, help to reinforce a view of language use which is based on disciplinary specificity and an individual's membership of a rhetorical community.

### 3.3. Tutor expectations

Another major disciplinary difference is tutors' attitudes to writing and feedback. In a study of 20 academics, 5 from each of 4 faculties comprising 8 disciplines, at HKU I found broad differences in both attitudes and practices (Hyland, 2013). All teachers set written assignments – always as assessment and often as the only assessment. But soft knowledge tutors were agreed that this is not just a measure of quality control, but of developing skills of disciplinary argument, as these respondents recognised:

*Writing is absolutely key, it embodies the discipline: the main discipline product. Teaching History is about teaching students to write. What I expect them to gain ultimately, as well as the ability to express themselves, is the ability to engage more effectively with discourses in the past. You can't do that unless you can articulate precisely what the discourse means. (History)*

*I think writing is very important. It reflects the ways which students structure and express their thoughts. So, I am less concerned about correct spelling and grammar, what I am very concerned about is teaching them to write logical essays which take a research question and address it in a structured and thoughtful way with evidence and logical conclusions. (Business)*

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For teachers in the sciences writing was less important, and the fact that students were writing in a second language was often treated as a minor issue:

*If they have problems with language errors, that means they are not working hard enough. They are 21 year olds. I mean they should have a high level of ability already, not just what they have learnt since coming here. When I assess their writing I have to treat everybody equally so grade grammar less, a very small percentage, maybe 5%. (Engineering)*

Looking at the feedback itself, I found it was typically less frequent and more cursory on the science assignments as tutors often just gave ticks or question marks and frequently just a grade. The texts seem hurriedly checked, rather than carefully read. Teachers in the social sciences, however, offered more explicit commentary on language and these comments were largely seen as aspects of disciplinary writing rather than aiming for correct grammar:

*I suppose my feedback focuses on trying to help them clearly state a claim or idea and then how they can develop it in an appropriate style. So, it's about encouraging clarity of thought and clearly defining a question to discuss. (English)*

In contrast, tutors in the hard sciences rarely required drafts and gave no feedback:

*Actually I don't ask for a draft. Their report is an assignment and they are graded on this. If we give them a chance to write a draft, if we correct a draft, we are just giving a grade to our own work. We don't write their exams for them so why write their reports? (Engineering)*

For some academics, especially in the sciences, setting assignments was a way of seeing if students had understood the course and for them feedback had doubtful significance:

*I don't think it makes a lot of difference to be honest. It all depends on the students. Some students will come and talk about it and will go away and change it. Some students seem not to care too much. I guess if the students thought it was helpful more of them would ask for feedback. (Biology)*

In fact, tutors often delegated feedback to teaching assistants, and several did not see improving students' disciplinary literacy as their job at all:

*How helpful is the written feedback for improving students work? I've no idea. I don't teach them how to write. They go to academic writing classes I think. I don't think my feedback would help them to write. (Engineering)*

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Overall, while these comments reflect the ideas of individual faculty members, they nevertheless display clear patterns of attitudes and practices towards writing by tutors acting as community members. Again, there are differences which underpin the need to adopt a specific approach to English language teaching as a way of best meeting the needs of students.

### 3.4. Assignment types

Perhaps specificity is most clearly demonstrated in the *kinds* of writing that students are asked to do. Put succinctly, different fields value different kinds of argument and set different writing tasks, so the humanities and social sciences stress analyzing and synthesizing multiple sources, while the sciences value activity-based skills like describing procedures, defining objects, and planning solutions.

We also know that different fields make use of different genres, so that in their large-scale corpus study of 30 disciplines in UK universities, Nesi and Gardner (2012) found 13 different 'genre families', ranging from case studies through empathy writing to reports. These differ considerably in their social purpose, genre structure and the networks they form with other genres. Even in fairly cognate fields students write quite different texts. In looking at the assignments given to medical students, for instance, Gimenez (2009) found that nursing and midwifery students were given very different writing assignments. Again, this underlines the different ways students are assessed and different expectations of how they should write. In our own courses we find similar discipline-specific assignments such as community health reports, Speech & Hearing Sciences project reports, popular science journal articles, hospital bulletin articles, political science dissertations, and patient case histories.

#### 4. THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Turning from the research back to practice, I have space for just one example of an English in the Discipline course offered by the Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES) at Hong Kong University to show what specificity means in practice.

*English for Clinical Pharmacy* is a new third-year ED course focusing on common spoken and written genres in drug information, and developed in collaboration with colleagues from the faculty of medicine over two years. This represents a massive investment in time and energy and, as we experienced with other collaborations, really depends for its success on imaginative individuals in the client faculty who are able to recognize the value of writing and communication skills to their students. We did, however, seek to avoid team teaching and tandem classes due to the potential for faculty withdrawal and CAES being left to write a new course to replace it. Clearly, because CUE is related to broader academic presentation skills, it is less vulnerable to changes in personnel and the goodwill of faculty members. *English for Clinical Pharmacy*, however, represents a good example of what can be achieved through good relations and mutual respect.

Early in the course we teach specific word knowledge and strategies for learning and applying new terms. This enables students to more easily select the vocabulary and arguments they need to write drug information genres and cite information from different sources to give drug recommendations. Learning is through a drug information project which was jointly devised with the Pharmacy Department. Drug evaluation is a basic part of a pharmacist's career, as many of the documents they write have to be based on some form of drug evaluation. So students, working in pairs, evaluate and recommend two drugs that can be used to treat the same medical condition. To make sure the exercise is meaningful, the drugs assigned to the students are selected by the Pharmacy Department. The

Pharmacy Department also advised us on the writing task – this is a hospital bulletin article – as this is a common genre for clinical pharmacists who are working in a hospital.

Thus the project provides an opportunity for learners to develop and practice useful and highly disciplinary specific research and academic writing skills. They have to search for and select relevant drug information from reliable sources, compare drugs, and write a comparative drug evaluation article for publication in an online pharmacy bulletin. To ensure the authenticity of all this, the project has not only been jointly designed by Pharmacy and English tutors in partnership, but is also co-assessed together.

## 5. LESSONS AND LIMITATIONS

Having run these courses for five years now we are in a better position to assess their shortcomings and the difficulties in implementing them. Overall, we have been pleased with the responses of students to these new classes and for most courses the evaluations have been very positive (between 70% and 80% on student satisfaction questionnaires). One main problem was adjusting the courses to accommodate student workloads for out of class tasks which over-estimated students' abilities. Changes to the materials and tasks have been necessary in some courses and in others we have rethought how we present and practice rhetorical structures which are very new to students.

In the business course, for example, the faculty required only one ED course for the eight majors they offer and, having initially focused on an academic paper where students argued why 'Corporate Social Responsibility is beneficial to a company's performance', we decided to change the focus of the course. This involved broadening the course to help students analyze and evaluate texts so that they were better able to discover criteria for judging good writing and use these in their own writing. The course now focuses on the two genres that are common to all the majors in business (cases and reports) and a third assignment which assesses what students have learnt from the course by asking them to compare these genres. By flipping the classes, the input occurs before each session through a video mini-lecture accessed by students on a course Moodle and designed to get them to reflect and provide short, but thoughtful, responses that can be used by the teacher to initiate class discussions. After class students work on assignments and do follow up online exercises.

While some changes have been made to courses, the most significant issue has been maintaining relationships with client faculties. The most successful collaborations were those entered into and continued on the basis of equality and respect, and these elements are not always present. Teachers have encountered a range of attitudes from enthusiastic cooperation to cold indifference and, in some cases, have experienced what Raimes (1991) once graphically described as 'The

Butler stance': where faculty actively position language teachers as handmaidens to the discipline, expecting them to simply offer the support that faculty thinks is best. In writing of an earlier attempt at collaboration at HKU, for example, Barron (1992) argues that the ontological superiority that science teachers give to scientific facts can make them rigid when negotiating learning tasks and assignments. The divergent philosophies of functionalism in EAP and realism in science, in other words, can be so fundamental as to undermine cooperation and lead to the subordination of EAP to subject content.

Collaboration, in fact, is highly dependent on the support of individuals who may get promoted, leave, take on new responsibilities or otherwise withdraw from involvement in academic literacy cooperation. Recognising that Faculty involvement in ED courses is thus highly vulnerable to staff changes, we developed most of the courses by treating subject teachers as specialist informants on readings and content, rather than as close partners in parallel courses. While we interviewed students, collected course materials, visited classrooms and analysed student written work to get a full picture, we found that the most positive working relationships were those which made least demands on subject teachers.

As a result, many of our course are of the 'composite' type, such as Civil Engineering and Chinese Medicine, where we focus on the literacy of a single discipline rather than a specific course. Only a few are fully integrated *adjunct* arrangements where students take the CAES English course in conjunction with a subject course. Thus in History and Linguistics, for example, students enrol concurrently in the two classes which run parallel with each other and students study related materials. Because students discuss videos of lectures, set texts, and course topics from a literacy perspective this best meets the definition of specificity discussed in this paper and best addresses the literacy demands the subject course makes on them. It is, however, vulnerable to changes in either personnel or subject course.

We have, therefore, tried to ensure that our voice is heard in the planning of literacy education and sought to promote the view that disciplinary discourses are systematic expressions of institutional meanings and values. On the other hand, we have been cautious in ensuring that our courses have not been treated as subordinate to the disciplinary course.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The idea of disciplinary specificity has become important in EAP as we have become more sensitive to the ways students write as members of social groups. Essentially, we can see disciplines as language-using communities, and the term helps us join writers, texts and readers together. Communities provide the context within which students learn to communicate and to interpret each other's talk, gradually acquiring the specialized discourses of the group. Successful academic

writing does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, it largely depends on the individual writer's projection of a shared context as they seek to embed their writing in a particular social world.

In sum, this research shows that scholarly discourse is not uniform and monolithic but an outcome of different practices and strategies, where argument and engagement are crafted within specific disciplines that have different ideas about what is worth communicating and how this should be done. The fact that subject teachers are generally unwilling, for various reasons, to teach these practices encourages EAP teachers to bring their courses as close as they can to their students' reasons for learning English. This is likely to make teaching more effective as students will be able to make use of it in their subject classes (e.g. James, 2014). Equally importantly, students are likely to be more motivated if they can see that their English course is directly related to their subject course. Studies by Kember, Ho, and Hong (2008), Malcolm (2013), and Woodrow (2013) all confirm this view. These reasons point to the desirability of taking a specific approach as the most effective means of equipping students with the communicative skills they need to participate in their studies.

To work in a discipline, students need to be able to engage in these practices and, in particular, in its discourses. The ability to construct disciplinary arguments is at the heart of conceptual understanding of a field and this means that students must learn to craft their writing in community-specific ways. As a result, professors across the curriculum seek to initiate students into these particular styles of thinking by setting specific writing assignments (e.g. Currie, 1993). In some cases, however, faculty members see writing as simply something to get right, a set of arbitrary conventions which are an extension of what students failed to learn adequately at school and have not welcomed our involvement. As a consequence, we have backed away from full engagement with such faculties and sought to provide disciplinary specific rather than course specific courses. Generally, however, the experience has been a good one and the curriculum reform has provided unique opportunities to explain the nature of our work to faculties and to promote the value of our role in the university, giving us a greater presence and a platform to show the centrality of academic literacy to teaching and learning in the university.

To summarise in one sentence: EAP has nothing to do with topping up generic language skills, but about developing new kinds of literacy. The most effective, and time-economical EAP courses are likely to be those which seek to equip students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic cultures.

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