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Applying Argumentation Theory to Cultivate Academic Common Ground

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays, the Western academic domain is enriched by the inclusion of many scholars originating from other academic traditions. A fundamental problem facing such scholars is to assimilate the norms of the Western academic domain. One effective way of cultivating this common ground is to develop teaching materials that integrate insights from the field of argumentation. Due to its 'critical-rationalist' starting points, I argue that the pragma-dialectical theory is particularly suitable for this task.

KEY WORDS: academic writing, activity type, argumentation theory, culture, critical-rationalism, Englishization, pragma-dialectics

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades the use of English as a prima facie language for academic communication has grown considerably. This growth has led to the present day situation in which English dominates the international research world. An unprecedented number of Non-Native Speakers (NNS) now study in English speaking universities, and a good many scholars conducting research in other languages find it desirable or even necessary to attempt to have their work published in Anglophone journals. It has long been accepted by researchers and teachers alike that NNS often experience great difficulty when using English for Academic Purposes (EAP). These difficulties are perhaps most evident in NNS academic writing. Importantly, these difficulties are understood as being primarily related to cultural rather than linguistic knowledge. Research has clearly shown that many of the problems associated with NNS texts arise from the misguided transference of L1 (language 1) cultural norms and practices. Such norms and practices include organizational schemata, perceived roles of author and text, and means of persuading an audience. In this paper I will argue that many of these cultural features can be collected under the more specific realm of argumentation. From this perspective, I argue that integrating insights from argumentation theory into NNS academic writing instruction can bridge the cultural gap that currently exists. If this is done, native English speakers and NNS alike will share the necessary common ground to compete on a more even playing field.

Part 1 of this paper describes the rise of 'Englishization' in the international research world and highlights the main problems NNS experience when using EAP. It is argued that these problems are of a broadly cultural nature. Part 2 of the paper reviews the development of the EAP research field in order to demonstrate how it has attempted to respond to the growing acknowledgement of the link between cultural knowledge and successful language use. Since culture is an integral piece of the

puzzle, Part 3 offers a brief and selective review of more general research into culture and language use. The review concludes by framing academic writing as a well defined cultural and argumentative activity type. Part 4 reviews general research into academic writing in order to highlight what are considered to be essential properties of successful Western academic texts. By way of contrast, research into NNS academic writing is reviewed in order to classify which key problems appear in NNS writing. Here, I focus on the Asian situation due to the comparatively large amount of research available, and because of the relatively large share of the NNS market that Asians represent. As I argue that these key problems can largely be subsumed under the heading of argumentation, in part 5 I propose and attempt to demonstrate how the Pragma-Dialectical theory of argumentation can be used as a basis for NNS to develop the argumentative common ground required to communicate effectively in an English dominated research world.

1. THE RISE OF ENGLISHIZATION

The number of Non Native Speakers (NNS) now using the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is at an all time high and is set to keep growing. Three distinct areas in which this growth can be seen are: Native English speaking countries; a growing number of non Native speaking countries; a growing number of "off-network" scholars. Each area is briefly described below.

Native English speaking countries

English speaking territories such as The UK, North America and Australia have been welcoming students from abroad in ever increasing numbers for the last three or four decades. A recent article by the BBC, *Overseas students 'one in seven'*, neatly illustrates the scale of the increase. Citing evidence from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency, and the British Council, the article reports that the global market in overseas students has doubled in the last decade; In the academic year 2005-2006 there were 333,000 overseas students in the UK, representing one in seven of the total UK university population; the number of overseas students entering UK universities could triple in the near future
(http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/6498619.stm).

As the market for overseas students is now worth billions of dollars annually, one can expect the Native English universities to attempt to grow their share of the market. Indeed, many such universities now routinely hold recruitment drives in overseas universities. In addition, preparatory language courses that aim to prepare NNS to study in English have been made widely available, particularly since the onset of the internet. There are also well developed and internationally recognized language testing systems (International English Language Testing System, Test Of English as a Foreign Language) that set explicit and universally accepted requirements for entry to different levels of education.

Non-native speaking countries

Due to the current predominance of the English language, there is a trend in many countries, particularly in Europe, to 'Internationalize' their domestic courses in order to realize two important objectives; To prepare their own students to compete in an

ever more Anglicized research world, and to compete against the English Native countries for their share of the market of overseas students. By offering programs in English, it is a realistic possibility for a university in, say, Eindhoven, to attract a good deal of NNS. Logically, as the language of instruction on such programs is English, the internationally recognized language testing systems mentioned above are exploited as entry requirements for International programs.

Off-network scholars

The growing 'Englishization' has led to what many consider to be a serious imbalance of power within the international research world. Belcher (2006) in her article, *Seeking Acceptance in an English Only Research World,* provides an excellent review of literature on the Anglicization and its effects. Her review begins with Swales (2004) finding that the United States alone was responsible for 31% of the total published output in leading scientific journals. When we consider the wealth of publications originating from other English Native, or 'inner-circle', countries, it is not hard to understand just how privileged the Anglophone voice is in the International research world. Swales describes those outside of the inner-circle as "off-network" scholars, whose voice is greatly suppressed in the current Anglicized system.

To play an active part in the construction of knowledge, off-network scholars have to develop an English voice and seek to have their work published in English speaking journals. Recent research cited by Belcher has shown, however, just how difficult it is for off-network scholars to have their articles accepted. Flowerdew (2001) interviewed journal editors and discovered that poor quality English language was not the main reasons for the rejection of off-network research, it was rather its "parochialism, or failure to show the relevance of the study to the international community" (p.135). For many, and I am wont to agree, there is a serious cultural bias at play here. Returning again to Swales (2004) this bias is described as "the skewing of international research agendas towards the most likely to pass the gatekeeping" (p.52). Lillis and Curry (2006) found that central European off-network scholars may feel that their work is being weakened by the requirements of journals to reposition it in light of center knowledge claims. Canagarajah (1996) points out that the expectation for off-network scholars to position themselves centrally is rather obtuse, as such scholars are often concerned with topics concerning non-central "social and cultural realities" (p.460).

In the current Englishized academic environment, even if some argue that they are too basic, systematic testing systems are in place to ensure that NNS have reached an acceptable level of English to undertake academic tasks. In addition, in-sessional English language support courses and individual language skills courses such as academic speaking, listening and writing classes are commonplace in the majority of universities. Many researchers, and teachers in the field alike, agree that linguistic competence is not the primary problem that NNS face in the Anglicized academic world, rather, it is a lack of 'academic competence'. In a study within UK universities Richards and Skelton concluded that "overseas students evaluate less, and evaluate less critically" (1991, p.49). More recent research, which will be reviewed in part 4, has shown that what the Anglophone academic world has perceived as a lack of criticality can better be explained as the application of alternative cultural norms and schemata. Similarly, as has already been pointed out, the rejection of the work of Off-network scholars is often due to cultural rather than linguistic reasons.

2. APPROACHES TO EAP

The fact that NNS have difficulties when using English in the Western academic domain is not in dispute. Indeed, a broad research field known as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been evolving since the 1960s in order to understand and address the most typical problems. In addition, much research has been carried out into academic writing, as this is perhaps the best medium in which to identify such mistakes, and it is also the medium that is most evaluated in the academic domain; student grades are customarily linked to the quality of the term papers, essays, reports etc that they produce, and scholars are customarily judged on the research papers that they submit for publication. In the following section, first, a brief history of approaches to EAP is given, and then a selection of research into academic writing is given. The research will focus on Asian problems, particularly those of Chinese and Japanese writing, as these countries are the most represented in the literature. In addition, students from these two countries make up a very high percentage of the overall NNS population.

Register analysis

The first wave of research into EAP can be identified in the mid-1960s with the emergence of English for Scientific and Technology (EST). EST was devised in order to redress what Strevens (1977) describes as the 'literary bias' that existed within the English Language Teaching field. Strevens argued that many of his contemporaries viewed literature as 'warm' and science as 'cold', which resulted in their predisposition towards all things literary and away from all things scientific. Of course, Strevens argued, this approach can offer little to students wishing to pursue courses of study or work outside of the humanities. In order to address this problem, Strevens recommended designing courses that focused on the needs of the students' future activities.

In line with the thoughts of Strevens, many researchers began to shift their attention towards specific features of scientific English and away from the traditional mainstays of grammar and literature. As Benesch points out, "EST research during this period consisted primarily of frequency studies of lexical items and grammatical features of scientific English" (2001, p.5).

A good example of this kind of research can be seen in Huddlestone (1971) who conducted a 4-year linguistic study of 135,000 words of scientific English in order to identify patterns in single sentences and clauses. This, and other research of a similar vein, became the foundation upon which EST textbooks were written in the late 1960s. Among these books are Ewer and Latorre's *A Course in Basic Scientific English* (1969), based on a study of 3,000,000 words of modern scientific English, and Herbert's *The Structure of Technical English* (1965).

Such books, and the work of researchers involved in register analysis, received a mixed reception from others within the field of English Language teaching. Benesch (2001) cites Dudley-Evans and St John, for example, who praised such work for its "coverage of semi-technical language" (1988, p.21.), but they were less impressed with the way in which it was delivered. They noted that in much of the literature which resulted from register analysis, "the passages were dense and lacked authenticity, the accompanying diagrams were not very supportive, and, worst of all, the exercises were very repetitive" (p.22.).

In addition to these objections, many researchers were, in line with developments in applied linguistics, interested in moving away from sentence level analysis to a more pragmatic, or discourse centered approach. This change in perspective "led EAP research away from linguistic form toward communicative purpose and role, through the use of Rhetorical analysis" (Benesch 2001, p.6.).

Rhetorical analysis

Rhetorical Analysis, the second major phase in the history of EAP research took place during the 1970's and coincided with new ideas coming from the field of applied linguistics. The work of linguists on discourse analysis, particularly Halliday, led practitioners in the EAP field to pay greater attention to the rhetorical functions of a text, rather than simply focusing on the grammar or mechanics of single sentences as in register analysis.

An often-cited group of EAP researchers working with discourse analysis is the Washington State ESP group whose main contributors were Lackstrom, Selinker and Trimble. In keeping with their interest in pragmatic notions of language use, the Washington State ESP group (1973) focused on how *presuppositions* (information common to the reader and the writer) inform surface-level syntactic choices of articles and tenses within paragraphs.

'Physical paragraphs', sentences grouped together and demarcated by indentation in the text, were seen as less interesting units of study than "Conceptual" paragraphs, which they describe as "organizationally - or rhetorically – related concepts which develop a given generalization in such a way as to form a coherent and complete unit of discourse" (Lackstrom et. al. 1973, p.7. in Benesch 2001, p.130). In order to demonstrate how different concepts are related within a conceptual paragraph, the group devised a '*rhetorical –grammatical process chart for EST*'.

The rhetorical-grammatical process chart for EST consists of four discourse levels, A-D, whose rhetorical purposes are discrete, but are nonetheless hierarchically linked to each other. Level A consists of the purpose of the overall discourse and includes elements such as presenting an experiment, presenting a proposal and outlining an experiment. Level B is concerned with the function of the units that precipitate the purposes of level A, by, for example, presenting a problem, discussing theory and reporting on past research. Level C contains rhetorical devices exploited to realize the functions of level B, such as definitions, classifications and explanations. Level D consists of relational rhetorical principles which allow a cohesive link to the units in level C. Examples include naturalized organizational principles such as temporal and spatial order, and logical principles such as cause and effect, analogy and exemplification. By focusing on conceptual text spans in this way, the Washington State group sought to teach students "to anticipate shifts by carrying out rhetorical analysis, sensitizing them to changes in communicative purpose occurring in paragraphs" (Benesch 2001, p.7).

Study skills and needs analysis

In the late 1970s EAP practitioners became increasingly interested in the ways in which NNSs learned the necessary skills and techniques that would allow them to become a competent member of an academic community. Of course, the concept of the 'academic community' is far from a universal one; not only does the concept change form country to country, it also changes from university to university and even

from department to department. Therefore, specific need analysis became popular in order to isolate and teach the appropriate skills that students need for their future academic studies. The two main historical trends of needs analysis are described respectively as *Target Situation Analysis, and Present Situation Analysis*.

The target situation can be understood as the realm or domain in which the NNS wishes to be a part of in the near future, for example as a post-graduate student in the physics department of a Western University. In order to prepare the student for this prospective course of study, the target situation is subjected to a "rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation" (Hutchinson & Waters 1987, p.12.). These linguistic features and the functions they perform then become the basis of a particularized syllabus design. According to Hutchinson and Waters, the most thorough application of target situation analysis can be found in John Munby's Communicative Syllabus Design (1978). Munby produces a model which details student needs in terms of "communication purposes, communicative setting, the means of communication, language skills, functions, structures etc" (Hutchinson & Waters 1987, p.12).

Whereas research into target situation analysis was largely gathered by administering surveys and questionnaires to departmental staff, Present Situation Analysis took their research one step further and included in-depth interviews with students and faculty members. The research goals here were not only to uncover the text types that are prevalent in a given target situation and how certain linguistic features operate within such texts, but also to understand the reactions and processes students go through in creating these texts "as well as faculty reactions to student participation and writing" (Benesch 2001, p.11). In this sense, Benesch points out, teaching can be seen as an interactive social process (Ibid, p.11). That is to say, with the understanding of student needs, EAP teaching moved away from its previously didactic stance toward a more dialogic one in which students were given greater autonomy and they enjoyed a more equal and discursive relationship with their teachers.

Linked courses

Because, as was mentioned above, the idea of an academic community is not a universal one, in the late 1970s and early 1980s linked courses became popular. Linked, adjunct, or team-taught courses are essentially courses whose syllabi are split between EAP or study skills teaching, and subject or content teaching.
Linked courses were designed in response to the realization that academic expectations varied not only from discipline to discipline, but also within different realms of a given discipline. What was needed then was "well-contextualised EAP instruction based on continuous feedback from students and faculty [members] (Benesch 2001, p.15). A major difference between the linked courses approach and that of situation analysis is that in the latter all instruction comes from EAP teachers, whereas in the former teaching is split between EAP teachers and Faculty members from the target courses. The main goal of this approach is to deal with problems of content as they arise, which is not always possible when relying solely on the knowledge of the EAP teacher, particularly when the subject is of a specific nature.

A further problem that linked courses seek to address is the ability of students to transfer skills from one context (i.e. the EAP classroom) to another (i.e. their target course). This is problem particularly worthy of attention because, as Benesch points out, there is "little research evidence of transfer of skills from one context to another"

(Ibid, p.15). If this is the case then, it makes sense to try and apply the study skills learned in the EAP syllabus to the study of a real disciplinary subject. This task, proponents of linked courses argue, is made possible due to the collaboration of EAP and subject teachers, and their joint guidance over the students' work.

In the ideal situation, the EAP elements will be delivered by English language teaching staff and the content teaching will be delivered by subject specialists from other faculties and departments. However, in the real world this is often difficult to achieve due to practical problems. Due to the diversity of target subjects EAP students study, it is often impractical to offer each student a linked type course at the pre-sessional stage. Additionally, once such students have begun their target courses, often the links between the English language teaching department and other departments are severed due to the strictures of departmental budgets. This said, however, linked courses have survived in some universities, particularly American ones, perhaps because of the greater resources American universities enjoy in relation to their British counterparts.

Contrastive rhetoric

Contrastive rhetoric (CR) began in 1966 with the work of Robert Kaplan, who analyzed and compared international students' writing in English. He concluded that, "each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastery of its logical system" (Kaplan 1966, p.14). Subsequent CR research has aimed at understanding how a person's first language and culture influence text production in a second language. A large number of studies have contrasted writing patterns of many different cultures, and many of these results have found their way into instructional writing material. However, despite its continued popularity, there are a growing number of voices expressing concern about the ideology and methodology underlying CR, claiming that it is ethnocentric in nature and non-systematic in practice. For an interesting discussion of this issue, see (Kubota and Lehner 2004)

Genre analysis

Genre Analysis, beginning around the early 1990s represents the latest major field of research into EAP. In his paper entitled *A Generic View of Academic Discourse,* Bhatia describes Genre analysis as "the study of situated linguistic behavior in institutionalized academic or professional settings" (Bhatia in Flowerdew ED 2002, p.22).

An interesting point that Bhatia makes is that Genre analysis can be understood as belonging to discourse analysis, along with the previously discussed register and rhetorical analysis. An important distinction he makes, however, is that register and rhetorical analysis can be understood as "discourse analysis as description", while genre analysis can be understood as "discourse analysis as explanation". Bhatia points out that the move from previous modes of research towards research into genre analysis represents a shift in focus "*from text*, to *what makes a text possible* [italics from original], from surface structure to deep structure of discourse … [and] from 'what' to 'why' in language use (Ibid, p.21). In other words, research into genre analysis does not limit itself to simply explicating the linguistic features of a text, as in register analysis for instance, rather it "goes beyond

such a description to rationalize conventional aspects of genre construction and interpretation"(Benesch 2001, p.19).

Examples of EAP research into specific genres include Dudley –Evans (1985) *Writing Laboratory Reports*, Murison and Webb (1991) *Writing a Research Paper*, Swales and Feak (1994) *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*, and Bhatia (1999) *Disciplinary variation in business English*. As we can see from the research areas listed above, the subject areas of genre analysis research vary considerably, however, what they all have in common, as Benesch points out, is that they "go beyond text to take social purposes into account, including ways members of discourse communities are guided by shared rhetorical purposes when they speak and write" (2001, p.18).

To conclude the review, research into EAP has gradually shifted away from a lexico-grammatical approach towards a more context-sensitive, pragmatic approach. Whereas a good command of grammar and a well developed vocabulary used to be seen as the basis of sound language instruction, it is now recognized that cultural knowledge of the target language is also an essential ingredient of effective communication, whether spoken or written. In the following section a brief review of research into the relationship between language and culture is given.

3. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

In 1977, Dell Hymes published his groundbreaking book entitled 'Foundations in Sociolinguistics', which he described as an "attempt to rethink received categories and assumptions as to the bases of linguistic work, and as to the place of language in human life" (intro v111). In this richly detailed and far reaching work, Hymes introduces many new notions and ideas about how language within a given culture can be understood, and thenceforth compared cross culturally with other languages. Hymes organizes 'sociolinguistics' around three themes, but for present purposes, his first theme: "that there is a mode of organization of language that is part of the communicative conduct in a community", will serve as the focus.

After discussing the said theme, the discussion will progress by looking at how Levinson, in his essay 'Activity types and language', develops Hymes' ideas so as to delineate distinct realms of communication in order to better understand how communities use and understand language. Some ideas of Herbert Clark will also be introduced here, particularly his notions of 'Common Ground' and 'community'. To bring the discussion back to the academic domain, recent work on Argumentative Activity Types will be considered, and it will be argued that academic texts belong to this type.

For Hymes, in order to make progress in the understanding of language use, one cannot simply seek to combine or correlate the results of the many different approaches within the field, such as linguistics, sociology, psychology or ethnology. Rather, Hymes argues, "one needs to investigate directly the use of language in contexts of situation, so as to discern patterns proper to speech activity" (Ibid, p.33). If this is done with sufficient care, we will be able to surpass a mere grammatical theory of language and arrive at what Hymes terms 'ethnography of communication'.

The ethnography of communication can be understood as, within a given society, "the study of the organization of verbal means and the ends they serve" (Ibid, p.8) What is worthy of note here is the fact that by considering language use as 'means' in order to achieve 'ends', Hymes moves away from a dry, grammatical theory of language, extracted from actual language use, and moves towards a more functional theory of language in use. As opposed to the grammarian who views

language somewhat in the ether, "the ethnographer is likely to look at communication from the standpoint and interests of a community itself, and to see its members as sources of shared knowledge and insight" (Ibid, p.8).

The importance Hymes places on gaining a thorough understanding of the demographics or characteristics of the users of language cannot be underestimated. Again, we can see a clear departure from the universality of the grammarian's approach. Hymes argues that "only by reference to the participants … does is seem possible to introduce in a natural way the various types of functions which communicative events may serve for them" (Ibid, p.21). We can see, then, that Hymes' description of language use as a means-end relationship and the attention he draws to the functions of language, moves away from a mere semantic theory of language towards an interactional and pragmatic one.

Rather than attempting to make definitive and universal correlations between form and functions, Hymes advises us that "functions may prove specific to individuals and cultures" (Ibid, p.22). As this essay progresses, the notions of 'cultures' and 'communities' will be returned to in order to aid the explanation of how language users belonging to the same group cooperatively seek to align means with ends. It is important to note here that Hymes argues that not all instances of language use can be considered as truly communicative. For example, someone muttering to themselves or someone speaking merely for the sake of speaking cannot be described as making an attempt to align means and ends. This only occurs in the midst of a 'communicative event'.

Hymes' conception of a communicative event is taken up by Levinson (1979) in his essay A*ctivity Types and Language*, and both can be seen as discreet activities or exchanges bounded by specific goals. Levinson's description of Activity types, in many ways, is far more accessible than Hymes' communicative event, and it will be discussed in detail later in this essay. However, in order to give Hymes his dues, and show how he beats a path for others to follow, it is important to understand the fundamental questions he asks language theorists to consider: "What are communicative events, and their components, in a community? What are the relationships among them? What capabilities and states do they have, in general and in particular cases? How do they work? (Ibid, p.25)

In order to begin answering the above questions, Hymes argues that "underlying the diversity of speech within communities and in the conduct of individuals are systematic relations that … can be the object of qualitative inquiry" (Ibid, p.30). By employing qualitative inquiry one can seek to understand how a given utterance may function within a given event or activity between participants of a shared community. In other words, one can view exchanges not in terms of grammatical rules, or what can be said, but rather in terms of what is an allowable, or coherent, contribution within a given activity for a defined community.

An important distinction to understand is that the term 'community' cannot be viewed as synonymous with 'society' or 'nation state'. For Hymes, "a speech community is defined … as a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech" (Ibid, p.51). At first glance, this may seem a confusing or unnatural extraction, but the separation of nation and community is essential for the understanding of how participants within an activity interpret each other's turns. Perhaps the clearest definitions of 'community' can be found in the work of Herbert Clark, and his definitions will be essential in the development of this essay.

Clark (1996) introduces his ideas of community in line with his exposition of 'common ground'. Clark argues that we often necessarily "categorize people by

[things like] nationality, profession, hobbies, language, religion or politics as a basis for inferring what they know, believe or assume" (Ibid, p.100). For Clark, each of these categories can be described as comprising a 'cultural community' of which each member will share 'inside information'.

Clark describes inside information as the "particular information that members of the community *mutually assume* (my italics) is possessed by members of the community" (Ibid, p.101). Therefore, if I am a teacher and I meet with another teacher, then we can assume that each other knows how to plan a lesson, construct an exam, mark an essay, discipline an unruly student etc. Because both people belong to the same cultural community, Clark describes this shared knowledge as 'Communal common ground'. If, on the other hand, a teacher encounters a lawyer, then each will have to rely on 'outside information' as a basis for inferring the other's beliefs, knowledge or assumptions. In Clark's own words, "outside information of a community is types of information that that outsiders assume is inside information for that community" (Ibid, p.101).

Common ground is built collaboratively with the people we interact with, and "every new piece of common ground is built on an old piece" (Ibid, p.119). Coordinating the common ground we share with others is essential if we are to achieve successful communication. As Clark puts it, "people cannot take joint actions without assuming certain pieces of common ground"(Ibid, p.120) Before we move on from Clark to Levinson, I would like to conclude with an assertion Clark makes in his introduction to his chapter on common ground: "Common ground is important for any theory of language use that appeals to "context"" (Ibid, p.92).

Levinson's theory of 'Activity types' (1979) can certainly be described as a theory that appeals to context. Levinson introduces this theory by reminding the reader of Wittgenstein's "well-known doctrine of 'language games'" (p.66). in which knowing or understanding the meaning of an utterance "involves knowing the nature of the activity in which the utterance plays a role" (Ibid, p.66). Trying to link form and meaning 'in vacuo' is an idea that Levinson rejects. For Levinson, in a vast number of communicative events or activities, "the understanding of what is said depends on the understanding of the 'language game' in which it is embedded" (Ibid, p.68)

In order to illustrate the link between the 'language game' and meaning, Levinson cites the example of a game of cricket. Customarily, a game of cricket proceeds, for the most part, with a dignified silence. Intermittently, however, one does hear cries such as 'howzat', 'over', 'the slips' etc. Levinson categorically states that it is "simply and straightforwardly impossible to describe the meaning or the function of these cries without referring to aspects of the game and their role with the game" (Ibid, p.67). With just a little knowledge of cricket, one can decode the 'howzat' as an appeal to the umpire that a batsman is 'out', 'over' can be seen to function as a statement that a delivery of six bowls has transpired, and that 'the slips' is an order, or directive, from the captain to a fielder to guard a specific zone of the pitch. In Levinson's own words, in order to understand these utterances we need to know two things; "the meaning of the words; … and the kind of utterances that typically occur in such a game" (Ibid, p.68)

It is from this foundation that Levinson introduces his notion of "activity type", which he describes as being 'roughly equivalent' to various other terms employed within the fields of sociology and anthropology, "especially "speech event" [Gumperz] and "episode" [Hymes] (Ibid, p.69). Levinson goes on to describe his notion of an activity type as a "fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined,

socially constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants, setting, and so on"(Ibid, p.69). The category is 'fuzzy', as Levinson puts it, because it is not clear which kinds of language use can be described as an activity type, and which cannot. A chat, Levinson suggests, "probably is", whereas the telling of a single joke is "probably not".

Levinson, in the absence of a solution to this problem, argues that "it appeals to the intuition that social events come along a gradient formed by two polar types, the totally prepackaged activity…(e.g. a Roman Mass)…,and the largely unscripted event…(e.g. a chance meeting on the street)" (Ibid, p.69). One the one hand, then, Levinson's description of the well scripted 'prepackaged' activity type seem fairly concrete, one the other hand, however, the notion of a largely unscripted event seems a good deal fuzzier indeed. If the activity in question is a well scripted event and it is conducted by rational participants of a shared community, it seems a reasonable task to attempt to, as an ethnographer, infer the rules of communication for the event in question, as a speaker, to co-operatively align your verbal means with the end goal of the activity, or as a Language teacher, to teach non-native students the script, and a range of allowable utterances for the event. If the activity were largely unscripted, however, any of the above tasks would be a daunting one.

With this problem in mind, this essay, as Levinson himself does, will concentrate on activities towards the more well-scripted end of the gradient. The script, or if you like, the 'structure' of the event in question was a matter of great interest to Levinson. He notes that the structure of an activity can often be broken down into subparts or 'episodes'. Episodes can be seen as the pre-structured sequences of a script one must go through in order to successfully perform an activity. Furthermore, within each episode, one can seek to distinguish procedural norms such as the correct turn taking, or position one should adopt. All of these structural elements can be seen as being "rationally and functionally adapted to the point or goal of the activity … that members of the society see the activity as having" (Ibid, p.71). After describing activities as being organized around a dominant goal, Levinson devotes much of the remainder of his essay to the following question; "in what ways do the structural properties of an activity constrain (especially the functions of) the verbal communications that can be made towards it?" (Ibid, p.71). In short, Levinson's answer to this question is as follows; "they do this in two ways … they constrain what will count as an allowable contribution to each activity, and … they help to determine how what one says is to be taken" (Ibid, p.97).

Since Levinson's paper, much research has been carried out on a wide range of activity types occurring in a wide range of settings, from ritual insults to police interviews. Recent research by Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2005) concentrates on what they call Conventionalized Types of Argumentative Activity. They point out that "Argumentative activity types manifest themselves in various institutionalised variants, some of which are culturally established forms of communication with a more or less fixed format … Following the ethnographer Dell Hymes, such conventionalised discourse units can be called *speech events*" (Ibid, p.2).

In a similar vein to Hymes and Levinson, Van Eemeren and Houtlosser advocate distinguishing conventionalized activity types and their associated speech events through careful empirical observation or reality. Observation of argumentative practice has distinguished many activity types in which argumentation plays a central role. Although in their paper they focus on adjudication, mediation and negotiation, Van Eemeren and Houtlosser point out that other argumentative activity types include political debates, legal defences and *scientific essays.* In the following section

research into academic writing will be reviewed in order to justify the claim that scientific essays are indeed argumentative activity types.

4. ACADEMIC WRITING

Genre analysis research has shown that successful texts often adhere to commonly exploited organizational patterns. Such patterns include the Problem-Solution structure, which frames the text as a rational solution to a well defined problem, and the hypothetical real structure, where a thesis is first presented as being plausible, followed by an antithetical move that problematizes the first thesis. Perhaps the most famous and widely used genre research is Swales' CARS model, which illustrates the functional, goal driven moves that are found in many Research Paper (RP) introductions. What all of these structures have in common is that they require the writer to forward standpoints, provide support and draw conclusions; all moves which are by definition argumentative.

Other research has shown that aside from taking text structure into account, a successful writer must display an awareness of, and respond in their writing to, the expectations and needs of the audience (1989; Thompson 2001; Hyland 2002:). Nowadays, such research also unequivocally views academic writing as a well defined cultural activity (Flowerdew 2000; Hyon and Chen 2004; Hyland 2000). Therefore, effective academic writing must take into account not only the immediate reader, but also the wider norms and conventions of the discourse community that the text belongs to. Thompson (2001), explains that "proficient writers attempt to second guess the kind of information that readers might want or expect to find at each point in the unfolding text, and proceed by anticipating their questions about, or reactions to what is written" (Ibid, p.58). It is for this reason that academic writing can be considered as an interpersonal activity, or if you will, 'a stage managed form of dialogue' between the writer and the discourse community for which the text is written. Bearing in mind that the Western academic tradition is based upon Popperian principles, a writer must expect the reader to be skeptical and antagonistic. Such a reader will firmly place a high burden of proof on the writer, which may only be discharged through critical and reasonable argumentation.

The devices the writer uses to interact with the reader have been coined 'Meatadiscourse' (Hyland 1998; Bunton 1999; Mauranen 1993; Thompson 2001). Thompson (2001) argues that metadiscourse can be broken down into two distinct categories: interactive devices and Interactional devices. Interactive devices "primarily involve the management of the flow of information and thus serve to guide the readers through the content of the text", whereas, Interactional devices "aim to involve readers in the argument or ethos of the text" (p.59). A good academic writer then must be able to clearly signal to the reader how the text's structure and content is organized and will unfold. In addition to this, the writer must also be able to predict and deal with questions the immediate reader (i.e. a professor or a journal editor) and the 'reader-in-the-text' (i.e. a generalized other from the same research field) might pose about the writer's arguments. Clearly, this can only be done if the writer is aware of the standards and practices, including argumentative standards and practices, which exist in the Western academic domain. In what follows, a brief review of Japanese and Chinese writing is included. The review will show that such writing does not adhere to the standards and practices mentioned above.

The numerous studies dealing with the rhetoric of Japanese and Chinese texts are not always in full agreement. However, the majority of these studies generally

agree on certain key points. These points centre on text organization and structure, authorial stance and text positioning, and modes of arguing. I will centre the discussion of the research around these three themes.

Text structure and organization

In terms of text organization, Japanese writing is described as favoring inductive reasoning, as opposed to deductive reasoning in Western texts. This is manifested in a *specific to general* rhetorical text structure in Japanese writing, as opposed to the *general to specific* pattern commonly exploited in Western academic texts. Additionally, Japanese writing often displays a 'bottom-heavy' structure, in which the topic or main idea appears near the end of the paragraph. This is in stark contrast to typical Western paragraph organization, in which the paragraph generally begins with a topic sentence that informs the expectations of the reader. On the macro level, in keeping with the principle of providing key information first, introductions to western academic texts, such as reports and research papers, customarily include findings or conclusions.

Chinese Writing typically shares more features of Japanese writing than it does with Anglicized writing. As in Japanese texts, Chinese paragraphs often develop without a clear topic sentence. In addition, Chinese texts are commonly characterized by a 'non-linear' structure which includes 'yin-yang' movements and puts the "emphasis on the ups and downs, twists and turns, as the author develop[s] his argument". This typical structure, composed of the following elements, *qi* (beginning); *cheng* (transition); he (synthesis); and *jie* (end) has been often described as an '8-legged essay' (Liu 2005, p.4). A similar pattern, *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*, originating from Chinese poetry, can be identified in Japanese texts. In this pattern, the topic is introduced in *ki*, it is developd in *sho*, a transition is made in *ten*, and a conclusion is finally offered in *ketsu*.

To the Western reader, such textual patterns can appear confusing as they do not begin with a clear position and proceed linearly towards a clearly anticipated conclusion. In addition, the argumentative function or relevance of some movements in Japanese and Chinese texts is similarly unclear. In argumentative terms, Asian texts tend more towards progressive presentation (i.e. argumentation preceding standpoint), whereas Western texts tend more towards retrogressive presentation of the argumentation (standpoint preceding argumentation).

Authorial stance and text positioning

In terms of authorial stance and text positioning, there are stark contrasts between Western and Asian texts. In the Western tradition it is understood and accepted that a confrontational stance is an integral part of *Creating a Research Space* (Swales 1990*)* for a text to occupy. Therefore, it is common for Western academic writers to openly criticize existing, related work in the field in an attempt to frame their own work in a favorable light.

In contrast, in the more collectivist Asian cultures, in order to avoid making face threatening acts, a more cooperative relationship with the field is assumed (Taylor and Chen 91). In informal terms, Western writers generally adopt a critical, evaluative authorial stance, while Asian writers generally adopt a less confrontational and less-evaluative stance. In argumentative terms, Western academic texts, due to their confrontation of related work, can be described as 'mixed disputes', in which the

author has to argue in favor of the his own claim and also argue against the claims of a real or imaginary opponent. Asian texts, in contrast, range from being barely argumentative activity types at all, to being disputes of a 'non-mixed nature', in which the author only has to argue in favor of his own claims.

Modes of arguing

In the Western academic tradition, scholars tacitly agree to take a Popperian, critical-rationalist approach to the construction of knowledge. From this perspective, claims must be verifiable and falsifiable, which relies, in essence, on the ability of other scholars to critically test averred claims. This requirement leads to the necessity in Western academic texts to make clear and explicit claims, and to provide reasonable and testable supporting argumentation. It appeals to common sense that causal and symptomatic relations are verifiable and falsifiable, therefore Western academic texts tend towards causal and symptomatic argumentation schemes.

In contrast, Matalene (1985) found that the persuasive texts of Chinese EFL students, and the "arguments" in a leading daily newspaper in China, were argued on the basis of 'assertions' rather than on 'proofs'. In such texts, it is not reasonable evidence that wins the argument; rather, it is a well placed emotional appeal. When Chinese writers do rely on arguments, it has been found that they are often arguments by analogy (Liu 2005). Instances of analogical argumentation, however, are at best extremely difficult, and at worst are inherently impossible, to verify or falsify. As such, analogical argument schemes are not preferred in the Western, critical-rationalist approach, at least not when the justification of claims is concerned.

Research into Japanese writing has shown that Japanese texts also do not customarily take a critical-rationalist approach. Okuma (1997) points out that writers concentrate on what they 'hear', 'think', 'see' or 'feel' in order to arouse emotion in the reader. The success of such a text is judged on how much the reader empathizes with the writer's position. Echoing this point, Liebman (1992) states that Japanese writers often regard persuasive or argumentative writing as expressive writing, in which the writer's emotions are central to the argument. Again, the ability for arguments to be objectively testable is conspicuously absent in such texts, in contrast to the expectations of Western academic texts.

I hope to have shown that, in one way or another, all of the three problem areas discussed above are connected with the use of argumentation. As such, it seems only logical to turn to argumentation theory to help solve these problems. As different types of argumentation theories exist, first a choice of theory has to be made: I will argue that a dialectical theory is most suitable for dealing with the argumentative activity type of academic writing. Once this is done, I will discuss how the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation can help to address the three problem areas from above.

5. ARGUMENTATION THEORY AND ACADEMIC WRITING

Why a dialectical theory of argumentation?

A contentious question at the very heart of argumentation theory is "what it means for a rational judge to be reasonable" (Eemeren & Grootendorst 1994, p.4). This is an important question to ask, as a primary concern of argumentation theorists is to provide norms that can be used in order to assess or evaluate the quality and tenability

of arguments in an equitable and reasonable way. Unsurprisingly in such a diverse field, argumentation theorists differ widely on what such norms of reasonableness should consist of. To understand the major differences that exist, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst point out that after Toulmin's survey of the field, three general perspectives can be distinguished; "[the] (formal) 'geometrical', 'anthropological' and 'critical' perspectives of reasonableness, underlying logical, rhetorical and dialogical approaches to argumentation respectively" (Ibid, p.4).

Formal logicians consider reasonableness as tied to the formal validity of the argument in question. This means that a necessary step for the evaluation of argumentation is the translation of natural language to a chosen formal language. Aside from formal validity not being the only criterion used to judge whether an argument constitutes a reasonable discussion move, the difficulty of formalizing natural language renders a formal logical model all but unusable in general writing instruction.

Rhetoricians, alternatively, consider the prevailing standards held within the community in which the arguments are used to represent reasonableness. In a political debate, for example, personal attacks may be considered as a reasonable, strategic move, whereas in a business negotiation they may not. While rhetorical analysis can play an important role in helping writers to identify commonly made moves in well-defined texts, it is important to remember that in academic writing many of the prevailing standards pertain to the critical attitude that writers, readers and texts must adhere to.

Dialecticians believe that argumentation is used by a given party as part of a critical discussion in order to attempt to convince another party. As Van Eemeren and Grootendorst explain, "[d]ialecticians who maintain a critical outlook … regard all argumentation as part of a critical discussion between two parties who are trying to resolve a difference of opinion". Because resolving the difference of opinion is the central goal of the discussion, "the main criterion for reasonableness is whether an argumentative procedure is instrumental in achieving this goal". Within the pragma-dialectical theory, the ten *rules for a critical discussion* are designed in order to highlight which argumentative procedures may, and which may not, contribute to the reasonable resolution of the critical discussion. Because of this marriage of the "ideal of reasonableness to the methodic conduct of a critical discussion, the dialectical approach can be characterized as *critical-rationalist*" (Ibid, p.4).

It is precisely this critical-rationalist outlook that Asian writing seems to lack. Therefore, a dialectical perspective is most appropriate for the instruction of academic writing. The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation is a well-established and well developed theory taking such a critical rationalist approach. Due to its clearly defined normative standards and its various heuristic, analytic and evaluative tools, it can be seen as a useful instructional aid to academic writing.

The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation

Pragma-dialectics considers argumentation, whether spoken or written, to be a dialogic process in which the 'protagonist' of a point of view seeks to defend his standpoint in the light of critical scrutiny from a real, or imagined 'antagonist'. In order to structure the discussion in an efficient and manageable fashion, pragma-dialectics posits an ideal model of a critical discussion which consists of four separate stages, each stage having its own procedures and goals. The *confrontation stage* is initiated when a standpoint is forwarded and meets with doubt, whether from a real

antagonist or, as is the case in argumentative writing, an implicit antagonist[1]. The *opening stage* allows the participants to agree upon the starting points for their discussion. In the *argumentation stage* the protagonist attempts to defend his standpoint in light of the critical objections of the antagonist. In the *concluding stage*, the parties decide upon whether the difference of opinion has been resolved or not, and if so, in whose favour.

In seeking to defend a standpoint the protagonist has a number of options available to him. Within the theory of pragma-dialectics, the distinction is made between single (or simple) and multiple (or complex) argumentation structures. In the simplest case, one argument can be used to support one standpoint. In this case, the argument structure is referred to as single argumentation. A single argument consists of two premises, and, often, one of these premises is left unexpressed. The three complex structures are described as *multiple*, *coordinative*, and *subordinative* argumentation structures.

The pragma-dialectical model considers argumentation to be part of an ideal critical discussion in which the primary goal of the participants is to resolve, in a critical and rational manner, differences of opinion. In order to facilitate this process, pragma-dialectics provides the participants with ten discussion rules, or, if you will, a code of conduct, which, if followed, can help to facilitate the process of resolution. The rules cover areas such as the participant's freedom to forward standpoints of their choice, the need for participants to defend their standpoint if they are asked to do so, and the need to conclude the discussion in a manner that was predetermined and agreed upon by all participants involved with the discussion. Whenever one of the rules is breached, the participant who breached it is said to have committed a fallacy. Alongside each rule pragma-dialectics offers a description of the types of fallacies that result when a particular rule is broken.

Text structure and organization

The analytic overview (AO) allows for both the analysis and evaluation of an argumentative text. As a heuristic tool, the analytic overview helps to identify and bring together the argumentative elements of the text. In the words of Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, the analytic overview seeks to highlight "exactly which difference of opinion is to be solved by the text, how the various stages of a critical discussion are represented, and what the structure of the argumentation is" (1994, p.222). The overview is the end result of the analysis of the argumentation; it reconstructs the argumentative elements into an organized picture which clearly shows exactly which standpoint(s) are being argued, and in precisely which manner.

From the perspective of the Western reader, it is precisely the lack of this clearly organized picture that makes Japanese and Chinese texts difficult to comprehend. In the absence of clearly stated positions early in the text, it is difficult for the Western reader to judge what is relevant to the discussion. Even when a move is identified as being relevant, it may still be difficult to determine its argumentative significance and function in the text.

The analytic overview constitutes a useful instructive tool in academic writing, as it provides a method to represent the argumentation of a text in a clear and idealized form. The so-called *dialectical transformations* are instrumental in this

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[1] For an interesting account of the imagined or implicit antagonist in a written text, may see Thompson's (2001) notion of the-reader-in-the-text.

process. Two of these transformations, 'addition' and 'deletion', serve to establish what is relevant to the argumentation and what is not. 'Substitution' ensures that the argumentative moves are clearly formulated. Permutation seeks to optimize the comprehensibility of the argumentation by restructuring it into a linear form. This restructuring could bring an additional benefit to Japanese and Chinese writers, in that in constructing an AO, one is trained to represent the argumentation in a retrogressive manner. This is so because an AO typically begins by reconstructing the main standpoint or claim of the text, and then progresses by unfolding the argumentation in a linear manner. As mentioned earlier, retrogressive presentation is considered the norm in Western academic texts, but is customarily absent in Asian writing.

Authorial stance and text positioning

Asian writers do not tend to take a confrontational stance in their texts. In contrast, the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation considers all argumentative texts to be 'critical discussions'. This means that the main claim of the text is conceived of as situated within a difference of opinion between two parties; the writer and a real or imagined opponent. This acknowledgement of a critical and skeptical opponent is something that is typically lacking in Asian texts.

In the pragma-dialectical theory the argumentative roles of the parties participating in the critical discussion are further specified with the help of the notions of protagonist and antagonist. Each role carries with it a specific set of responsibilities, which are pragmatically derived. In Pragma-dialectical theory, the argumentative exchange "is seen, pragmatically, as an interaction of speech acts" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1994, p.5). By viewing argumentative moves from a speech-act perspective, the speaker is seen not only to be uttering words, but also to be performing actions, which bring with them certain responsibilities. Advancing a standpoint is described as belonging to the speech act category of the 'assertive'. The primary condition associated with the averring of an assertive is that it has to be acceptable, or capable of being made so, to the hearer. If the hearer casts doubt on an averred assertive, then the condition is triggered that requires the speaker to make their assertive acceptable by supporting it with tenable argumentative speech-acts. If the speaker cannot satisfy this condition, whenever it may be required, then they are guilty of the infelicitous performance of advancing a standpoint. Normatively speaking, this must result in its withdrawal from the discussion.

Asian writers tend to position argumentative texts in the same way as expressive texts: as personally motivated theses that can be supported with informal evidence such as anecdotes and analogies. For this reason, the author appears to shy away from the conception of a critical discussion, and from the responsibilities that occupying the role of protagonist entails.

Finally, Asian writers can benefit from viewing the academic discussion as an instance of a so-called 'mixed dispute'. In a mixed dispute the antagonist introduces a counter standpoint of his own, thereby assuming also the role of the protagonist. In other words, in mixed disputes each party enacts the dual roles of protagonist of their own point of view, and antagonist of the point of view of the other. With this in mind, the writer of the text is focused on the need not only to provide arguments in support of his own claims, but he must also put himself in the position of the critical, antagonistic reader and anticipate and react to any reasonable counterarguments that may exist.

Modes of arguing

By conceiving of the text as a critical discussion in which the protagonist puts forward a standpoint to be critically tested by an antagonist, the obligation is incurred to provide reasonable and acceptable support. In the absence of such support, the standpoint will not be considered acceptable, and as such it must be withdrawn. Therefore, supporting a standpoint successfully is a matter of choosing the correct mode of argumentation, or the correct dialectical route.

Due to their subjective and expressive nature, it has been found that Asian texts customarily rely on anecdotal and analogical argumentation. For a sceptical Western, academic reader anecdotal evidence will carry very little weight, if any at all, as it is all but impossible to draw a generalisation from one informal observation. Analogical argumentation, due to the difficulty in adequately testing it, will also have little dialectical force. To improve the acceptability of Asian texts to the Western reader then, there is a need to focus Asian writers on the different types of argumentation scheme that can be exploited.

Within pragma-dialectics three separate argumentation schemes are identified. In order to provide support for their standpoint, the protagonist may rely on argumentation based on a symptomatic relation, a relation of analogy or a causal relation. According to pragma-dialectics, each argumentation scheme acts as a pointer to a particular dialectical route. By relying on an individual scheme, the protagonist "invokes a particular testing method in a dialectical procedure, in which certain reactions are relevant, and others not" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p.98). In order to understand which reactions are relevant, each scheme has its own set of critical questions.

In argumentation based on a *symptomatic relation* the standpoint is defended on the grounds of concomitance between what is asserted in the standpoint and some sign, symptom or other distinguishing mark present in the argumentation. In argumentation based on a *causal relation* the standpoint is defended on the grounds that a causal connection exists between what is stated in the argument and what is stated in the standpoint. In argumentation based on the *relation of analogy*, the standpoint is defended on the grounds of some perceived similarity or analogy between what is stated in the standpoint and some element included in the argumentation. The critical questions that pertain to each scheme represent the reasonable objections of a critical antagonist. For example, in the case of analogy the critical antagonist will need to be convinced that the comparison at hand can indeed be reasonably made.

With these critical questions at hand, the Asian writer can systematically reproduce the critical responses of the antagonist, or reader-in-the-text. Additionally, he can assess the tenability of his argumentative schemes and restrict the use of analogy to occasions where he is sure that the comparison can be sufficiently defended. When this is not the case, the writer should be aware of his responsibility to choose an alternative dialectical route.

6. CONCLUSION

Due to the dominant position that the English Language and Western Rhetorics enjoy in the current international research world, an unprecedented number of NNS are forced to rely on English as a prima facie when they communicate for academic purposes. The most common and arguably the important such purpose is the

production of academic writing. A wealth of research has shown that due to the transference of first language (L1) culture, NNS often produce texts that are unacceptable in a variety of ways from the perspective of the critical, Western, academic reader. I have tried to show that many of these problems can be understood to be of an argumentative nature. Therefore, to solve these problems, I propose turning to argumentation theory for help.

Pragma-dialectics is an argumentation theory built upon clear, rational and explicitly stated theoretical and philosophical foundations. These starting points, I have argued, occupy much common ground with the norms associated with the use of argumentation in the academic domain. In addition, the tools within the pragma-dialectical model, such as the analytic overview and the argumentation schemes and associated critical questions, can be used to identify the key problems mentioned earlier and point to more reasonable ways to proceed. For this reason, I contend that pragma-dialectics can be put to good use in the instruction of writing to NNS

To end my case with an anecdote, I have found that introducing pragma-dialectics to the NNS writers that I work with in my capacity as a university writing instructor has indeed improved the quality of the texts that these writers have produced. However, in the absence of much more reliable data, I would not expect my reader to be convinced. Therefore, future research is required that demonstrates the link between a pragma-dialectical approach to NNS writing instruction and the production of argumentatively acceptable NNS texts. This is a goal that I, and I hope others, will attempt to achieve.

link to commentary

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