

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ACADEMIC PAPERS
WRITTEN BY EXPERIENCED ASSOCIATE AND ASSISTANT
PROFESSORS**

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ABSTRACT

It is a common challenge for non-native speaker (NNS) researchers to publish in English irrespective of country, culture or origin. Present study analysed the academic papers, mostly published, written by experienced associate and assistant professors from different fields. It is based on work done at an Academic Writing Centre at the Izmir University of Economics. Since all writers have a high level of spoken English and regularly use it for both social and academic purposes, it is suggested that this has an influence on their written prose. This study examines editorial changes to papers in terms of replacement of forms which have characteristics of spoken language with forms typical of written academic prose, as attested in corpora based grammars, Cambridge Grammar of English (1999) and Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (2006).

**INTRODUCTION: THE DEBATE ON THE ROLE OF NATIVE SPEAKER
EDITING**

As the need for academicians to publish in English worldwide increases, this inevitably leads to questions of standards of English in academic publication, and the language requirement is a challenge for many non-native speakers (NNS) or second language (L2) writers. As Flowerdew (2008, 77) mentions in his introduction, ‘fifty years ago scholars did not feel such pressure as they do now to publish in international journals (which are invariably in English)’ and he adds that, ‘in many cases they (NNS) experience great problems in producing manuscripts which are acceptable to international journal editors and reviewers.’ Journals demand certain standards of English before an article will be published, regardless of the merits of the content. This means inevitably that, for many L2 writers, a native speaker editor or proof-reader will need to be involved in the

process at some stage. The role of native speaker editors has been described in Burrough-Boenisch (2003, 227), who concludes that an article is actually a collaborative effort by the writer, colleagues, reviewers, proof readers and editors. In the case of NNS academics, at least one editor will probably be a native speaker.

However, the need to employ a native speaker is obviously a disadvantage for NNS researchers, who incur extra cost and spend extra time having their papers corrected (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003, 230). Furthermore, Flowerdew (2008, 84) reports that NNS researchers can feel stigmatised, since their work can be seen as of lower standard to native speaker norms, and believes that editors should accept work by non-native speakers that is intelligible, suggesting that databases be established to decide what is intelligible and what is not.

Ammon, quoted in Flowerdew (2008, 83) asserts EAL (English as an Additional Language) writers' 'right to linguistic peculiarities'. Rajagopalan (2006, 329) goes further than asserting writers' right to use non standard academic forms, claiming that

(the phrase) 'It just doesn't sound idiomatic English' is often used and abused by editorial assistants and copy editors for changing portions of the text radically, often twisting the original, intended meaning unrecognizably out of shape.

Thus, it is claimed that the way to redress the balance is to accept 'intelligibility' as the criteria for accepting journal articles whose content meets journals' requirements for publication.

This article attempts to show that in the context of an English Medium University in a NNS English speaking country, in this case Turkey, that researchers are influenced by Spoken English, since this is the language they are most familiar with and use on a daily basis. Biber et al (2002, 9) have pointed out that there are significant differences between language used in spoken situations at university, including lectures, and the language of research articles. In Izmir University of Economics, the majority of the academic staff, the researchers, are Turkish, writing in L2, English. IUE is an English-medium university, and our research tends to suggest that it is possible that the daily use of academic spoken

English in lectures, tutorials and at conferences is a major influence on their writing.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study takes a descriptive approach in comparing NNS academic language and changes made by a NS editor. This is a common approach used in a number of previous studies. However, these earlier studies have tended to focus on mainly verbal constructions, e.g. articles, lexical choice, verbs (tenses) and mechanics (Santos, 1988), modality and modal verbs (Flowerdew, 2001), tenses, aspects and passive voice (Hinkel, 2003), the passive voice (Hacker, 2003) and 'epistemic modality' (Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2005).

In contrast, the present study focuses on the use of nouns and clausal and phrasal elements closely connected with the use of nouns, because these are essential to the nature of academic writing, and it is these that contribute in a major way to the differentiation between 'literate' and 'oral' genres, considering the importance of these features in condensing information.

The lack of focus on nouns and nominal phrases in previous research would seem to be an important omission. Most research has focused on verbal constructions, despite the fact that corpus based grammars have revealed the importance of nominal constructions. Carter and McCarthy (2006), state 'the noun phrase is an important structure in academic writing' (267) They also point out that 'post-modified and complement noun phrases are extremely frequent in academic English because of the frequent need for definition and specification' (ibid, 269) and that 'noun phrases are often used in academic style as an alternative to longer, clausal constructions' (ibid, 271).

The interaction between verbal and written language and possible implications for the influence of spoken clausal patterns on NNS academic writing has so far received no attention. This study, by focusing on nominal structures, attempts to redress this balance.

THE CONTEXT

As mentioned earlier, IUE is an English-medium university. The students study English for one year at preparatory programme and when they go to their faculties, follow almost all the courses in English. There are five faculties in our university: Faculty of Computer Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, and Faculty of Communication. The academicians are encouraged by the administration to publish articles and take part in international research projects.

The Academic Writing Centre

While the AWC is used by a minority of university staff, it performs the service of proofreading and editing articles to an acceptable level for international publication for those who need it. By providing such a service, the university is helping researchers overcome many of the obstacles.

The Writing Centre at the Izmir University of Economics differs from traditional writing centres. It is aimed primarily at Faculty staff, research assistants and Masters students, and is not available for undergraduate students.

THE METHOD

In our research, nine researchers have been chosen from different faculties and departments. Except for one of them, who is an Associate Professor, all the others are Assistant Professors. Two of them are at School of Foreign Languages, two are at the Department of Business Administration, one of them is at International Relations and European Union Department, one is at The Department of Fashion and Design, one is at The Department of Logistic Management, one at the department of Public Relations and Advertising, and one at the Department of Architecture. As can be understood, they are all from social sciences.

The table below shows the researchers' academic background:

Table 1. (N = 10)

Education in English	Total
Primary School:	2
High School:	3
Undergraduate Studies:	7
Graduate Studies:	8
Number of Years Publishing in English	
1 – 5:	5
6 – 10:	2
11 – 15:	2

When it comes to whether the researchers publish in English or in Turkish, they all said they published in both languages but mostly in English. Similarly, when they were asked whether they followed literature in English or in Turkish, except for one, who followed literature only in English, they all said they followed literature in both languages but mostly in English.

This article will analyse extracts from NNS articles and compare them with the Native speaker rewritten forms, relating these changes to corpus based grammars (Cambridge Grammar of English, 2006, and Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English, 1999).

THE DATA

All the extracts remain anonymous and are used with both the authors' permission and with the knowledge and permission of the School of Foreign Languages. In some cases, papers have been used to compare authentic researcher's actual words with NS AWC advisers rephrasing for purposes of comparison. There is no guarantee that the researcher made the changes to the paper, and no attempt has been made to follow up the researcher to see if the changes were in fact made. The aim of this research is purely to compare the two phrasings and analyse them in terms of written and spoken language.

The five categories represent five tendencies of academic prose to concentrate information, which are opposed to spoken language's tendency to employ verbs rather than nouns, coordinating clauses rather than subordinating clauses, to post modify with finite clauses rather than non-finite clauses, to post modify with clauses rather prepositional phrases, and to post modify rather than pre modify nouns.

It also represents, in ascending order of concentration of information the techniques academic prose uses to concentrate and integrate information. For example, nouns tend to be used more than verbs in written language. At the second level, rather than coordinate clauses, subordinate clauses are more a feature of written language, and so on. Thus, each stage represents a move towards greater informational focus and information integration.

The following extracts show editing that moves NNS academics' language from a more personal, less compact style which shows structures common in spoken language to a denser, more informational style typical of NS academic prose. The divisions are for the purpose of convenience, but in practise, since forms are interdependent, the categories overlap. For example, where a *wh*- clause with a finite verb is replaced by noun post modified by a noun finite clause, change has occurred at the verb/noun level and the finite/non-finite level. Other changes, such as replacement of vocabulary items with more formal synonyms are included in the amended versions, but not commented on as they are not the focus of this study.

Certain preferences are observed in academic prose as compared to spoken language, due to the importance of the noun and noun phrase.

1. Nominalisation: Academic writing relies more on nouns than verbs, which is a feature of spoken language. This section demonstrates how replacement of verbs with nouns allows a more formal tone.
2. The tendency of academic language to integrate information into subordinate clauses which post modify nouns. This section shows how changes that introduce subordination result in a more academic style.
3. Post modification by non-finite clauses.

4. The tendency of post-modification to use prepositional phrases rather than clauses.
5. The tendency of academic prose to use premodification as a way of integrating information.

1. Nominalisation

1.1

One of the most frequently expressed problems was that the preparatory programme very intensive and they had difficulty in keeping up the program.
(SFL2)

One of the most frequently expressed problems was the intensity of the preparatory programme and the difficulty in keeping up with the program.

Carter and McCarthy note that noun phrases are preferred to clausal constructions in academic writing because they allow more information to be conveyed by the subject or object. This is known as nominalisation (2006, 271). Nouns allow for modification, and *difficulty* and *intensity* are both post modified in the amended version.

2. Subordinate Clauses

2.1

If supplier development is implemented by a buyer company, personnel from a buyer may be involved in the processes of the supplier... in that company. Accordingly, he/she supports the supplier's development. **(Logistics)**

If supplier development is implemented by a buyer company, personnel from a buyer may be involved in the processes of the supplier...in that company, thus supporting the supplier's development.

The use of a non-finite clause connects the sentences and eliminates the need for a clumsy dual third person singular pronoun. Carter and McCarthy state that 'in general academic writing displays quite complex sentence patterns, including frequent use of the types of subordination... Non-finite subordinate clauses are particularly common'. (2006, 288-9)

3. Post Modification by Non-finite Clauses

3.1

The reason why we decided to develop such a system was that we are a new administration and have observed dissatisfaction, demotivation and quite high failure rate... (SFL 2)

The basis for the decision to develop such a system was the fact that we are a new administration, and have observed...

Biber et al. (1999, 754) state that ‘finite complement clauses, i.e. *that* clauses and *wh*- clauses, are most common in conversation. They are relatively rare in academic prose.’ Conversely, ‘*to*- clauses and *-ing* clauses are... common ... in academic prose’ but ‘are relatively rare in conversation’ (ibid 754). The replacement of *wh*- clauses allows the omission of the pronoun *we* thus replacing a personal construction with an impersonal one. Biber et al. (1999, 325) note that ‘derived nouns are essential in academic discussions... where frequent reference is made to abstract concepts.’ Nominalisations such as the use of the postmodified noun *decision* eliminate the need for the nominal clause *the reason why we decided*. (ibid, 325).

4. Post-modification by Prepositional Phrases, Including Complex Prepositional Phrases.

4.1

In another project conceived in order to cool down the body under high temperatures, translation from bioclimatisation to clothing has been done for anyone who has to migrate due to global transformation of the climate (Fashion)

In another project conceived for those forced to migrate due to global climate transformation, bioclimatisation features have been integrated into clothing in order to reduce body temperatures.

The indefinite pronoun *anyone* is typically postmodified, but this is much less a specific feature of academic prose, and more a general feature of all type of language (583). A post- modified *those*, very rare in conversation, is very common in academic prose (Biber et al., 1999, 580) and thus replacing anyone

with those creates a more formal style. The focus of the sentence has thus been transferred from the personal (*who*) to the abstract (*body temperatures*). *Those* has been postmodified by an –ed clause *forced*, rather than a full relative *those who were forced*, also frequent in academic prose (607).

5. Premodification

5.1

Company success in the long term or wide scope will not be guaranteed
(7) logistics

Long-term, wide-ranging company success will not be guaranteed

The writer's use of *or* in the original suggests that these two qualities are different, however this is unlikely to be the case. Carter and McCarthy (2006, 267) note that English academic style 'packs a great deal of information into... noun phrases'.

DISCUSSION

As can be seen, speaking and academic writing are not only different, they are mutually exclusive. Speaking relies on pronoun use, and simple nouns and verbal constructions. Academic writing in contrast depends on nomination construction and pre and post modification, so that while almost 60 % of nouns are modified, in conversation the number is around 15 percent (Biber et al., 578).

Flowerdew (2000, 130) mentions the need for academics to learn 'the belief values and conventions that characterised a community' and quotes a study by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) where a graduate student's 'articulate but informal style' is replaced by a more formal one. The spoken/written distinction, while not synonymous with the formal/informal distinction, does coincide with it to a high degree, and, the extracts show using written styles is important in making a text less personal and more formal.

Academics whose native language is not the one in which they are writing, and who use spoken form of the language on a daily basis, may find that while they are fluent speakers, their writing frequently needs proof reading. For

these writers, a NS proof reader may be a necessity as time limitations and other reasons may mean that it would be impossible for writers to reach the required level. Cargill and O'Connor (2006, 217) suggest that experienced and novice writers' needs are different. This present study suggests it is at sentence level/stylistic level that help is needed, experienced academics need no help with article structure and it would be inappropriate for writing centre staff to attempt give it. However, with regard to assistance in producing language of appropriate formality, this may be seen as a continuous and almost permanent need.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of academics writing suggests that, rather than using their own 'idiosyncratic' language, as suggested, academics are in fact using a type of academic 'interlanguage' (Ellis, 1995), based on both L1 and their previous experience of learning English, and their daily interactions in English. As much of their previous language learning would have been with non academic forms, spoken English may be the forms used for this.

While the AWC is used by a minority of university staff, it performs the service of proofreading and editing articles to an acceptable level for international publication. For academics in the field of linguistics, further study of the differences between written and spoken language may be helpful, but for many academics without a background in linguistics, some kind of editing service is going to be needed. This is the difference between the writing centre at IUE, which is primarily aimed at academic staff, and writing centres in UK, USA etc which are to help students, both NNS and NS. This does not solve the problem for writers with no access to this type of service, but the establishment of a writing centre at IUE may be part of a trend to develop writing support for academics. Writing centres do not need a great deal of resources (one room, two part time staff at present) and are relatively easy to set up.

Finally, further research could look at similarities between lecturers' spoken language in class and their writing styles, and look for other ways to raise awareness on this issue.

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