Innovating Instruction:  
English in the Discipline at the University of Hong Kong  

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Abstract
The 2012 educational reforms in Hong Kong are a unique curriculum innovation, dramatically increasing Hong Kong’s tertiary intake and offering opportunities for universities to move to a less specialized and more holistic student-oriented approach to undergraduate education. For those of us responsible for English language provision it also presents considerable challenges and raises some key questions about the kind of English that we should be teaching. At the University of Hong Kong (HKU) students will be required to take 12 credits of English, double the current number, and half of these must be in the form of ‘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. In this paper I outline what this means in practice and argue for a more context-sensitive approach to English provision, based on closer cooperation with academic disciplines and research-informed course design.

Keywords: curriculum reform; English in the Discipline; specificity; academic literacy

Introduction
In September 2012 universities in Hong Kong (HK) launched a four-year undergraduate curriculum to replace the existing three-year curriculum, reducing the secondary school experience by one year. This follows a significant reform of HK’s schools. Because English is the official medium of instruction in HK higher education, a major element of the new curriculum is the provision of English in this new context. At the University of Hong Kong (HKU), the territory’s premier institution of higher learning, students are now required to take 12 credits of English, 6 of which will be in the form of ‘English in the Discipline’. In this paper, I will discuss what challenges and opportunities these changes have presented and how HKU has responded to this opportunity to reinvigorate our English provision.

What’s it all about? Curriculum Reform in Hong Kong

The Hong Kong curriculum reform, commonly referred to as ‘3+3+4’ after the number of years students will now spend at secondary and tertiary levels of education, is not only designed to shake off the old colonial system of education and increase the number of university places, but also has some lofty educational goals. It is intended to focus more on the whole student by giving more time for non-academic learning.
and extracurricular experiences as well as greater exposure to disciplines outside the student’s major field and opportunities for a broader academic experience. By aligning more with four-year undergraduate degrees in Mainland China, Europe and the US, especially the changes called for in the Bologna process, it also promises to increase opportunities for foreign study and for Hong Kong students to be more exposed to the influence of visiting international students.

The change is nothing less than a major shift in educational philosophy. It is an attempt to move away from a more specialised British undergraduate curriculum to refocus on 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 making their choice. Faculty members have therefore had to learn to be more flexible in the design and delivery of their programmes. In addition, because several Hong Kong universities aspire to world-class standards (and are among the top 50 in the world), the pressure for research will not diminish at the same time when the demands of undergraduate teaching will increase. So, while planning has been going on for eight years, such a root and branch reform of a country’s education system is an almost unprecedented leap in the dark. As two American observers (Finkelstein & Walker, 2008) have observed: ‘Hong Kong higher education is being asked to do nothing less than “re-invent” itself – a tall order’.

The change also represents serious logistical challenges. The government is committed to increasing undergraduate capacity to 64,500 by 2015 to accommodate four-year degrees, including an increase in the proportion of ‘non-local’ students from 11% to 20%. Some 30,000 new entrants were admitted in 2012, in addition to the last intake of three-year students, presenting institutions with the need for more classrooms, teaching staff, dormitories, food outlets, everything. Universities also have to cope with students admitted under two very different systems, following two very different curricula and spanning two different time frames. The four year students are a year younger than most previous entrants and represent something of a mystery to old faculty hands. At HKU, for example, many teachers have been surprised when fresh arrivals have brought their parents along to course advising sessions. More seriously, they arrive with very different expectations and perhaps very different learning expectations and even English language proficiencies.

Each institution is charged by the funding body, the University Grants Committee (UGC), with developing a curriculum and student support programme in line with its own unique mission and history. As the historic colonial university, celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2011, HKU has followed a British-oriented model, focusing only on the major field, and so the curriculum changes have brought a particularly dramatic overhaul to its practices. HKU has revised its goals to adopt a set of aims which recognises that students are now more vocationally focused and less academically oriented than in the past and that their careers will change direction more than ever before (Tsui, 2009). The first year experience has therefore been wrestled away from the faculties and presented as a common core of electives which stress diverse modes of learning and engagement in a range of ways of understanding the world. Most importantly for the subject of this paper, it has reaffirmed English as the campus lingua franca and mandated a doubling of required credits for all students, half of which has to be in disciplinary specific courses.
Preparing the Ground: English at HKU

Last September the Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES), the unit tasked with designing and delivering English language courses to students at HKU, accepted an extra 3000 students as first year students in the four year curriculum. This was in addition to the 6,200 undergraduates we were preparing to teach from the last entry of students beginning a three year curriculum, and our usual 1700 research postgraduates. This 50% increase in our bread and butter undergraduate admissions meant an increase in staff numbers, and was accompanied by a move to a new building in a campus extension designed to provide facilities, classrooms, offices and study areas to accommodate the increase. More importantly, it has also meant a major revision of our courses and a committed, research-led engagement with the reform process.

For many years CAES has offered two 3 credit courses to students of each of the ten faculties at HKU: a broad-based English for Academic Purposes course in the first semester and a more professionally-oriented course, looking forward to students’ possible workplace destinations, in the second. The increase from 6 to 12 credits of English for all students in the new curriculum and the requirement that half of these should be for more subject-focused ‘English in the Discipline’ courses encouraged us to critically reflect on our courses and to refocus our undergraduate teaching on academic literacy. In the future we will place greater emphasis on assisting students to perform better in their courses while at university, rather than on the professional competence they may need when entering the workplace. This has involved more than a subtle shift of emphasis. The skills, texts and rhetorical practices of the disciplines are not transparent and have had to be excavated by a series of research projects lasting several years.

In preparation for the changes, CAES sought to produce a coherent suite of courses within the framework provided by the new curriculum structure. This involved creating as many pedagogically and logistically viable disciplinary-specific courses as resources and faculty interest permitted, and to develop a new common first year English for General Academic Purposes course, eventually called ‘Core University English’ (CUE). Together these would form the basis of students’ English learning experience and the cornerstone of academic English support for all undergraduates at HKU.

Developing the Goods: Creating CUE and ED

Both types of course presented their own challenges. CUE is designed to enhance students’ proficiency in academic English and so bridge the gap between the kind of English they have learnt at secondary school and what will be expected of them when they enter their disciplinary studies in their second year. Making a virtue of heterogeneity, classes are deliberately composed of students from a range of faculties and programmes, asking 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. A recent large scale corpus study, for example, has distinguished 13 ‘genre families’, ranging from case studies through empathy writing to research reports, which differ in social purpose, generic stages and the networks they form with other genres (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). It is, however,
possible to help students to structure writing as a coherent argument, to show how they can present a stance through hedging and various kinds of evidence, to develop critical reading skills by identifying how an author’s opinions are expressed, and so on.

While the objective of the CUE course is to enable students to take part in their university studies more effectively and to enrich their first-year experience, the 30 English in the Discipline courses written by CAES are designed to enable learners to participate in the debates of their disciplines and to demonstrate their learning to readers in those disciplines. To prepare these courses, teachers have conducted various investigative projects looking at the literacy demands and expectations of courses in the 10 faculties and exploring new ways of delivering classes, monitoring progress and giving feedback. This has involved working in close collaboration with individual faculties and departments to ensure that the English courses align with the communicative needs of the students in their content courses. It has also involved finding ways to offer students the means of extending their learning experience beyond the classroom and into some 80 to 100 hours of out-of-class learning.

Clearly the curriculum reforms offer tremendous opportunities for research and for developing ourselves professionally through a better understanding of disciplinary literacies. They also present us with the prospect of demonstrating our expertise in research-driven pedagogy to faculties; building closer relationships and understandings with departments and showing that our work does not merely involve fixing up students grammar or teaching study skills. Dealing with faculty representatives in developing these disciplinary-focused courses, however, has not always been smooth. Teachers have encountered a range of attitudes from enthusiastic cooperation to cold indifference and, in some cases, we have experienced what Ann Raimes (1991) once graphically described as ‘The Butler stance’: where faculty 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.

While the value of well-contextualised EAP instruction based on the needs of students and subject teachers has been discussed extensively (e.g., Long, 2005), the types of possible cooperative relationships with subject departments can be seen as a continuum of involvement from cooperation through collaboration to team teaching (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Most of these CAES courses have been developed through cooperation, where teachers treat subject teachers as specialist informants on readings and content, while also interviewing students, collecting course materials, visiting classrooms and analyzing students’ written work. This approach has informed our ‘composite courses’ such as Civil Engineering and Chinese Medicine, where we focus on a single discipline rather than a specific course. Other courses have been more collaborative, and involved the EAP teacher developing a course to be taken in conjunction with a subject course in an adjunct model where students enrol concurrently in the two classes and study related materials. Courses developed for History and Linguistics have followed this parallel model. Here instruction is largely
focused on addressing the study and literacy demands of the subject course, often discussing videos of lectures, set texts, and course topics from a literacy perspective.

Working with subject teachers seems to have been most positive in cases where the EAP course preparation has made relatively few demands on them and where there has been mutual respect and acceptance of each other’s specialist expertise. As a centre, however, we have been cautious in ensuring that our courses have not been treated as subordinate to the disciplinary courses and have backed away from full engagement with faculties where this has seemed likely. 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.

Why Specificity?

The key decision we made in contributing to curriculum reform at HKU, and one which is fundamental to everything else, was to adopt a specific approach to academic literacy instruction. Our conception of English in the discipline recognizes that because the conventions of academic communication differ considerably across disciplines, we need to identify the particular language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of particular disciplines and recognize the particular subject-matter needs and expertise of learners. This is a position which recognizes that higher education puts considerable communicative demands on students and that the difficulties they face in understanding their subjects have little to do with a linguistic deficit which can be topped up in a few language classes. Instead it acknowledges that students have to take on new roles and engage with knowledge in new ways when they enter university, which means we see teaching English for academic purposes as developing new kinds of literacy. ED is our attempt to address this priority and to equip students with the communicative skills they need to participate in particular disciplinary contexts (Hyland, 2002; Hyland & Bondi, 2006).

The concept of ‘discipline’ has become important in EAP as we have become more sensitive to the ways genres are written and responded to by individuals acting as members of social groups. Ideas such as communicative competence in applied linguistics, situated learning in education, and social constructionism in the social sciences have contributed to a view which places community at the heart of writing and speech. 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 we learn to communicate and to interpret each other’s talk, gradually acquiring the specialized discourse competencies to participate as group members.

The relevance of ‘discipline’ has been challenged by post-modernists, who see intellectual fragmentation and the collapse of organized knowledge (e.g., Gergen & Thatchenkery 1996), and by the emergence of practice-based and modular degrees which have no single parent discipline. It is, however, a notion with remarkable persistence. This is because successful learning does not occur in a vacuum but depends on the individual writer’s projection of a shared context as they seek to embed their understanding in approved discourses (Hyland, 2004 & 2009). So we can
see disciplines as certain ways of doing things—particularly of using language to engage with others in recognized and familiar ways. Academic texts involve writers and speakers in making choices to gain support, express collegiality and resolve difficulties in ways which fit the community’s assumptions, methods, and knowledge. This means that we need to understand the distinctive ways they have of asking questions, addressing a literature, criticizing ideas, and presenting arguments, so we can help students participate effectively in their learning.

There is certainly a high degree of specificity in the kinds of writing that students are asked to do in different fields, as surveys by Horrowitz (1986) and corpus studies by Nesi and Gardner (2012) have found. Our own research has discovered, for example, that students in the Speech & Hearing sciences write reflective journals, journalism students write narratives and pharmacy students produce drug profile presentations. In fact, because different fields value different kinds of argument and set different writing tasks, even students in fairly cognate fields, such as nursing and midwifery, are likely to be given very different writing assignments (Gimenez, 2009).

More centrally, the language of the disciplines is not some arbitrary choice but reflects different social practices and epistemological ideas—we communicate as members of social groups and different groups use language to do things differently. Language is tied to disciplines because it is inseparable from how we understand the world. This famous quote from Bartholomae captures this perfectly:

> Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion – invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history, anthropology or economics or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4)

These ‘Ways of knowing’ are not learned by repetition or memorization, but by writing and learning a subject needs to be closely linked with learning to write a subject. This is not to dismiss more generally-oriented EAP, of which we are adopting a variant for our CUE as I discussed above, but we believe this can only take us so far and doesn’t allow us to engage with our students’ expertise and target contexts. Our commitment to the ED principle means a commitment to research-based language instruction. It means determining what the community’s conventions are, so that those conventions can be analyzed, ‘demystified’, and taught in our classrooms.

**Some Example Differences**

To this point the discussion has perhaps been rather abstract and I now want to turn to illustrate some of these disciplinary differences and look at a series of studies I have done over the past decade or so into the features of a 1.5 million word corpus of research articles in 8 disciplines and 4 million words of student dissertations.

**Lexical Meanings**

Until recently language teachers have been enamoured of the idea that there is a single academic vocabulary which is of value to all students. This is, however, an idea which has come under fire in the last few years. In a study into an academic corpus of
3.5 million words, for example, Hyland and Tse (2007) found that so-called universal semi-technical items in Coxhead’s (2000) Academic Word List actually had widely different frequencies and preferred meanings in different fields. For example:

- ‘consist’ means ‘stay the same’ in social sciences and ‘composed of’ in sciences.
- ‘abstract’ means ‘remove’ in engineering and ‘theoretical’ in social sciences.

Similarly, Ward (2009) compared lexical items in textbooks across five engineering fields and found that ‘gas’, ‘heat’ and ‘liquid’ occurred almost exclusively in chemical engineering. He also found items such as ‘system’, ‘time’, ‘value’ and ‘factor’ which were very high across all engineering fields, but they collocated very differently, giving these words different technical meanings (e.g., ‘settling time’, ‘critical value’ and ‘load factor’).

**Reporting Verbs**

There are also major differences in the ways writers report others’ work, with results suggesting that writers in different fields draw on very different sets of reporting verbs to refer to their literature (Hyland, 1999). Among the higher frequency verbs, almost all instances of ‘say’ and 80% of ‘think’ occurred in philosophy and 70% of ‘use’ in electronics. The most common forms across the disciplines are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Most frequent reporting verbs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Most frequent forms</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>say, suggest, argue, claim</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>describe, find, report, show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>argue, suggest, describe, discuss</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>show, propose, report, describe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Linguistics</td>
<td>suggest, argue, show, explain</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>show, report, describe, discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>suggest, argue, demonstrate, propose</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>develop, report, study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These preferences seem to reflect broad disciplinary purposes. The soft fields largely used verbs which refer to writing activities, such as ‘discuss’, ‘hypothesize’, ‘suggest’, and ‘argue’. These involve the expression of arguments, and allow writers to explore issues discursively, while carrying a more evaluative element in reporting others’ work:

1. Lindesmith’s (1965) classic work indicated the …

   Davidson *defends* this claim on the grounds that …
Engineers and scientists, in contrast, preferred verbs which point to the research itself, such as ‘observe’, ‘discover’, ‘show’, ‘analyse’, and ‘calculate’, which represent real world actions:

2. Edson et al. (1993) showed processes were induced ….

... using (4) special process and design, or by adding (5), or removing (6) a mask.

This emphasis on real-world activities helps scientists represent knowledge as proceeding from impersonal lab activities rather than from the interpretations of researchers. The conventions of impersonality in science articles thus play an important role in reinforcing an objective ideology by portraying the legitimacy of hard science knowledge as built on socially invariant criteria. Again, it removes the author from the text to give priority to the unmediated voice of nature itself.

**Hedges**

Devices such as ‘possible’, ‘might’, ‘likely’, collectively known as hedges, also diverge across fields. These devices function to withhold complete commitment to a proposition, implying that a claim is based on plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge. They 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 (Hyland, 1998). Because they represent the writer’s direct involvement in a text, something that scientists generally try to avoid, they are twice as common in humanities and social science papers as in hard sciences. Claims are therefore made with more explicit caution:

3. The existence of such networks did not go unnoticed by contemporaries (see Rocke 1989), and it seems sensible to assume the men concerned were probably not unreflective about this patterned conduct either. (Sociology)

With hindsight, we believe it might have been better to have presented the questionnaire bilingually. (Applied Linguistics)

One reason for this is there is less control of variables, more diversity of research outcomes, and fewer clear bases for accepting claims than in 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.

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. They downplay their personal role to suggest that results would be the same whoever conducted the research. The less frequent use of hedges is one way of minimising the researcher’s role, and so is the preference for modals over cognitive verbs. This is because modal verbs can more easily combine with inanimate subjects to downplay the person making the evaluation. So we are more likely to find
examples like (4) in sciences and those with cognitive verbs in the soft discipline fields (5):

4. For *V. trifidum*, ANOVA showed a significant increase from L to L’ and FI, which *could be interpreted* as reflecting the dynamics of fungal colonization.  
   (Biology)

   The deviations at high frequencies *may* have been caused by the noise measurements.  
   (Electrical Engineering)

5. *I think* this would be a mistake.  
   (Sociology)

   *We suspect* that the product used in this study may have contributed to the result.  
   (Marketing)

Scientists tend to be concerned with generalisations rather than individuals, so greater weight is put on the methods, procedures and equipment used rather than the argument. 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.

**Self-mention**

Self-mention is another important feature which varies across disciplines. This concerns how far writers want to intrude into their texts through use of ‘I’ or ‘we’, or to use impersonal forms. Presenting a discoursal self is central to the writing process, and we cannot avoid projecting an impression of ourselves and how we stand in relation to our arguments, discipline, and readers. To some extent we have to see this as a personal preference determined by seniority, experience, confidence, personality, and so on, but the presence or absence of explicit author reference is a conscious choice by writers to adopt a particular community-situated authorial identity. However, as Table 2 shows, my 240 research articles contained broad disciplinary preferences with 2/3 of cases in the social sciences & humanities papers (Hyland, 2001).

**Table 2**

*Self-mention in research articles (per 1,000 words)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Self-mention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Linguistics</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from these figures that writers in different disciplines represent themselves, their work and their readers in different ways, with those in the humanities and social sciences taking far more personal positions than those in sciences and engineering. The reason for this is again that the strategic use of self-mention allows writers to claim authority by expressing their convictions, emphasizing their contribution to the field, and seeking recognition for their work (Hyland 2001; Kuo 1999). It sends a
clear indication to the reader of the perspective from which statements should be interpreted, and distinguishes the writer’s own work from that of others. Successful communication in the soft fields depends far more on the author’s ability to invoke a real writer in the text, emphasizing their own contribution to the field while seeking agreement for it.

6. I argue that their treatment is superficial because, despite appearances, it relies solely on a sociological, as opposed to an ethical, orientation to develop a response. (Sociology)

I bring to bear on the problem my own experience. This experience contains ideas derived from reading I have done which might be relevant to my puzzlement as well as my personal contacts with teaching contexts. (Applied Linguistics)

So self-mention can help construct an intelligent, credible, and engaging colleague by presenting a confident and authoritative authorial self.

In the hard sciences, as noted above, researchers generally seek to downplay their personal role in the research in order to highlight the phenomena under study, the replicability of research activities, and the generality of the findings. Scientists, then, try to distance themselves from interpretations in ways that are familiar to most EAP teachers, either using passive voice (7), dummy ‘it’ subjects (8), or by attributing agency to inanimate things (9):

7. This suggestion was confirmed by the observation that only plants carrying the pAG-I: GUS transgene showed a gain of GUS staining in leaves of clf-2 plants. (Biology)

8. It was found that a larger stand-off height would give a smaller maximum shear strain when subjected to thermal fatigue.... (Mechanical Engineering)

9. The images demonstrate that the null point is once again well resolved and that diffusion is symmetric. (Physics)

By subordinating their voice to that of nature, scientists rely on the persuasive force of lab procedures rather than the force of their writing. In contrast, in the humanities and social sciences, the first person allows writers to strongly identify with a particular argument and to gain credit for an individual perspective. By marking your views with the first person, you leave readers in no doubt of your stance while claiming credit for what you are saying. It is a powerful way of demonstrating an individual contribution and establishing a claim for priority.

**Bundles**

The final example of disciplinary specificity I want to mention is lexical bundles, or frequently occurring word sequences. These are a key way of shaping text meanings and contributing to our sense of distinctiveness and naturalness in a register. So collocations such as ‘as a result of’ and ‘it should be noted that’ help identify a
text as belonging to an academic register while ‘in pursuance of’, and ‘in accordance with’ mark out a legal text. Using a corpus of 120 research articles and 120 post-graduate dissertations in four disciplines I found that the most common bundles in this academic corpus of 3.5 million words were ‘on the other hand’, ‘at the same time’ and ‘in the case of’, all of which occurred over 100 times per million words (Hyland, 2008).

There are, however, some interesting disciplinary differences. The electrical engineering texts contained the greatest range of high frequency bundles and also the highest proportion of words in 4-word bundles. Biology, on the other hand, had the smallest range of bundles, the fewest examples, and the lowest proportion of texts comprised of words in bundles. So the electrical engineering texts were most dependent on prefabricated bundles and used many sequences not found in the other disciplines, perhaps because of the fact that technical communication is relatively abstract and graphical. This means that language constructs an argument by linking data or findings in routinely patterned, formulaic ways with the same forms used repeatedly.

There are also considerable differences across disciplines in the 4-word bundles. The top 20 most common ones are shown in their rank order within disciplines in Table 3 with items that occur in all four disciplines marked in bold and those in three disciplines are shaded (Hyland, 2008).

The table clearly shows the extent of disciplinary specificity with just two forms in all four disciplines (‘on the other hand’ and ‘in the case of’) and a handful in three fields. In fact, over half of all items in the top 50 bundles in each discipline do not occur in the top 50 of any other discipline. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the greatest similarities are between cognate fields, linking the soft disciplines together and the hard disciplines together. Business studies and applied linguistics share 18 items in the top 50 with ‘on the basis of’, ‘in the context of’, ‘the relationship between the’, and ‘it is important to’ exclusive to these two fields. Similarly, biology and electrical engineering have 16 bundles in common, with ‘it was found that’, ‘is shown in figure’, ‘as shown in figure’, ‘is due to the’, and ‘the presence of the’ not found in the social sciences list at all.
Table 3
Most frequent 4-word bundles in 4 disciplines (bold = 4 disciplines/ shaded = 3 disciplines)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>Electrical Eng</th>
<th>Applied Ling</th>
<th>Business Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in the presence of</td>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td>on the other hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the present study</td>
<td>as shown in figure</td>
<td>at the same time</td>
<td>at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td>in the case of</td>
<td>in terms of the</td>
<td>at the end of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the end of the</td>
<td>is shown in figure</td>
<td>on the basis of</td>
<td>at the end of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is one of the</td>
<td>it can be seen</td>
<td>in relation to the</td>
<td>at the end of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the end of</td>
<td>as shown in fig</td>
<td>in the case of</td>
<td>as well as the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was found that</td>
<td>can be seen that</td>
<td>in the present study</td>
<td>the extent to which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the beginning of</td>
<td>can be used to</td>
<td>the nature of the</td>
<td>significantly different from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as well as the</td>
<td>the performance of the</td>
<td>in the form of</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a result of it</td>
<td>as a function of</td>
<td>as well as the</td>
<td>are more likely to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is possible that</td>
<td>with respect to the</td>
<td>at the end of</td>
<td>the relationship between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are shown in figure</td>
<td>is given by equation</td>
<td>the fact that the</td>
<td>the results of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was found to be</td>
<td>the effect of the</td>
<td>in the context of</td>
<td>the hang seng index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be due to the</td>
<td>the magnitude of the</td>
<td>is one of the</td>
<td>the other hand the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the case of</td>
<td>at the same time</td>
<td>in the process of</td>
<td>in the context of</td>
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What do Specific Courses Look like?

To illustrate how some of the ideas revealed by the research into academic specificity work out in the practical delivery of particular ‘English in the Discipline’ courses, I will briefly outline some of the courses here.

Specificity is perhaps most evident in the genres students study, so that students of journalism, for example, are asked to examine some well-known contemporary non-fiction narratives to critique their structure and language and how they develop characters, story line and plot. Through reading and analysing these texts, students discover how journalists have employed narrative techniques and literary devices to turn true stories into extraordinary ones while upholding journalistic principles. Alongside reading and analysing selected exemplars, students select a story and write in the narrative journalism genre. The course for Dentistry students is more closely related to a particular content course and offers students language support in parallel to the Community Health Project offered in the Faculty of Dentistry. This develops
language skills in written and oral presentations which communicate dental care issues in a professional context while also moving students towards enhancing academic literacy in scientific research. **Architecture** students, on the other hand, explore the metaphors and styles favoured in describing buildings in the profession and analyse transcriptions of authentic speech to help them improve their performance in high stakes spoken genres such as CRITs and Design Studios.

Even in related disciplines, such as the medical sciences, the genres students study and write are very different, and our courses have been designed to reflect this specificity, as can been seen in the following examples from pharmacy and medicine.

**English for Clinical Pharmacy** is a second year course designed to develop students’ abilities to meet the communicative demands of drug information delivery by focusing on common oral and written genres in drug information. Parts of the course involve teaching specific word knowledge and strategies for learning and applying new terms so that students are able to select vocabulary and rhetorical devices appropriate to drug information genres and to synthesise and cite information and evidence from multiple sources to provide drug recommendations. Students also learn how to write clinical correspondence such as a drug reclassification letter and a drug incident report.

The learning activities for this purpose are contextualised in a drug information project jointly devised and co-assessed with the Department of Pharmacology and Pharmacy. Drug evaluation is a fundamental part of a clinical pharmacist’s career, as many of the drug information documents prepared by clinical pharmacists have to be based on some form of drug evaluation. This is the main assessment task and requires students, working in pairs, to evaluate and recommend two drugs that can be used to treat the same medical condition. To ensure the comparison is meaningful, the drugs assigned to the students are selected by the Department of Pharmacology and Pharmacy which, after some initial trepidation, have come to see the value of discipline specific work and that CAES was not trying to encroach into professional content areas. The Department of Pharmacology and Pharmacy has also advised on the kind of writing task which would be appropriate, eventually settling on a hospital bulletin article, a common site for clinical pharmacists to publish their writing, including drug evaluations, addressed to an audience of healthcare professionals who are working in a hospital.

The Drug Evaluation Project therefore provides an early opportunity for learners to develop and practice necessary and highly disciplinary specific research and academic writing skills. It requires them to search for and select relevant drug information from reliable sources, to compare drugs for the purpose of evaluation, and to write a comparative drug evaluation article for publication in an online pharmacy bulletin using appropriate citation and referencing styles. Each student pair writes a first draft of the article and receives feedback before writing a final draft. To ensure the authenticity of the project and to ensure students understand the high standards for research and communication expected in the field of drug information, the project has not only been jointly designed by Pharmacy tutors and English tutors in partnership, but is also co-assessed by them. The students certainly find the project challenging and complain that the second year is too early for them to write in this way as they do not feel capable of judging sources or have the knowledge to give the advice that is
required in the drug evaluation. A lecture by the medical librarian on finding reliable drug sources and the support of the Department of Pharmacology and Pharmacy have been key elements in the successful development of the programme and in helping students to see its possibilities.

*English for Clinical Clerkship* is a fourth year course for students majoring in Medicine. The main strands of the course include oral and written patient case presentations and seminar presentations on ethics in clinical practice. As part of the extended learning goals of these strands, students practice communicating differential diagnoses, justifying treatment or management plans, and writing clinical correspondence for referrals and medical reports. The course is delivered through group discussion and simulations, the study of language in context, practice activities and out-of-class learning tasks centred on the genre of patient case histories.

One of the main learning outcomes of the course is for students to write up a well-structured, accurate patient history based on and immediately following a doctor-patient interview and, once again, the development of this component has involved close collaboration with Medical faculty staff. This collaboration was necessary in providing both the cases and materials used in the course together with advice on the structure and specifics of the genre of patient history reporting. They are also keen that the CAES course does not stray into areas such as how to report a physical examination or even how to conduct the patient interview itself as this is part of their own course and involves highly specific clinical requirements.

Interviewing a patient and reporting a patient history are key elements of clinical clerkships. They are essential to evidence-based medicine and form part of the case reports students need to write in the future. The course therefore introduces students to an established framework for patient history reporting through an authentic situation. Students watch and take notes on a video of a doctor-patient interview conducted in Cantonese to reflect the clinical clerkship situation whereby students interview the patients in Cantonese and then report the patient’s history to the tutor at the bedside in English. This session involves an interview organised by CAES between an elderly patient with a skin condition and a final year student posing as the Doctor, but all other cases in the course are provided by the Faculty and involve ‘real’ doctors and patients. The English teachers are provided with translated notes of the cases put into the order of the report structure so that they can guide the students. Where relevant, there are opportunities for students to practice interviewing non-Cantonese speaking patients in English.

Following the note-taking, students work in small groups to check their accounts, agreeing the problem the patient has reported and the chronology of the symptoms, before categorising the information in themes which they then share with the class. Students then discuss an example of a patient history and compare its organisation and features with their notes before using the model to draft their own patient history. This is done in groups with each member assigned a specific role: a Writer, who drafts the patient history based on the group’s decisions; a Challenger, whose task is to vet the content and organisation to ensure the group has the right format and the information is relevant and in the correct sections; and a Harmoniser, who works to help the Writer and the Challenger to reach decisions and stay on task. Each group’s draft is reviewed by another group against certain genre criteria and
then individual group members write the patient history as a homework exercise which is then discussed and edited in the next class session before being submitted. Students then go on to watch further interviews, and practice taking notes and reporting the patient history orally using the same framework.

This part of the course, therefore, helps students towards competence in a highly specific genre and allows them to demonstrate synthesis and coherence in both written and oral presentations of patient case histories. Here they are able to become familiar with the writing style and format required for a case report, apply the common conventions of the genre, and communicate an appropriate degree of likelihood that matches their diagnostic judgment. The students seem to appreciate the input and the opportunity to use their developing clinical and rhetorical skills to deal with authentic cases and value the fact that the English course dovetails with their degree programme.

Conclusions

All the features I have presented here occur and behave in dissimilar ways in different disciplinary environments, and it is this variation which has encouraged CAES to adopt an approach which emphasizes ‘English in the Discipline’. The research and collaboratively-based courses discussed in the final section acknowledge that students are judged on their use of discourses that insiders are likely to find effective and persuasive. This commitment to ‘English in the Discipline’ means approaching teaching in a way which rejects the idea that EAP involves topping up generic language skills and instead sees it as developing new kinds of literacy: equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic cultures. The examples outline how these courses work by recognizing students’ specific target contexts as the most appropriate starting point for instruction.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge colleagues in the Centre for Applied English Studies for helping me understand the practical applications of specificity and particularly Jane Stokes, Laura Wakeland, Lisa Cheung, Liz Samson and Julie Ng for their thoughts on the courses mentioned in this paper.

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Ching Center for Research on Education in China.


