

TESL Undergraduates' Ability to Handle Academic Text-types at University Malaysia Sarawak

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Abstract

This case study examined the ability of TESL undergraduates to handle five text-types commonly required by their assignments, with a specific focus on the structure and language features significant to the text-type. Stratified random sampling was used to obtain 60 coursework assignments across five text-types from undergraduates in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) degree programme at University Malaysia Sarawak: argument, explanation, discussion, instruction and information report. Genre analysis of the assignments using the frameworks of Feez and Derewianka showed that the information report and explanation text-types were the most difficult in terms of the generic structure. The results showed that the undergraduates were familiar with the staging of argument and discussion but the ideas were sometimes not effectively developed within the stages. The analysis of linguistic choices indicated good use of relevant language features to fulfil the purpose of the text-type in 27 assignments but the rest of the assignments contained unsatisfactory use of modal verbs and conditional clauses to present arguments and connectors to show sequence of steps in assignments requiring explanations.

Keywords

Academic writing, English for Academic Purposes, genre-based approach, explanation, information report, argument

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1. Introduction

Learning to write effectively for various purposes may take place through formal instruction or informal learning. Some learners do not have the opportunity to see how language is used in ways that work and therefore cannot figure out how to produce effective written texts, for example, complaint letters that elicit desired action or assignments that score high grades. Their cultural and linguistic backgrounds may not provide them a literacy-rich environment to develop knowledge of how to use language with communicative effect. "It is the role of schooling to make the nature of literacy explicit, particularly to provide historically marginalised groups of students access to literate culture and literate ways of thinking" (Cope and Kalantzis 63). The explicit pedagogy for inclusion and access advocated by Cope and Kalantzis can provide the tools and the social awareness for using language in ways that work.

Explicit formal instruction is crucial for texts which are far removed from daily life, particularly texts which are required in academic and work contexts. When students enter university, they find that they are now "required to construct new knowledge from and in text and critique this knowledge" (Cullip and Carol 216). Cullip and Carol explain that at university level reading can no longer serve as largely a process of decoding and memorisation and writing becomes much more than copying or imitating, and for many, the processes of reading and writing take on new meanings with specialised learning. For some, immersion in academic texts in the form of lectures, books and journal articles helps to socialise them into the academic discourse community, and they learn ways of constructing knowledge in the discipline. Some others may never figure out how to write in ways considered effective or even acceptable by the lecturers, the expert members of the academic discourse community who hold the power to grade them. These university students would benefit from explicit instruction in using language effectively for academic purposes. For the instruction to be beneficial, the specific writing problems of the students need to be identified, but this should not be merely at the micro-level of grammatical accuracy but also at a macro-level of organisational structure and task fulfilment. "The reason students' writing often goes wrong is not because of surface errors such as spelling or the inappropriate choice of vocabulary, but because they are not abiding by the conventions of the genre in some way" (Sidaway 25).

Knowledge of conventions of the genres is usually acquired through immersion in the discourse community, although explicit instruction by expert members of the discourse community may accelerate the acquisition of genre skills. According to Swales, "genres belong to discourse communities, not to individuals.... Genres themselves are classes of communicative events" (*Genre Analysis* 9) with their respective communicative purpose and a conventionalised social and schematic structure. An example of a genre is an argument, realised in forms such as debate, letter of complaint and letter to the editor, which we will refer to as "text-types" in this study. To effectively achieve the purpose of arguing for a particular point of

view, the schematic structure is thesis statement, arguments and reinforcement of thesis. There are also particular language features which are pertinent for realising effective arguments and these include causal and comparative conjunctions, reference, modality and conditional clauses (see Feez 99). Other types of genre have different purposes, for example, information reports give information about types of things. The change in communicative purpose is reflected in a different structuring of content and language features. To put it simply, genres are general patterns of language use which evolve to fulfil a particular communicative purpose.

Research on awareness of conventions of a high-stakes academic piece of writing, the research article, is extensive. Various aspects of the research article have been analysed: the abstract (Kamler and Thomson, 2004; Kenneth and Maclean, 1997; Lorés, 2004; Martin, 2003; Salager-Meyer, 1990), introduction (Samraj, 2002, 2005; Swales, 1981), literature review (Kwan, 2006), method (Lim, 2006), results and/discussion (Brett, 1994; Holmes, 1997; Hopkins and Dudley-Evans, 1998; Yang and Allison, 2003), acknowledgements (Hyland, 2004), as well as the whole article (Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Nwogu, 1997). The analysis of the structure, moves within the stages, and linguistic choices has made explicit what experienced researchers and journal reviewers consider as effective research writing, making it easier for novice researchers to learn how to use language to make meanings in the research discourse community. This is a text-type that university students encounter towards the end of their tertiary education when they are required to produce a research report.

Research on academic text-types relevant to university students earlier in their tertiary education tends to be on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) involving the use of the experimental design. For example, Osman used genre-based instruction to teach writing of brochures in collaboration with a discipline lecturer teaching Publication Production in a Diploma in Communication Studies programme in a Malaysian university. Her findings showed that “ESP students need the cognitive processes to understand the construct of any professional genre to enable them to produce these genres effectively” (Osman 27) and genre analysis was a powerful pedagogical tool. Similarly, Henry and Roseberry’s study examined the ability of the genre group and the non-genre group to produce brief tourist information texts at the University of Brunei Darussalam. Their findings indicated that “a teaching approach focusing on rhetorical organisation can be successful in an EAP/ESP teaching situation with reasonably advanced learners” (1998: 154). Other studies on less specialised texts have also demonstrated the benefit of raising genre awareness. Henry and Roseberry’s experimental study on essay introductions written by education undergraduates at the University of Brunei Darussalam showed that “providing explicit knowledge of the schematic structure of essay introductions, combined with practical analysis of the genre... can be beneficial to learners’ output in terms of organising information and in how this information is combined” (1999: 198). According to Lavelle, expository writing needs to be emphasised in first-year composition if educators expect to develop students’ expository skills (91). This is a

finding from her *ex post facto* study on differences between early writing and later writing of undergraduates in an American university. In general, these studies have shown that university students can benefit from explicit instruction in academic writing, and genre-based instruction has been found to be an effective approach.

The academic texts examined in these studies were either specialised texts in ESP classes or general expository essays submitted as undergraduate portfolios. The category of expository essays is broad, including diverse text-types such as discussion, explanation and procedures (e.g. report of laboratory experiment) – each with its distinctive communicative purpose and language. Thus far, little is known about the university students' ability to handle these specific text-types at University Malaysia Sarawak, located in Kota Samarahan district of Sarawak, East Malaysia. Finding out writing difficulties in these areas would lead to more targeted instruction in academic reading and writing courses, particularly for university students who were in the TESL degree programme and undergoing training to become English language teachers in secondary school.

2. Purpose of the Study

This paper reports the outcomes of a case study on the ability to produce effective academic text-types among TESL undergraduates in University Malaysia Sarawak. The specific aspects focussed on were the structure of the text-type required by the assignment task and the significant language features of the text-type. For the purpose of this study, the effectiveness of the written assignments was not assessed based on the maturity of thought, extensiveness of readings and other marking criteria used by the respective lecturers. The method of the study is described in the next section.

3. Method

The method section begins with a brief description of the TESL undergraduates at University Malaysia Sarawak who produced the assignments, followed by the procedures for the selection of the assignments and a description of the checklists used for evaluating the written assignments.

4. Participants

60 texts for analysis were selected from the written assignments of undergraduates in the TESL degree programme in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The undergraduates were in their second to fourth year as there was no first year intake at the time of the study.

The term “ESL” is used based on the specifications of the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum regarding the position of English in Malaysia and is not meant to be a sociolinguistic profiling of the language use of the undergraduates. In Malaysia, “English is taught as a second language in all primary and secondary schools in line with its status as a second language in the country” (Ministry of Education of

Malaysia 1), second in importance after Bahasa Melayu which is the national and official language. English was not necessarily the second language of the undergraduates in the sense of Judd's classification of English language use whereby in an ESL context "all four skills are used and the English language is employed in a variety of registers" (5). The TESL undergraduates were from different language backgrounds, with some who learnt English as an Additional Language (EAL). In an EAL situation, "English is used in more limited ways than in an ESL situation [and] the registers where English is used tend to be of a much more formal nature" (Judd 5). Without an in-depth sociolinguistic profiling of the TESL undergraduates' language use, it is sufficient to say that the written assignments were produced by undergraduates from ESL and EAL contexts.

In the undergraduate population, the TESL group was of particular interest because the undergraduates had been sensitised to the nature of good writing through TESL methodology and writing courses in their degree programme. Based on this assumption, if certain text-types were found to be difficult for the TESL undergraduates, then they would likely be difficult for other undergraduates in the social sciences at the university where the study was conducted. The findings of this study are not applicable to the natural sciences where the purpose is to classify, describe and explain, unlike the social sciences where argument and discussion tend to be more prevalent, as found by Cullip and Carol (2001: 3)

5. Procedures

To select the written assignments for the analysis, the rubrics of coursework tasks in the TESL degree programme at University Malaysia Sarawak were analysed to determine the text-types required by the assignments. From this, five common text-types were identified, namely, argument, discussion, explanation, information report and instruction. Lesson plans, drama scripts and teaching portfolios produced for the literature class were excluded from the selection. A randomised stratified sampling procedure was then used to select 60 names from the list of 156 TESL undergraduates, with 12 for each text-type. The selected undergraduates were approached individually to obtain their verbal consent to participate in the study and permission was sought to use the identified assignments for the analysis.

For the analysis, the checklists for evaluating the effectiveness of the written assignments in terms of the structure and language features were formulated based on Derewianka for explanation and Feez for the other four text-types (see Table 1 in Appendix). Based on the information in Table 1, separate checklists were created for rating the five text-types. The two researchers who were near-native speakers of English first read the assignments to determine whether they exhibited the generic structure of the text-type. Holistic evaluation was used as it is common in research on university composition (see Lavelle 90). Conformity to the structure was rated as "good" when the stages were present and the ideas within the stages adequately and appropriately developed to fulfil the purpose of the stages. Assignments with the

generic structure but poorly developed ideas were rated as “moderate” whereas those with missing stages were rated as “poor.” Assignments with stages not characteristic of the text-type were rated as “inappropriate.”

Then the assignments were reread to identify the use of selected language features considered important for realising the purpose of the text-types, and to rate the usage holistically as a proportion of the total extent of usage instead of absolute frequency counts to obtain an overview of the effectiveness of the usage. When the proportion of appropriate to inappropriate use of a particular language feature was more or less equal, a rating of “moderate” was given. When the use of the language feature in question was appropriate or inappropriate almost every time it appeared in the assignment, then the usage was rated as “good” and “poor” respectively. The results of the analysis are presented in the following section, and excerpts are included, where necessary, as illustration of the writing ability.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Familiarity with the Structure of the Text-type Required by the Assignment Task

The undergraduates were most familiar with the generic structure of argument followed by discussion and instruction but not with explanation and information report as shown by the number of assignments rated as good and moderate (see Table 2 in Appendix). Specific problems in the staging of the five text-types will be described next.

6.1.1 Argument

As many as eight out of 12 assignments had the {thesis ^ argument ^ reinforcement of thesis} structure considered effective for arguments, three were moderate in the structuring, and one did not have the staging of an argument (see Table 2). The specific difficulties were: (a) writing a clear thesis statement at the beginning, (b) presenting relevant and adequately-supported arguments, and (c) reinforcing the thesis at the end. An example of a poorly constructed argument with an obscure stance is as follows:

Teachers are able to influence the nature of classroom climate through the use of rewards. Students normally are rewarded when they engage in desired behaviours, through intrinsic or extrinsic means, whereas they are deprived of rewards or experience [undesirable] consequences for their action when they engage in undesirable behaviours. (Text 3K)

The assignment question required a stand to be taken on the use and abuse of rewards in managing student behaviour in the classroom but Text 3K merely provided general information on rewards. The inability to clearly state the thesis of the argument and use elaboration, statistics or even personal experience to support

the argument makes for poor persuasive writing. Poorly-written arguments could be due to the undergraduates not thinking through the issue in depth and therefore not having a personal stance on the issue rather than poor writing skills *per se*.

6.1.2 Discussion

Table 2 shows that six out of 12 discussion-type assignments began with a positioning of the issue, followed by arguments for and against, and concluded with an assessment of arguments. However, four other assignments were moderately effective in the staging, with one that was poorly structured and another that was not organised like a discussion. The results revealed a preference for a “definition of scope” stage preceding the positioning of the issue, a variation of the structure provided in Feez (99).

The results also indicated a reliance on personal assertion of viewpoint to support the argument rather than evidence in the form of statistics or quotes from authorities in the field, which is expected in academic writing. Note the liberal use of modals (highlighted in bold) to push forward the views in the following description of the multiple roles of a teacher in the classroom:

One of the teacher’s roles is being an organiser. It is the first and notable role that **should** be performed by the teachers. Teacher as an organiser **should** ensure all the things concerning the students are in the right and proper condition, including the seating arrangements in the class to suit the number of students, the daily timetable for students to clean the class and so on. To be a good and excellent teacher, one **must** have the expertise in handling the time, managing the class, understanding students’ behaviour, selecting, modifying and designing teaching aids and choosing the appropriate teaching method and others related to teaching-learning process. (Text 2O)

This piece does not read like a discussion text as the description of the characteristics of a good teacher is not marshalled into an argument. Readers are left to make inferences about the point that the writer was trying to make. In fact, the non-committal effect was also found in the assessment stage of several discussion-type assignments, along the lines of “There are pros and cons, and it is up to the reader which view to take” – almost totally disregarding the effort put into the preceding arguments. Unlike arguments, in discussions the writer cannot take a stance – but an effective discussion is one that ends with an assessment of points of view raised earlier. The failure of the writer to make certain recommendations based on the preceding arguments means that the text has not achieved its purpose of discussing the issue in question.

6.1.3 Instruction

The assignments for the Instruction text-type were taken from an Instructional Design and Evaluation course. The assignment required undergraduates to write

down the procedures for creating courseware for teaching a selected subject. Table 2 shows that the quality of the writing assignments in the Instruction category was acceptable from the aspect of the {goal ^ steps} structure, with five out of 12 texts considered good, four moderate and three poor. Compare Texts 4R and 4U:

Text 4U:

1. First, drag a Calculation Icon to the flowline in the Design Window and name it as "Resize Window."
2. Then drag a Display Icon onto the flowline and place it under the Calculation Icon.
3. Name it as "Background."
4. Double click the Display Icon to open the Presentation Window and go the File and choose Import and Export and finally select Import Media.

Text 4R:

7. Double-click the Background Display icon at the Run to view Documentation page. You will see a presentation window. Select File> Import and Export> Import Media. A box will appear asking you whether you want to import the file from which folder. Since you have saved the background of the PowerPoint in desktop, therefore, look for your background there and select it before you click on the Import Icon.

Both Step 4 of Text 4U and Step 7 of Text 4R direct readers to drag and click on a particular icon but the latter is clearer on the expected outcomes should the Background Display icon be clicked. Explaining the functions of the steps shows reader-awareness and makes for more comprehensible directions to get things done, particularly since instructions in the written mode do not allow on-the-spot clarification. On this account, Text 4R is more helpful than 4U.

6.1.4 Explanation

Assignments which required explanations – either to explain why a phenomenon occurs or how a phenomenon happens – are unfamiliar to the undergraduates in the study. Table 2 shows that out of the 12 assignments analysed, there was an almost equal number with good and poor structuring of content in terms of the identification of the phenomenon as well as the sequenced explanations (6 good, 1 moderate, 5 poor). For example, in Text 3E, hamartia was correctly identified as one of the tragic elements but what follows is a narrative:

Title: The catharsis in *Oedipus Rex* depends on the tragic plot

The tragic fundamental nature of *Oedipus Rex* depends predominantly on the tragic plot which leads to a cathartic reading experience of this tragic play. All

the five tragic components (i.e. hamartia, hubris/hybris, anagnorisis, peripetia, and irony) can be found in this play. In this paper, hamartia and anagnorisis in the plots have contributed extensively to the characteristics of tragedy in *Oedipus Rex*. The use of hamartia in Scene 2 and Scene 3 establishes the tragic plot in this tragedy. At the very moment when Oedipus was born, King Laois decided to cut Oedipus' ankles and abandoned the baby on the mountain. King Laois wanted to get rid of the baby because there was an oracle that prophesied his doom which is death in his own son's hand. Hence, to escape from the prophecy, King Laois decided to let go of Oedipus. (Text 3E)

Subsequent to this extract, there was also no explanation of the connection between crucial incidents in this tragedy, and readers are apparently expected to figure out the stepwise progression to the tragedy. As the undergraduates under study were rather familiar with writing instructions, pointing out the similarity between the "how-explanation" and the "instruction" text-types may serve to highlight the need for sequenced explanations, provided that the distinction between the two is made clear. To quote Derewianka, the purpose of explanation is "to give an account of how something works" (60), and the purpose of instruction "to tell someone how to do or make something" (27).

6.1.5 Information Report

The results showed that the generic structure of an information report was the most difficult for the TESL undergraduates to master. Table 2 shows that out of the 12 texts, four were good, three moderate, and five poor in demonstrating the expected {general classification ^ description of sub-categories} structure. Texts like the following on the St John Ambulance of Malaysia (SJAM) show lack of awareness of the purpose of information reports which is to categorise groups of people or things:

The Chief Commander, as Head of the Foundation, has overall responsibility in directing and coordinating the activities of SJAM. In practice, SJAM matters are handled on his behalf at Headquarters by the Commissioner. Commissioner, an Executive Officer of the Order, has the responsibility for the organization, administration, efficiency and discipline of SJAM.

Superintendent holds the responsibility in general organization, administration, duties, training, maintenance of efficiency, discipline, welfare and nursing personnel. He has to insist on proper standards of ability and safety observance on those members who are in-charge of dangerous activities. (Text 3A)

The reference to the superintendent as "he" in the second paragraph is not appropriate as the description is supposed to be about the job specifications of a superintendent in the organisation, not a specific individual. While writing involving taxonomic descriptions is more characteristic of science texts, the skill of writing good information reports is no less important in the Social Sciences, for example,

assignments may require classification of theories, teaching methods and learner types. But the infrequency of use may explain the TESL undergraduates' unfamiliarity with the staging of an information report compared to argument and discussion which are foregrounded in the social sciences. From a macro-level analysis of the structure of the assignments, we proceed to a micro-level analysis of the language features.

6.2 Use of Significant Language Features of the Text-types in the Assignments

The results showed that appropriate lexical, grammatical and discourse features were found in 27 out of 60 assignments analysed, with some lack in 25 other assignments (see Table 3 in Appendix). A comparison across text-types indicated that the undergraduates were more familiar with the language of argument and discussion as relatively larger numbers of assignments were rated as demonstrating good use of the important language features of the text-types (9 and 7 out of 12 respectively). Only eight assignments contained poor linguistic choices which were, in fact, not problems with specific language structures, but rather a reflection of lower proficiency in English. The rest of this section highlights the specific language features which a majority of the undergraduates had limited control of.

6.2.1 Modality in Discussion Texts

The analysis showed that modality is a lexicogrammar tool that was not used effectively in the discussion-type assignments, as shown in Text 3Q:

Normally, teachers **would** "carry" an extra duty besides teaching in classroom such as being organiser, communicator, motivator, manager, innovator, counsellor, professional, taxi driver, money lender, psychologist, substitute parents, accountant and others. (Text 3Q)

In this case, "should" might have been more appropriate as the intended meaning seemed to be the compulsion for teachers to go the extra mile. Modal verbs are useful not only in discussions but also arguments to persuade readers to take up a different point of view. Derewianka explains that "the adult writer is more aware of the differing degrees of certainty with which we can make claims" (80) so as not to create scepticism in the reader and jeopardise the chance of winning an argument. The use of modal verbs enables the claims to be put forth without making sweeping statements.

The inappropriate use of modality by undergraduates in this setting is also a characteristic of non-native speaker contributions to journals. Flowerdew's interview study with the editors of 12 leading journals in applied linguistics and English language teaching revealed that modality is a common surface error. Flowerdew quotes one of the editors as saying modality and modal verbs are recurring problems, like using *could* instead of *can*, or *would* instead of *will*, as they create different

meanings (134). With these findings in view, special attention needs to be given to modality and modal verbs in the teaching of discussion and argument.

6.2.2 Conditional Clause in Discussion Texts

The results also showed that the potential of the conditional clause was not exploited as the usage could hardly be found in the 12 discussion-type assignments. Therefore, no excerpts could be provided. Conditional clauses usually begin with *if* or *unless* and can be used to describe hypothetical situations and subsequently to reason with the reader to show them the undesirable outcome of certain decisions and situations given the prevalence of existing conditions or if certain actions were not taken. This strategy is useful when convincing evidence in the form of statistics is not available to back up an argument.

6.2.3 Cause-and-effect Relationships in Explanation Texts

The analysis revealed that the undergraduates preferred to show causality through the content rather than connectors, as illustrated in Text 4F:

The reliance on imagination and subjective experience shapes the construction of *Tintern Abbey* (1798) in Corresponding Wordsworth's Claim

Wordsworth (1802) in Preface to Lyrical Ballads claimed that "For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful **feelings**... **the feeling** therein developed gives importance to action and situation," **a statement** that has not only revolutionised the 18th century poetry but also sets the Romantic poets apart from their Neoclassical predecessors. The central notion of **these claims** is **emotions**. **These emotions** are formed through the reliance on imagination and subjective experience which is a characteristic of English Romantic period. *Tintern Abbey* (1798) produced by Wordsworth corresponds with the **statement** and the characteristic. (Text 4F)

The connection between the ideas was skilfully interwoven into Text 4F by picking up on key words used in the preceding sentences (e.g.... powerful feelings → the feeling therein...) and by using a bridging reference to refer back to an early idea (e.g. a statement that has not only revolutionised the 18th century poetry but also sets the Romantic poets apart from their Neoclassical predecessors... → the central notion of these claims). Picking up on key words used in preceding sentences for coherence is a feature of good writing, but the versatility can be enhanced with the additional resource of cohesive devices to emphasise reason, result and purpose.

Having said that, the indiscriminate use of logical connectors without proper consideration of meaning is worrying. For example, Text 3N shows an overuse of sequence connectors to summarise the points of discussion on the use and abuse of rewards in the classroom:

In a conclusion, as a whole, teachers have to keep in mind that the rewards should be carefully selected and systematically applied in learning activities in order to avoid the abuse of rewards. **In a nutshell**, appropriate use of rewards enables teachers to cultivate students' pleasure and motivation in learning in addition to establishing a positive learning environment. (Text 3N)

The connectors for summing up are rightly placed in the concluding paragraph but packing "in a conclusion," "as a whole" and "in a nutshell" all into one paragraph suggests that cohesive devices may be used without giving enough attention to the meaning.

6.2.4 Paragraphing in Information Reports

Paragraphing, sub-headings and other graphic devices are useful to introduce different areas of the topic in information reports (Derewianka 53) but the written assignments did not maximise the use of these graphic organisers. For instance, one of the assignments (Text 3D) had a 390-word description of the roles and responsibilities of various groups of people involved in running the activities of St John's Ambulance Malaysia in two lengthy paragraphs. The responsibilities of the principal, senior assistant and teacher advisors were in one paragraph, and the various positions held by students in the uniformed body in another. The extensive description could have been made more reader-friendly by breaking it up into several paragraphs.

To sum up, most of the assignments showed competent use of significant linguistic features, particularly for the argument text-type but there were particular problems in the use of modal verbs and conditional clauses to show conditions in discussion texts, and the use of connectors in the explanation texts.

7. Conclusion

This case study examined the ability of selected Malaysian TESL undergraduates to handle five common academic text-types in terms of the generic structure and language features. The findings showed that the undergraduates were more familiar with argument and discussion in both macro- and micro-aspects but explanations turned out to be the most difficult text-type. The findings also revealed that although most of the undergraduates' writing had the semblance of the generic structure of the text-types, the development of ideas in various stages left room for improvement, and language features such as modality, conditional clauses and connectors were not appropriately used to achieve communicative goals. Albeit limited in scope, the findings of this study have some implications for English for Academic Purposes courses which is to make the nature of academic discourse explicit to undergraduates instead of leaving them to learn through trial and error from immersion in the university environment. Although the study did not specifically investigate the effect of duration in the degree programme on academic literacy, there were indications that the final year undergraduates were more aware of the conventions of academic

text-types as they had been immersed in the academic discourse community much longer and had learnt to make academic meanings in ways considered acceptable or even effective. To understand the development in the acquisition of academic literacy in ESL and EAL contexts, further research on changes in the academic writing of undergraduates from entry to exit in their tertiary learning is needed to identify specific writing habits that are less amendable to change without explicit instruction.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Structure and Significant Language Features of Five Academic Text-types

Text-type	Structure	Significant language features
Argument	Thesis ^ Argument ^ Reinforcement of thesis	Conjunctions (e.g. causal, comparative, conditional)
Discussion	Issue ^ Arguments for and against ^ Assessment	Reference Modality Conditional clauses
Instruction	Goal ^ Steps	Imperative clauses + sequence markers Modals Dependent clauses of condition and time
Explanation	Identification of phenomenon ^ Sequenced explanations	Generalised non-human participants Time relationships (e.g. first, following) Cause-and-effect relationships Action verbs (e.g. falls, rises, changes), Some passive voice Timeless present tense (e.g. are, happens)
Information Report	General classification ^ Description of sub- categories	Range of cohesive devices (e.g. conjunction, reference) General categories of people and things Present tense and supporting tenses Passive voice

Table 2

Conformity to Generic Structure of Text-types Required by the Assignment Task

Genre	Good	Moderate	Poor	Inappropriate	Total
Argument	8	3	0	1	12
Discussion	6	4	1	1	12
Explanation	6	1	5	0	12
Instruction	5	4	3	0	12
Information Report	4	3	5	0	12
Total	29	15	14	2	60

Table 3

Appropriateness in Use of Significant Language Features of Text-types in Assignments

Genre	Good	Moderate	Poor	Total
Argument	9	2	1	12
Discussion	7	4	1	12
Explanation	2	9	1	12
Instruction	4	5	3	12
Information Report	5	5	2	12
Total	27	25	8	60