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Plenary Speech

Some thoughts on English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) and related issues

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Academic writing for research publication takes place around the globe, involving, according to a recent account, 5.5 million scholars, 2,000 publishers and 17,500 research/higher education institutions (Lillis & Curry 2010: 1). Because so many scholars whose first language is not English are now using English for publication purposes and because of the research interest that has developed in the field, a specialist term has been coined, ENGLISH FOR RESEARCH PUBLICATION PURPOSES (ERPP). This paper presents an overview of some issues relating to ERPP.

1. Introduction

Because of the growing interest in international scholarly publication as a field of research, it has recently been given a label and accompanying acronym: ENGLISH FOR RESEARCH PUBLICATION PURPOSES (ERPP). ERPP is defined in a special issue of the Journal of English for Academic Purposes as follows:

English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) can be thought of as a branch of EAP addressing the concerns of professional researchers and post-graduate students who need to publish in peer-reviewed international journals. It is now almost a truism to say that the vast majority of these journals are published in English, and that this presents considerable challenges to users of English as an Additional Language (EAL), regardless of the field in which they work. While EAP programs in universities can address some of these needs in a general way, the real-life, specific issues for academics whose L1 is not English wishing to publish in English are often broader and more complex. (Cargill & Burgess 2008: 75)

I will address ERPP and related issues under the following headings:

1. The need for international publication in English
2. The advantages and disadvantages of the spread of English as the language of international research and publication

Revised version of a plenary address given at the Symposium on Second Language Writing, Taïpeï, Taïwan, 9–11 June 2011.
2. The need for international publication in English

If you look at the Wikipedia entry for the famous corpus linguist, John Sinclair, you will see the following paragraph:

He was well-known for having unconventional ideas which helped to advance the young field of corpus linguistics. At his valedictory lecture in 2000 he stated that none of his many published articles passed successfully through peer review, and that even an article he had been invited to write for a journal was peer reviewed by mistake and rejected. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McHardy_Sinclair)

I am providing you with this quote to make the point that I do not think it would be possible, at least in many contexts, to have a successful academic career today without going through the peer review process, which Sinclair was able to avoid so successfully. Peer review is now a universally recognised procedure for evaluating academic contributions and controlling for quality. It is also used for academic hiring, contract renewal, tenure and promotion purposes.

Another feature of international academic publication is that it is increasingly being conducted through the medium of English. The Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) Web of Science, the world’s largest academic journal indexing system, for example (which, incidentally, only includes peer-reviewed journals), states on its web site:

English is the universal language of science. For this reason Thomson Reuters focuses on journals that publish full text in English or at very least, bibliographic information in English. There are many journals covered in Web of Science that publish articles with bibliographic information in English and full text in another language. However, going forward, it is clear that the journals most important to the international research community will publish full text in English. (http://thomsonreuters.com/products_services/science/free/essays/journal_selection_process/)

3. The advantages and disadvantages of the spread of English as the language of international research and publication

The spread of English in scholarly publications brings with it various advantages and disadvantages for individual scholars, academic communities and countries. One undoubted and extremely important advantage, of course, is that it provides a global lingua franca, enabling scholars to communicate with each other across borders and thereby promote the global dissemination of knowledge. This is good for all those concerned and improves the overall creation of scientific knowledge and, ultimately, the well-being of our planet. Another
advantage of using English is that it is rapidly becoming an international lingua franca in other fields, so why should it not be used for scholarly publication? The former French Minister of Higher Education, Valérie Pécresse, recently argued, for example, that 'English is not a foreign language anymore. It’s a language you have to speak, like you have to speak information technology'.

However, the fact that this lingua franca, English, is also the native language of one group of scholars (a minority) and is an additional language for the rest of the world (the majority) brings with it particular advantages for the former group and disadvantages for the latter. Anglophone scholars enjoy what van Parijs (2007) has referred to as a ‘free ride’. English is their mother tongue and the language in which they have received their education, so they do not need to make any special effort to learn an additional language (although they do need to acquire the particular register and genres which are required for academic publication). Non-Anglophones, on the other hand, and their governments, have to invest in learning English. Governments need to use taxes to fund English teaching in schools and universities, and individuals, if they do not receive adequate support in the public sector, need to pay tutors and editors. Other things being equal, it is likely that their Anglophone counterparts will be able to produce what Ammon (2007: 124–125) has referred to as ‘linguistically more refined texts’ and with ‘superior impact on the recipients’.

As Ammon (ibid.) has noted, Anglophones, because of their greater facility in English, may take on more gatekeeping functions, assume a greater share in ‘paradigm building’, attracting awards and internationally mobile scholars and students, and overall derive economic benefits from having English as their L1. Furthermore, if writing for international publication is in English, other languages may lose their sophisticated academic genres which, in the case of developing countries and languages, may never emerge at all.

A final drawback of the status of English as the international language of scholarship is that it may deprive scholars and professionals who do not know English to adequate levels of proficiency of access to important research findings of value to their communities. A recent article in *Science* argued that local journals dealing with professional practice should not be forced to use English, on the grounds that their readers – German health-care practitioners – do not know English well enough. Furthermore, there is an argument that local knowledge is local, that is to say, local knowledge in Africa, for example, is not the same as local knowledge in India, and that such knowledge is best transmitted through local languages.

### 4. The international university and English as a lingua franca (ELF)

One feature of the international spread of English is the growth of a particular type of language, used when speakers of different native languages use English together. Such
speakers do not necessarily use ‘Standard English’, that is to say, British or American English, but a hybrid form, English as a Lingua Franca, or ELF for short. Firth (1996: 240) provides a simple definition of ELF:

[ELF is] a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication.¹

Whether ELF is an actual language, a variety of a language, a language system or a language process is much debated (Prodromou 2007)⁵, but there is a growing academic literature relating to it (Seidlhofer 2011). With regard to the use of ELF in academic contexts, I would like to make a couple of observations. First, with the internationalisation of academic exchange at all levels, the use of ELF is spreading, as witnessed by the two well-known corpora of academic ELF collected at the universities of Vienna and Helsinki. However, although ELF is being more and more widely used, as Jenkins (2011: 927) has observed, when it comes to the preparation of students for academic English, the model is still usually Standard British or American English:

While one might expect academia as a whole, and universities, with their substantial international communities, in particular, to be revisiting their English language policies, this seems not to be happening outside a relatively small group of researchers into academic ELF. Instead, it is largely ‘business as usual’, with the focus remaining on helping students in dedicated pre- and in-sessional classes to improve their English in line with the norms of standard British or American academic English, both spoken and written.

Jenkins goes on to say that the same applies when it comes to the examinations that are universally employed, such as TOEFL and IELTS. Universities worldwide are applying British and American English as the standard entrance requirement for their students when, in actual fact, many, if not most, of the interactions these students are engaged in once they are accepted into their chosen university are likely to be in ELF. Jenkins sums up this situation and highlights how it is at odds with the current reality of English with a quotation from Brumfit: ‘Statistically, native speakers are in a minority for [English] language use, and thus for language change, for language maintenance, and for the ideologies and beliefs associated with the language’ (Brumfit 2001: 116, cited in Jenkins 2011: 927). In this, Brumfit was echoing Kachru (cited in Davies 1999), who, in 1985, was already claiming that:

... the global diffusion of English has taken an interesting turn: the native speakers of this language seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization; in fact, if current statistics are any indication, they have become a minority. This sociolinguistic fact must be accepted and its implication recognized. What we need now are new paradigms and perspectives for linguistics and pedagogical research and for understanding the linguistic creativity in multilingual situations across cultures. (Davies 1999: 30)

⁴ As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer of the written version of this paper, this definition would not be accepted by ELF researchers, as it implies that native English speakers are excluded from ELF communication, which they are not.
⁵ As pointed out by the same anonymous reviewer, ELF researchers have now abandoned the notion that ELF could be a variety, or even a number of varieties (e.g. Seidlhofer 2009).
5. International publication and ELF

While ELF is being used more and more in spoken and informal written communications in today’s increasingly international academia, one type of communication stands out as resistant to ELF. This is the academic research article. Notable exceptions occur when a deliberate decision has been made to use ELF in an international publication. Mauranen, a leading ELF researcher, has co-edited a special edition of a journal (Mauranen & Metsä-Ketelä 2006) which she describes, in the introduction, as written in ELF:

This special issue . . . is written in ELF. Although native speakers have not been excluded from the volume, they have not acted as the ultimate authorities of linguistic correctness or comprehensibility. Thus, the papers have not been ‘checked by a native speaker’ as the saying goes (p. 6).

Such examples are rare, however, many journals requiring contributions to be ‘checked by a native speaker’, to use the term cited by Mauranen.

This practice is demeaning to scholars whose L1 does not happen to be English and puts scholars whose English may not be at ‘expert’ level at a disadvantage to others (e.g. Lillis & Curry 2006; Flowerdew 2008). As long as ‘native speaker’ is the yardstick, this situation is not going to change. Other genres of the academy have been taken over by ELF, particularly spoken genres, because there is no external yardstick or gatekeeper (it is difficult for there to be one, as speech is spontaneous and therefore more difficult to control). If there is a gatekeeper where ELF is practised, it is the ELF users of the language themselves. For the international journals, however, the external gatekeeper remains. This is ironic, not least because more and more editors and reviewers of academic journals and book series are not native speakers of the language. Perhaps these EAL editors and reviewers feel more secure in having an objective yardstick to appeal to when it comes to the language of the papers they publish.

Proponents of ELF, of course, argue for publication in that variety and there are some signs in our own field of EALLT that ELF is being accepted or encouraged. The collection edited by Mauranen, referred to above, is one example. Other examples can be found in the new Journal of English as a Lingua Franca, and in other volumes edited by ELF scholars, such as the Nordic Journal of English Studies (5/2), and in the volume edited by Murata & Jenkins (2009).

However, it is dangerous to try to recognise examples of ELF simply on the grounds that they exhibit features of ‘non-Standard’ English. It is notable that even the leading proponents of ELF – Jennifer Jenkins, a native English speaker, Anna Mauranen, a native Finnish speaker, and Barbara Seidlofer, a native German speaker – do not use ‘non-Standard’ grammar in their published work. Nevertheless, as they are writing, for the most part, for an educated audience of linguists and language professionals it is fitting that they adopt an appropriate style for their specific ELF audience. Thus, these authors all write in their own individual ways, but attempt to be intelligible to their wide international/ELF readership. Jenkins, for example, may avoid British English idioms and metaphors that do not have wider currency. Seidlofer and Mauranen may similarly adapt their writing to their audience, but this does not necessarily imply ‘non-Standard’ English grammar. This is a point to be borne in mind by critics of ELF.
6. China English

We can apply the above quotation from Brumfit (about the ideologies and beliefs associated with English coming from non-native speakers because they are the majority) to the situation of English in China. As has been pointed out by He & Li (2009), among others, mainland China has the largest English-learning population in the world. Li Yang and his ‘Crazy English’ is just one symptom of the explosion of English learning in mainland China. The following is extracted from the Wikipedia entry on Li Yang, to give you a flavour of the mania for China English:

Li Yang (simplified Chinese: 李陽; traditional Chinese: 李陽; pinyin: Lǐ Yáng; born 1969 in Changzhou, Jiangsu) is the Chinese creator of Crazy English, an unorthodox method of teaching English. He claimed to have taught English to more than 20 million people in a decade... He began promoting his method on a large scale until 1994 when he founded Li Yang Cliz English Promotion Studio. Today, his method has gained a very large amount of popularity in China, even attaining celebrity status. He lectures to crowds of 20 to 30,000, and visits an average of 15 cities a month. The proceeds from a single lecture can gross a million yuan. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Yang_%28Crazy_English%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Yang_%28Crazy_English%29))

English learning is progressing at such a rate in mainland China that He & Li (2009) claim that China may soon have more speakers of English than the United States and the United Kingdom combined. With this new community of English speakers, it is inevitable that a distinct variety of English, ‘China English’, will develop. Echoing the quotation above from Brumfit for the Chinese context, Deterding (2006: 195, cited in He & Li) goes so far as to argue that ‘[a]t that time, native speakers may even become irrelevant... and Chinese English will truly be in the forefront of the development of the language’.

Indeed, a range of distinctive features of China English have already been described. Xu (2008), for example, analysed three small corpora of data produced by Chinese users of English: interviews, short stories and news articles (from the China Daily). Not surprisingly the spoken data revealed most features of China English, because, unlike the two other corpora, it was not edited by native speakers of English. The following are the syntactic features identified by Xu in his spoken data (he did not analyse discourse/pragmatic features). I am sure teachers of English in Taiwan are familiar with these patterns, as used by their students:

- Adjacent default tense: *Last year I write a letter... I write two letters every week.*
- Null-subject/object utterances: *What do you do in your spare time? Sometimes ______ just play basketball, and sometimes_______ go to the Beijing Library, and sometimes_______ just play some games on computer.*
- Co-occurrence of connective pairs: *Although it’s not as big as Beijing, but I like it.*
- Subject pronoun copying: *My parents, they have no interest in me.*
- Yes-no response: *Okay, now. You haven’t been to many places. Yes.*
- Topic comment: *This society, the people get more and more practical.*
- Unmarked OSV: *Probably, some other kind of jobs I also want to try.*
- Inversion in subordinate finite wh-clauses: *I really don’t know what is international English.*

With regard to the newspaper corpus, it is interesting that Xu found some features of China English, in spite of the fact that the material was probably edited by native speakers.
Features he identified include the use of a particular type of nominalisation structure, multiple coordinate patterns (structural parallelism) and modifying-modified sequencing (e.g. because...therefore). Space unfortunately does not allow me to exemplify these patterns, but see Xu (2008). The short story data had no features of China English, except in the dialogues. This is hardly surprising, given that the volume of stories used was published in the USA.

The fact that the written data in Xu’s study had fewer features of China English highlights the more conservative nature of the written medium, where the intervention of native speakers is more likely. This, of course, is a feature it shares with scholarly writing. One might ask, however, how much longer native speakers will be accepted as the arbiters of what is appropriate English and the gatekeepers for what is publishable. If China English is likely to become a dominant form of spoken English in China, it becomes hard to argue that it should be excluded from writing, including writing for international publication, especially when, emboldened by its growing economic power, China seeks to increase its international influence not only in trade and commerce, but also in science and technology, and even the social sciences and humanities, as projected by its ‘Go Out’ policy of increasing international visibility and influence with regard to so-called ‘soft power’.

Of course, not all Chinese speakers or learners of English are satisfied with China English. Some may argue, along with Quirk (1985, 1990), that Standard English provides a gold standard against which all speakers and learners, wherever they come from, can match their English. Others might argue that China English is not the ‘real thing’: why should Chinese not be provided with access to a variety with which they can communicate on an equal footing with users from other countries? Why should they accept an ‘inferior’ model to that used in other countries, including the United States and Great Britain? In the latter, the Kingman Report of 1988 asserted that a command of Standard English served to ‘increase the freedom of the individual’. This applies not only in the United Kingdom; a command of Standard English enables greater freedom of movement at a global level.

### 7. Pressure to publish

However rapid the emergence of China English, it is unlikely to make a difference to young scholars in the audience today: they are still likely to feel pressure to publish in Standard English. So let us look at the issue of publication pressure.

Suresh Canagarajah, the former editor of *TESOL Quarterly*, kept a blog while he was editor, which he called *Editor’s Ponderings*: [www.personal.psu.edu/asc16/blogs/TQeditor/](http://www.personal.psu.edu/asc16/blogs/TQeditor/). Among the interesting posts in this blog that relate to the trials and tribulations of academic publication, one bears the title ‘Pressure on Chinese scholars to publish’. Canagarajah reports how one Christmas time he received a large package from China, and thought it was some sort of gift. On opening the package, however, he discovered that it consisted of three manuscript submissions, each with three copies, each with its own covering letter, abstract and author information – and all from the same person. Canagarajah implies in his post that this was not the only time that something like this happened to him as editor. He wondered,
as a scholar, what the implications are of such an approach to research and scholarship on the composing process of the author and the quality of the submission. He also wondered whether academic publishing was becoming similar to a lottery, where you buy multiple tickets hoping that one of them will win the jackpot.

Canagarajah sought an explanation for this behaviour from a Chinese colleague working in Malaysia, and reported the response of this anonymous colleague in his blog:

Almost all universities in Mainland China set down a specified number of publications as a precondition for promotion to an associate professorship or full professorship. I learned from a student of mine in China that at his university, the required number for promotion to associate professorship is 10 journal papers. In addition to quantity, there are also requirements about the quality of publications... One of my colleagues told me that his former university in China gives 5 times more reward points to a paper published in a high-impact overseas journal than one published in a ‘national-level’ domestic journal. I have also heard unverified stories that some Chinese universities give 10,000 yuan per article to their faculty who publish in SCI and SSCI journals. The deputy dean of the English Language and Literature College of another Chinese university told me that the rate at his university is 3,000 yuan per article. Given such financial rewards, it is little wonder submissions from China to international journals have greatly increased in recent years.

This explanation chimes, at least in part, with what I have heard elsewhere about publication in mainland China. It has certain similarities with the situation in Hong Kong, with which, of course, I am familiar, although at Hong Kong universities there are no direct financial rewards for publication and the number of publications is not usually specified. I am not sure about Taiwan, but I have heard that there is increasing pressure to publish here too. This is not at all surprising, because similar things are happening around the world, where universities are striving to become ‘international’ and to rise up the university ranking scales. Canagarajah notes another symptom of this phenomenon in his blog: during the five-year period of his term of office as Editor of *TESOL Quarterly*, the annual number of submissions rose from 94 to 250. I have heard of similar increases in submissions from other editors in our field.

Another story that I have heard about publication in our field, is that aspiring authors sometimes submit papers to leading journals, not in the expectation that they might actually be published, but in order to gain the feedback from reviewers that is part of the submission process. This feedback is then used to revise the paper, which is then submitted to another, perhaps lower tier, journal. While journals typically forbid simultaneous submission of the same article to more than one journal, there are no sanctions, to my knowledge, against the practices I have just described. This is very frustrating for editors and reviewers alike. All of this, however, can be attributed to the pressure to publish.

8. Language of publication in humanities and social sciences and in EALLT

I conducted two studies with Yongyan Li as part of our research collaboration into scholarly publication, studies which were specifically targeted at humanities and social sciences (HSS) disciplines. We found that there was less emphasis on publishing in English than in the natural sciences (Flowerdew & Li 2009; Li & Flowerdew 2009). The first of these two
studies was conducted with a group of 20 scholars from a range of HSS disciplines in mainland China. We sought to find out, first, to what extent English was used for publication by this group and, second, their attitudes towards the official policy of encouraging more international publication. Our findings suggested that, according to these scholars, there is a strong preference for publication in Chinese, that this preference is likely to be maintained, but that publication in English is likely to increase. Among a range of reasons for the preference for Chinese is that, as one participant put it, ‘While we’re having economic globalisation, culture should be plural, otherwise individuality is lost’ (p. 11, translated from Chinese). The domain of HSS is more closely tied to language, so there is a greater need to deal with such issues in the language with which they are identified.

In the second of the two studies, this time conducted with a group of Hong Kong HSS scholars (15 academics across a range of HSS disciplines), findings showed that the participants, driven at least in part by the assessment policy, were more interested than their Mainland counterparts in publishing in international refereed journals in English. However, we also found resistance to the assessment policy and that some publication was nevertheless carried out in Chinese, targeted at the local/regional audience, especially to a professional readership, as opposed to the purely academic.

The example from Canagarajah’s blog in the previous section is from our own field of English language teaching; as a discipline, English can be considered in a different light from other HSS disciplines. Scholars in the field of English language teaching can be viewed as a special group. As they have been trained to teach English, they might be expected to be able to write and publish in that language. This is not to say that all English scholars are at this level of competence, or, indeed, that they want to publish in English; in many countries there is traditionally a healthy literature on EALLT written in the L1 of the contributors. I know that in Taiwan, for example, the journal *English Teaching and Learning* (ETL) publishes articles in both Chinese and English (although in recent years there has been a move towards more articles in English). Be that as it may, I think a good case can be made that scholars in the field of EALLT need to be able to publish in English. I do not think that this is a case of linguistic imperialism. If someone has chosen English as their field of professional endeavour, then it is only reasonable to expect them to have mastered this field to the highest level, which, of course, in the case of EALLT, would include publishing in English. This is why I tell my Ph.D. students that they should be capable of writing in Standard English, even if they are sympathetic to the case for China English and ELF. In passing, I think this also partly explains why the proponents of ELF cited earlier have English of a very ‘Standard’ kind at their disposal.

9. Preparation for ERRP

Given the pressures to publish in English, there is a need for programmes which prepare international scholars to perform to adequate levels in their individual fields. More and more universities internationally are providing preparation programmes for their research degree students and junior faculty members. Such courses typically focus on what is usually referred to as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), with a strong emphasis on the typical
lexicogrammatical features of academic discourse (sometimes accompanied with attention to discourse structure, with a particular emphasis on the research article (RA)). There are a number of course books in this area, the best known of which is Swales & Feak’s *Academic writing for graduate students*, now in its third edition (Swales & Feak 2012).

There is more to preparing young scholars in writing for publication than just the ‘nuts and bolts’ of lexicogrammar, however. Swales himself has written of his role as a teacher of writing for doctoral students:

> My students come from every conceivable department, but I try to make them a socio-rhetorical community, a support group for each other. I do a lot of rhetorical consciousness raising and audience analysis . . . I take them behind the scenes into the hidden world of recommendations, applications and evaluations . . . In actual fact, I am much less sure than I used to be that I am a language teacher. I have come to believe that my classes are, in the end, exercises in academic socialization. (Swales, cited in Hyland 2012: 162)

What might be referred to as the non-linguistic dimension of Swales’s role here – what Swales refers to as ‘academic socialisation’ – has begun to be appreciated more generally. Hyland (2007), for example, has written of the need for both the linguistic and the non-linguistic levels in courses aimed at preparing novice writers. Hyland (2007) suggests drawing on the literature on the characteristics of published articles in different disciplines, focussing on key features of these texts and making them explicit to writers. This involves, Hyland argues, ‘both raising awareness of the ways language is used to most persuasive effect and encouraging reflection on writers’ own preferred argument practices’ (pp. 89−90). At the same time, Hyland believes it to be productive ‘to assist novice writers with the strategies they might employ in the publication process itself, giving particular attention to the analysis of their target publications and the navigation of the revision process’ (p. 90).

Indeed, most of the (rather scant) literature available on these sorts of courses focuses on these two elements of text, on the one hand, and social conventions, on the other. Kwan (2010) refers to these two aspects of what she calls ‘the discursive task’ as ‘communicating one’s research through an RA’ and ‘communicating with gate-keepers about the RA’. I would like to highlight the importance of the latter focus with an anecdote from my own experience, based on when I tried to publish my first article, which I submitted a very long time ago now, to *English Language Teaching Journal (ELT)*. I no longer have the letter I received from the editor, giving her evaluation of my manuscript, but I well remember the gist, which was along the lines that the reviewers liked my article very much, but that one of the reviewers had queried that I had not given an adequate definition of one of the key theoretical constructs in the article. I took this to be a rejection of the paper and submitted it to another less well known journal which only enjoyed a very short life, although my paper was published. With the knowledge that I have now, mostly gained through practical experience, I realised that I should have revised the original submission to *ELT*, adding the missing definition, and that it would quite likely have been published. The editor of the first journal had not referred to the possibility of a resubmission, but I now realise that just because an editor does not explicitly invite resubmission this does not mean that it is not possible. Editors’ letters may often be often difficult to fathom.
In fact, it is not only junior scholars who have difficulty in interpreting editors’ and reviewers’ comments. Canagarajah has another story related to this issue on his blog. Under the heading ‘Reading Rejection Letters’ he recounts the case of a member of the editorial board of TESOL Quarterly who complained about what he thought were rejections of articles he had submitted. Canagarajah explains that the decision letter the author referred him to was not exactly a rejection; it read: ‘What was surprising was that our decision letter didn’t exactly say that he didn’t have an opportunity to revise and resubmit. He had inferred that he has to abandon efforts to try to publish the article in TESOL Quarterly’.

Canagarajah also recounts a similar experience of his own, when he had submitted an article to College English. The editor’s letter began, ‘Congratulations on coming so close to getting published in such an early stage of your academic career’, from which Canagarajah inferred that that this was a rejection. It was only later, when he showed the letter to his Ph.D. adviser, that it was explained to him that the letter was in fact a ‘revise and resubmit’ letter.

Why do editors write in such an abstruse way? One reason might be that they want to save face in giving bad news. They may also want to avoid possible litigation and accordingly do not give too much encouragement to authors about the likelihood of future publication of their articles.

In order to investigate this question further, I conducted a study with Tony Dudley-Evans, the editor of one journal in our own field, English for Specific Purposes, examining the discourse of Tony’s letters to contributors (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans 2002). The conclusion of our study was that ‘there may be difficulties in interpretation due to a lack of clarity in the schematic structuring of some of the letters and the use of face-saving strategies on the part of the editor when presenting criticisms and suggestions for revision’ (abstract, p. 463). The analysis in the paper suggests that this conclusion might have been understating the case.

Kwan (2010) goes into more detail of what might be incorporated into the social dimension of ERPP courses. In addition to dealing with editors and reviewers and what Swales has referred to as their ‘occluded genres’, Kwan suggests two other areas meriting attention in an ERPP programme. These she refers to as, first, strategic research conception and, second, strategic management of research and publishing. The former involves a command of the necessary disciplinary academic rigour in the research process, an ability to find a ‘niche’ for the chosen research topic, and an ability to relate the research appropriately to the international community. The latter, strategic management of research and publishing, involves managing the time cycle for publication, ensuring the required amount of publications in order to obtain contract renewal, tenure or promotions, and knowledge of which are the most appropriate journals for the scholar’s research.

These are all important areas for an ERPP programme, Kwan argues, although one might debate to what extent they are the responsibility of either the content department, on the one hand, and/or the ERPP provider, on the other. Perhaps there is a case for team-teaching. As far as the English teacher is concerned, this need for the social dimension of ERPP preparation represents an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity because it provides the English teacher with a chance to work with other academics in the content departments, hopefully on an equal footing. It is a challenge because it requires knowledge of the publication process, which can often only be gained with experience, although team-teaching can alleviate this problem.
To end this section, and indeed the paper, I would like to present you with some comments from students downloaded from a website reporting on a successful ERPP project at the University of Brighton in the UK, conducted by Mark Hughes, comments which testify to the benefits of an attention to the ‘academic socialisation’ dimension of ERPP I have been talking about. The comments reflect the positive learning experiences of the students who underwent the course. I think they speak for themselves.

1. She said to me ‘Your dissertation is very good you ought to publish it’. I had no feel for whether it was good, bad or indifferent – I did not have a sense of how good it was? She said ‘No seriously you ought to consider publishing it’. I thought great but how, I had no idea how you published anything. I responded that I did not know how to begin.

2. Another learning was about style, adapting your style for your target publication. I had no idea that you changed your style according to the publication that you were writing for. I had no insight or understanding, which was again fascinating.

3. I thought you wrote something and as long as your commas are in the right place, your grammar was right and your subject matter was accurate, people were not going to say we do not want it. Surely, they just stuck it in an in-tray and if it did not go in the March issue it would go in the July issue. I did not realise that you got rejected as well.

4. At that time I had no idea about which journal to send it to. I did not even have an idea of potential journals.

5. I do remember that the response was not favourable. I do not remember any of the detail, but do remember the hostility of the review process. Anyway what stands out for me to this day was how Tom dealt with this negative feedback. He said we would ignore all of this and send the identical paper to another journal and see what happens. We subsequently learnt that Higher Education Review wanted to publish the paper and all the hostility from the previous submission was gone. (www.brighton.ac.uk/bbs/research/research/casestudies.pdf)

References


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