Teaching Academic English: Theory & Practice

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Teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has become an extremely popular topic, and the importance of the English language in the global academic context cannot be underestimated. According to Swales, quoting research done by Gibbs, in 1994 "[…] 31 percent of all papers published in mainstream journals emanated from the USA." (Swales, 1997: cited in Hyland, 2006: 125), a fact which clearly demonstrates this predominance and importance of English in scientific or scholarly publishing. However, what remains somewhat vague is how exactly we should define Academic English in order to find a more or less unified approach for teaching it. This article will explore some of the questions that necessarily need to be asked before potentially coming up with such a definition, and attempt to answer them, as well as presenting some of the means we may employ in the teaching of Academic English, once an suitable definition has been found.

Some Questions Concerning Academic English

To my mind, it seems relatively obvious that most of the questions we might want to ask ourselves concerning the teaching of EAP should be related to the question of what makes Academic English so different from the kind of ordinary English native speakers and learners acquire in order to fulfil general communication tasks. This, however, does not seem to be the primary focus of many, if not most, studies pertaining to the subject matter. Instead, in recent years, there seems to have been a growing tendency towards developing ways of teaching ***a*** kind of Academic English that is suited to the needs of ever more specific academic communities or genres, as can be seen in the following excerpt from Hewitt, 2001:

> There is a growing consensus that the generally held view of academic writing as an information-transmitting, objective and impersonal form of text is a misrepresentation. Research in sociology and applied linguistics suggests that academic writing is more accurately seen as a vehicle through which scholars attempt to persuade other scholars of the validity of their own arguments. In order to do so most effectively, these arguments have to be presented in ways that are acceptable to the members of the academic community within which they work. Academic writing is therefore seen as part of the process of negotiating what is to be taken as accepted knowledge within a discipline and this is best achieved through modes of expression that have become conventionalised through the particular social and cultural contexts in which they arise. Becoming familiar with these modes of expression is part of becoming an established part of the academic community. (p. 10)

If we take Hewitt's 'definition' of academic writing at all seriously, then there would actually be no point in trying to define the notion of Academic English as an entity *per se* because all we'd be describing would be a proliferation of conventionalised styles that are adapted to the presumed stylistic requirements and pressures of highly specific academic 'in-groups'. Even worse, if we really take academic writing as "negotiating what is to be taken as *accepted knowledge*" [my emphasis], there would hardly be any need at all for academic writing or 'speaking', since this seems to preclude one of the most essential parts of academic expression, i.e. the potential for disagreeing in *content* – and perhaps also *form* – with what is deemed to be established 'knowledge'. Bearing these points of criticism in mind, we can only conclude that Hewitt's point of view is based on the misguided ideology of the so-called 'practitioner', whose unfortunate experience has been that one never has enough time to teach the true basics of Academic English, and then expect the individual scholars who need to speak

or write it to be able to learn the subject specific conventions on their own by adapting their general knowledge to the requirements of their own subjects.

Assuming that there actually is a way to identify those features of Academic English that constitute the largest common denominator, and hence what I've termed the true basics above, instead of subscribing to the ever-increasing proliferation of genres, we should seriously begin attempting to define this common standard which is based on the idea that academic communication first and foremost represents a way of expressing critically reflected and well-founded ideas in the most suitable coherent and cohesive form. In order to be able to establish what these features are, we should probably begin by asking ourselves the following questions:

- How can we define Academic English and how can it be distinguished from non-Academic English?
- How/to what extent does Academic English relate to general rhetoric?
- To what extent is the ability to use Academic English related to specific items of vocabulary & grammar?
- To what extent should we impose specific conventions/genre-related styles on the writer(s)/speaker(s)?
- What do we want to achieve by teaching a course on Academic English?

We will certainly return to most of these later in different contexts. Out of these five questions, though, it seems as if the latter has been the one that has been predominant in most of the thinking about EAP, at the expense of mainly ignoring the importance of the others. In order to understand better how this may have happened, in the following section, I will attempt to give a brief summary of what has been taught or published under the heading of EAP in recent years.

Academic English in Context

If one surveys the field of EAP, one can find a variety of broad 'definitions', or rather interpretations, of the topic. These range from more or less the pure teaching of composition/verbal skills (Cox & Hill, 2004), via 'case studies' of individual genres/registers/text types (e.g. in Tognini-Bognelli/Del Lungo Camiciotti, 2005 or Hewitt, 2001), to 'everything to do with' the language used in academic settings (Biber, 2006). The references listed above are purely exemplary and certainly do not constitute any exhaustive list. Nevertheless, they all seem to reflect one common feature, i.e. that there is a distinct lack of academic research that deals with the generic nature of academic discourse into the nature of what Academic English actually is.

Cox & Hill (2004) comprises both a students' and a teachers' book and, although it is distinctly modern in its approach in the sense that it claims to promote critical thinking, as well as incorporating links to internet resources, it is rather unscholarly and imprecise in the way it approaches academic discourse, and seems more to rely on certain myths about 'academicness'. This can be seen in various parts of the two books.

The first example points towards a misunderstanding concerning the general nature of academic texts, in that it contrasts the following two short descriptive paragraphs with each other, claiming that the second one is "**the** academic" one:

> **Text 1**
> I used survey sampling when I did my first research project. It was about how many people lived in my neighbourhood and who those people were. I needed statistics in order to discover the demographics around where I lived. You can use survey sampling in a lot of disciplines and I used it because I knew it was an accepted method.

Text 2

Survey sampling is a quantitative method of research which is a 20th century phenomenon with most of its growth since the 1930s. Today, it is a widely accepted method for providing statistical data on an extensive range of subjects. Disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, demography, political science, economics, education and public health all rely on sample surveys. (students' book: p. 10)

Upon closer examination of the two texts, it should be obvious that both texts are academic, simply because of their subject matter. In terms of style, there are equally obvious differences, which, however, point to an explicit difference in specific *genres*, rather than representing a distinction of 'academicness' vs. 'non-academicness', the first being an oral or informal *report*, and the second a *definition*, one of the lexically densest genres to be found in academia. And equating definition style with the style to be used for all academic texts is certainly not valid from an academic point of view. That the authors do this is also particularly surprising because they actually list an article by Martin (1991), written in the tradition of systemic functional linguistics that contains examples of different genre categories, both from science and humanities, where one example actually is a definition, and some clear differences between these different types of academic 'super-disciplines', as well as between report, explanation and exposition are discussed.

Further indicators of their rather un-reflected or misinformed use of terminology can be found in their usage of the terms "Paragraph formatting" and *cohesion*. In the former, they fail to distinguish properly between *form*, *function* and *content* when they claim that:

> A paragraph in English is like a little essay on its own. It has an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The introduction is the topic or initial sentence, the body is made up of sentences which provide concrete, supporting evidence of the topic or about the topic and the conclusion is the last sentence of the paragraph. (ibid. pp. 16-17)

On the *content* plane, some paragraphs may well be "like a little essay" and adhere to the format described above, but I personally rather doubt whether the majority of paragraphs in advanced academic composition does actually conform to this pattern, especially with regard to every last sentence of a paragraph actually representing a conclusion to an argument. Rather, a paragraph – in its ideal form – is a *unit of thought* (or *sense*), i.e. it embodies a certain concept under discussion as part of a larger chain of arguments in an academic text. This is its *function*, which is obviously also related to its content, provided that the paragraph is well-written. When marking student assignments, no matter whether they were written by native or non-native speakers, I have often observed this lack of correlation between content and function as being a problem that manifests itself in paragraphs that are either too long or too short, and often reflect a student's inability to frame and structure his or her thoughts and arguments appropriately. Now, *formally*, this idealised correlation is usually reflected in the visual representation of a paragraph, i.e. the fact that its *structural importance* is also reflected in its *visual separation* from the rest of the content.

In terms of their definition of *cohesion*, this appears more like one of *coherence*, or rather a mix of the two:

> You need cohesion in your writing so that the writing makes sense to the reader.
> What is cohesion?
> 1. Cohesion comes from knowing what you want to say – ie *meaning*.
> 2. You need to understand the **overall structure** of the type of writing, reading or speaking you are engaged in and have an understanding of the **context**.
> 3. You must use whole sentences and use correct **discourse markers/sentence connectors/links** between and within sentences and paragraphs. (ibid p. 25)

Apart from the features already mentioned above, there is a somewhat strong insistence on *nominalisation* and *impersonal constructions* being some of the most important features in

academic writing (ibid. pp. 186; 229). These ideas, which also crop up in Hyland (2006: 14), as well as other books on EAP, often seem to be based on some descriptions of ***scientific*** English, originally developed in a number of articles by Halliday (c.f. e.g. those collected in Webster, 2004). But, again, there seems to be a certain kind of misunderstanding here, based on wrongfully equating the language of natural science – which seems to be what Halliday is mainly referring to – with academic language in general. This, in turn, seems to have caused the perpetuation of the myth of academic language as always being of very high *lexical density*, full of nominalisations and impersonal style, something which is surely not the case. However, Hyland, unlike Cox & Hill, at least acknowledges this myth indirectly immediately after listing these features as features of academic texts by saying:

> The extent to which disciplines conform to these features or subject teachers expect students to use them will vary enormously. (Hyland, 2006: 14)

It is surprising, though, that this nominal style is still treated as being a kind of norm in academic writing, especially since, according to Halliday (1999: 129), objections have already been raised against it since the 19th century! Maybe, however, this is just due to the ever-increasing importance attributed to the natural sciences in being the driving force behind technological progress, as well as their mistakenly assumed objectivity, when, in truth, the writing style used in these sciences is often far inferior and certainly often much less understandable than the one that is being used in the more scholarly academic disciplines.

The books or articles I have referred to as case studies above are usually far more academic in nature and most of them certainly seem to have a certain value to the field. The only problem I see with them is that they either tend to pick out only a few of the features that may be necessary for proper in-depth research into EAP, or that they restrict themselves to highly specific genres and therefore hardly make enough of a contribution to our understanding of what exactly the nature of academic English is. In order to achieve this purpose in using them, it would unfortunately be necessary to 'pool' such a great number of them for comparison that this may end up being a life's work, apart from the fact that it would be difficult to evaluate all of them thoroughly. Most of this type of research can be categorised as 'bottom up', rather than 'top down', whereas it is probably, as I will also argue later, more sensible to apply a mixed approach. Instead of achieving a sense of genericity, we seem to be losing out to a sometimes bewildering array of genres, rhetorical myths, or exercises in composition.

A similar thing may unfortunately be true for Biber (2006), although this book certainly looks at a very exhaustive list of features that occur in the language of university settings. However, I'm just not sure whether I would count certain communicative activities, such as service encounters at university, as proper academic genres and therefore worth investigating in this context.

Genre – Help or Hindrance?

What I have just remarked above about Biber's study is a very good example of what I would call the genre 'boom', which seems to have been started inadvertedly by the publication of Swales' *Genre Analysis: English in academic and research settings* in 1990. Here, Swales defines *genre* as:

> […] a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. (Swales, 1990: 58)

The major problem with this definition seems to be Swales' emphasis on the importance of communicative purpose in contrast to all other potential defining criteria. Insisting on this, in the worst case, leaves the door wide open to calling just about anything that deviates slightly from a previous established genre a new one, simply because it fulfils a slightly different purpose. Furthermore, it may actually prevent us from trying to establish useful sets of criteria that would enable us to list and explain the differences between individual genres in such a manner that would make it easier to teach students (or experts) who are already familiar with particular genres how to deal with new ones, e.g. if students change their subjects. Let's take a look at a list of potential genres in order to illustrate this point further:

Written Genres		*Spoken Genres*	
Research articles	Book reviews	Lectures	Student presentations
Conference abstracts	Ph.D. dissertations	Seminars	Office hour sessions
Grant proposals	Textbooks	Tutorial sessions	Practicum feedback
Undergraduate essays	Reprint requests	Peer feedback	Dissertation defences
Submission letters	Editor response letters	Colloquia	Admission interviews

Table1 – genre examples; source: Hyland, 2006: 50

Apart from the fact that the (implicit) definition of academic genre employed here already seems to be extremely wide, it should be quite obvious that the communicative purposes of some of the genres listed here are not easily distinguishable and may therefore not constitute good indicators of genre differences. Thus, the purpose or rationale behind lectures, seminars, tutorial sessions and colloquia essentially ought to be the same, namely to convey/impart information to/on the students. However, the differences in "choice of content and style" that Swales mentions are not really due to this rationale, but rather determined by the location, the size of the group, the degree of audience involvement, or the academic level of participants, so that we may actually be better off trying to define specific *discursive categories* that share certain similar features, rather than establishing genre categories that are actually unrelated to a specific content. Although Swales does actually also consider genres from the literary point of view in his attempt at defining the concept of genre, he nevertheless seems to ignore the fact that there are specific conventions associated with most genres there, and which are often present on multiple levels, but at the same time most specifically in terms of content and form, such as for example classical poetry or renaissance drama, etc. And these not only tend to adhere to specific – and often very strict – forms, but are also frequently restricted in terms of their subject matter, something that is definitely not the case with the types of academic genres referred to earlier.

Essential Category Distinctions for EAP

Thus, if the term genre somehow does not seem to fit the concepts it is used to express, and there is no clear and verifiable definition of what constitutes the properties of individual genres, we may actually be better off abandoning the use of this rather biased term and instead trying to establish discursive or communicative categories that are more clearly defined and also more clearly reflect the general ***academic*** purposes that are required at university level. But how big are the differences between these categories and how exactly can we get a handle on them if there seems to be such an abundance of genres/categories that most authorities seem to assume are necessary for successful academic communication?

Well, the first logical step in this should probably be to abstract away from this ever-expanding set of labels and to identify the true communicative needs that reflect academia in terms of higher-level communicative categories. Initially, this probably means

paring down the list of categories to those that are truly academic in nature, i.e. the *essential* ones, those that reflect the exchange or development of knowledge, as opposed to those that are purely *incidental* and only represent a means to an end, such as admission interviews, submission letters, editor feedback, grant applications, etc. In other words, what I refer to here as incidental categories are a kind of 'by-product' of academic engagement, but do not in and of themselves contribute anything to the real nature of academia and the 'pursuit of knowledge'. And yet – as can be seen from Table 1 and the categories of university language in Biber (2006) – these incidental categories seem to feature rather prominently on the lists of topics to be taught to students on EAP courses, which seems to be going hand-in-hand with a sort of commercialisation idea in education/academia, where so-called academic content is taught to 'customers' who want to be successful at university level, simply because it helps them to fit into a more and more globalised and increasingly commercialised academic environment.

Once we have successfully reduced the list of potential categories to only the essential ones, we can begin our attempt at isolating specific criteria that may be useful indicators of categories and consider how these can be applied to and across different academic disciplines. The discussion of this in the following sections can, however, only 'scratch the surface' of what is actually necessary in order to arrive at a reasonably exhaustive list of these criteria and should thus only be seen as a rough guideline.

Let's start by trying to establish the most important logical distinctions that apply to the realm of Academic English. If we turn back to Table 1, we note that Hyland has established a rough division into *spoken vs. written* categories. This intuitively makes sense because speaking and writing clearly usually require different skills in terms of usage of *cohesive devices*, *syntactic complexity*, *structuring* and *presentation of arguments*, etc. However, we should obviously not see these categories as being purely binary in nature, as there are certainly also some (not always clearly definable) levels in between these two 'extreme' points. Not only are there certainly categories that are usually written to be spoken – such as lectures, but any individual writer's style may also vary according to the level of spokenness apparent in their writing through such constructs as *rhetorical questions* or the use of *discourse markers*, such as *well* or *now*, that may well occasionally crop up in writing in order to 'liven up' or establish an imaginary discussion between reader and writer.

Below the level of this, there also seems to be a relatively clear distinction we can draw between *receptive* vs. *productive* categories or skills, but here again we find that most academic activities cannot clearly be situated at either end of the scale. For example, in many seminars, students not only need to listen to presentations other students or lecturers give, but also present their own materials or participate in discussions. Even in lectures, formerly perhaps one of the most prototypical types of receptive categories, nowadays it is increasingly becoming more common for students to ask questions – and quite rightly so. This perhaps leaves us with an increasingly narrow field of 'true' receptive categories, such as studying from books, which, upon closer inspection, also turn out not to be purely receptive since any kind of critical evaluation of a topic is automatically also a kind of productive process inasmuch as the content read also needs to be reflected and maybe even stored in the form of written or mental notes.

The next potential criterion for classification is the level of *depth* or *detail* an academic piece of work is expected to contain. Here, there are obvious differences between such categories as student presentations and lectures on the spoken level, or abstracts and full-length papers/assignments, book chapters and whole monographs on the written plane. These differences arise partly out of the levels of *knowledge/subject competence* (expected) of the producer (or recipient), as well as more conventionalised aspects of *presentation modes*, such as length restrictions for written materials or the time frame allocated for a presentation. The specific problems posed by these two factors are, on the one hand, that the receptive

competence of the student may often be assumed to be at a much higher level, i.e. the student may have to be able to digest difficult academic content and style without having been properly trained to do so, and on the other, that some conventions, such as e.g. the current trend for the length of workshop papers to be limited to eight pages, hardly leaves the producer enough space to express anything but the most rudimentary ideas coherently.

It is only at the final level that we really need to move away from content a little and start paying attention to the language (structure) used in order to convey this content. As previously noted, there are still major problems in distinguishing academic from scientific, let alone these two from general English. However, without these distinctions, how can we ever assume that we will be able to teach EAP properly? Well, although the key to this may at least partly be found at the levels of morphology or morphosyntax, e.g. in academia-specific phrases, words or parts thereof, it is much more likely that the true nature of academic English lies in the interplay of the former with higher-level structures that enable us to achieve the main purpose of academic discourse, i.e. to enhance or spread knowledge through scholarly, argumentative, and reflective modes of discourse. Thus, in order to achieve a better understanding of what makes a piece of discourse academic, we should probably do two things:

1) place more emphasis on investigating and illuminating the argumentative structures to be found in academic texts, and
2) question existing stereotypes of academicness based on mainly science-based traditional writing conventions.

The first of these can be achieved by investigating and comparing data from many different academic domains to one another, especially in relation to issues of structure and presentation of materials and how these relate to argumentative structure, as it is reflected in issues of cohesion and coherence. The second requires a critical in-depth analysis of academic (scientific, as well as scholarly) texts in order to determine whether the high level of syntactic complexity that is often created through the use of nominalisations and *information packing* (c.f. Ventola, 1996; Halliday, 1999: 127) in these texts is really a suitable way of expressing potentially complex academic notions or simply a convention that is based on an ill-conceived idea of objectivity underlying the language of science. As Halliday (1999: 129) states with regard to *nominalisation*, "There has always been some resistance to it – eighteenth-century humanists already felt threatened by the 'objectivity' of science, and the new scientific forms of language were at least partly to blame", something which apparently has never deterred the advocates of a 'scientific style' from continuing to promote its use since then.

To summarise, we can now establish four essential levels or categories of description that students in EAP courses need to be made aware of:

1) spoken- vs. writtenness
2) need for receptive vs. productive engagement
3) level of depth or detail, including appropriate use & knowledge of terminology
4) interplay between text structure, syntax and lexico-grammar

The general idea is that once students have developed an awareness of these most important distinctions, they can learn everything else autonomously, thus also enabling them to understand and produce new categories of academic material in 'subject-remote' or new disciplines. In the following sections, I will try to elaborate a little more on how such an awareness can be produced.

A Question of 'Directionality'

As already pointed out in the general section on approaches to academic English and the one on genre, much of the research done in EAP deals with very specific issues or features in 'would-be genres'. This very much corresponds with what I would refer to as a 'bottom up'

approach, which lends itself perfectly to analysing such features as errors & idiomaticity, use of subject-specific terminology, etc., and certainly plays an important role in discussing or identifying category differences. However, students often have major difficulties in identifying the general purposes or means of structuring their arguments, i.e. the 'top down' knowledge, which will enable them to digest or produce sensibly structured academic content, which is why they will equally need to be made aware of how structure and argumentation interact in order to produce cohesive and coherent (academic) texts. Aspects of 'top down' knowledge, to my mind, also include knowledge of 'academic word-formation' or general academic vocabulary, register and strategies. In other words, students need to equally learn about issues of *generic applicability*, as well as category/subject *specificity*, thus combining both top-down and bottom-up approaches, in order to be able to master the intricacies of academic English. We'll begin our discussion of how to raise awareness of both concepts with a look at the top-down side.

Structure & Argumentation (Meta-Grammar)

In describing the textual structure of academic texts, we can distinguish between two different cohesive and coherence chains, the *argumentative* and the *structural* chain. In Hallidayan terms, the former would probably here reflect the logic of the document/text in terms of its *ideational* aspects and the latter with regard to its *interpersonal* and *textual* ones. On the argumentative level, we essentially find a tri-partition into:

1) an introductory section
2) a 'middle part'
3) a conclusion.

The purpose of the introductory section is to set the scene and to provide an overview of the content the reader can expect, including the intentions of the author. As such, in the written domain, it usually minimally contains an introductory paragraph, which may also be preceded by an abstract. In presentations, the introductory section normally contains an introductory slide and/or an outline of the talk. Additional information that may appear in either medium is related to author identification, affiliation and contact details, such as email addresses, and occasionally also information about supporting grants from funding bodies that have made the research possible.

The 'middle part' contains the main body of the text in the form of developing paragraphs. Here, we can essentially find two different models, the first being modelled on ancient rhetoric – i.e. the *thesis*, *antithesis*, *synthesis* model, and the second reflecting a more procedural, experiment-based approach. The former is obviously grounded in the *dialectic* tradition of the more scholarly (Arts & Humanities) disciplines, whereas the second stems from primarily *experiment-driven* natural science disciplines, where usually experimental setup and procedure are discussed first, followed by a discussion of the results. However, with an increase in data-driven, empirical methodologies (such as corpus linguistics or empirical psychology) in the scholarly disciplines, a mix of the two forms has become more likely or frequent as a model for the latter, too. Understanding that these different forms derive from the descriptive needs of the individual disciplines should be a major step for students (and researchers) in understanding what the requirements for a particular academic text may be.

Any academic written (but maybe also oral) text is usually 'rounded off' by a conclusion. Here, it is elementary to understand that we basically come 'full circle' again by recapitulating what the motivation behind the text has been and how the research reported on has dealt with this. Therefore, the beginning of the conclusion often deliberately resembles the introduction and its end provides a synthesis or summary of the results. This may well be obvious for the experienced researcher, but, according to my recent experience, it is by no means something we can expect every student to understand without having it pointed out to them.

The structural chain consists of the title, as an abbreviated form of introduction which ought to be explicit enough to capture the reader's attention, followed by textual elements that may belong to one of three hierarchical levels, the *macro-*, the *meso-*, or the *micro-level*. The macro-level comprises all chapters and (sub-)sections, and is 'visually manifested' through headings and sub-headings of various levels. Their hierarchical structure in turn is ideally reflected in an equally hierarchical numbering system (e.g. 1, 1.1, 1.1.1, etc.), as well as differences in font-size and style. Usually, headings are also clearly distinguishable from ordinary text through the occurrence of *title-case*. In oral texts, the same structure ought to be reflected in the titles/headings of individual slides or transparencies of a presentation. The macro-level, in reflecting the highest-level logic of an academic text can be said to form a kind of *meta-grammar* of the text, which is also reflected in the table of contents (TOC) of a document, which can be built from it automatically in most modern word processors, provided that the headings are marked in the appropriate way.

At the meso-level, we find paragraphs, lists, tables, graphics, and quotations. Each of these ought to represent an *independent unit of thought*. The independence of each of these units is generally reinforced through a kind of 'visual metaphor', manifested in an appropriate spacing, separating each unit from the surrounding text, often also accompanied by a first-line indent. The main difference between paragraphs and all the other units at this level, though, is that the latter represent condensed information, which, in an ideal situation, should not be left as self-explanatory units, but instead appropriately introduced, as well as possibly also summarised by surrounding paragraphs, unless the list, table or graphic itself is only used as a summary of the preceding section content. The oral counterpart to paragraphs are bulleted or numbered hierarchical or non-hierarchical lists of keywords or phrases, as well as (usually brief) quotations.

The micro-level comprises all grammatical constructions (in the widest sense) up to the level of the *orthographic sentence*. Issues at this level are, e.g. the use of appropriate register, terminology or idiomatic constructions, grammar, information packing and unpacking, understanding the morphology of academic language, etc. It is perhaps at this level where category- and discipline-specific conventions play the largest role.

In order to raise students' awareness of what makes an academic text, the properties of both chains need to be discussed and clearly related to one another. Furthermore, the sense behind and usefulness of established conventions of text (re-)presentation, such as the use of headings, paragraphs, etc., clearly demonstrated. Some possible ways of how this may be achieved are discussed in the following section.

Teaching Meta-Grammar & Textual Logic

Raising awareness of textual structures and their relationship to argumentation may, first of all, be achieved by investigating research articles from different disciplines in order to compare the kind of variability one encounters in them, as well as their common elements/logic. Here, it is particularly interesting to compare articles written for humanities journals with those written for journals catering for the natural sciences, as well as more scientific/scholarly articles with popular science reports to be found in newspapers.

In teaching about good principles of document structuring, I have always found it highly useful to confront students with the structuring and layout options employed in writing web pages. Even for students who are not highly computer-literate, demonstrating the connection between using HTML tags around ordinary pieces of text and seeing the different effects achieved through their *rendering*, e.g. for different levels of heading, ought to illustrate this point. Apart from this, the use of paragraph tags to delimit individual paragraphs can prepare students for an introduction to sensible paragraphing and its advantages in word-processing later. Optionally, an introduction to hyperlinks in the form of a table of contents, linked to the individual sections of a web document may enforce the understanding of meta grammar.

Once a fairly good understanding of basic document structuring has been achieved by investigating shorter documents, the additional features of books or theses, such as front and back matter, chapters, indexes, etc. can be demonstrated and essentially portrayed as an extension on the meta-level.

Of course, it is not enough to raise awareness, i.e. to rely on a purely passive knowledge of the concepts discussed above, but, even if only limited time may be available, some practice under 'non-live conditions' is necessary. Although it may be tempting to actually integrate this practice into 'live conditions', i.e. a situation where students actually hand in their work and are graded on this, it may actually make more sense to do this as a kind of set of exploratory exercises, in order to avoid the pressures of time and performance associated with grade exercises.

In terms of the order of sensible potential exercises, I personally prefer the following approach, partly because it also again ties into aspects of progressing from the conception and creation of shorter to longer 'documents', as well as introducing students to an intelligent use of software. As a first step, one can begin by letting students structure and sketch their ideas on a particular topic by using presentation software, such as MS PowerPoint or Open Office Impress. This approach corresponds to a kind of 'online note-taking', which may actually represent a pre-stage for preparing a fully fledged assignment or article later, even more so if students are also made aware of how they can later use (export) their outlines into word processing documents, a feature that most standard presentation software offers. To learn to understand the concepts of document structuring and logic better, one can then progress to writing simple web pages, which may also help to strengthen the students' understanding of meta information versus actual content, if properly done. The final stage would then be to apply the principles learnt through web page writing, such as proper paragraphing, appropriate use of headings, etc., to word processing, including such practical exercises as creating TOCs automatically, sorting bibliographies automatically, adjusting and modifying styles, etc. While the latter may on the surface look as if it had little to do with EAP, it is a) something students (as well as lecturers) need to have a good working knowledge of, as well as b) being something that re-enforces the understanding of logical structure/argumentation and its relationship to the physical representation of academic texts.

Cohesion & Coherence

In teaching cohesion and coherence, one can employ relatively similar methods of raising awareness, as well as relating these two phenomena to the argumentational and structural levels discussed above. In doing so, it is generally advisable to start with cohesion because it is relatively easily identifiable via a number of surface features, such as *connectors*, *anaphoric* and *cataphoric* expressions, as well as mainly other *deictic* items.

In terms of teaching methods, there is a variety of simple ways to raise this awareness, out of which I'll only demonstrate two slightly different exploratory web-based exercises here. Both are similar to 'intelligent cloze tests', but fulfil slightly different awareness-raising functions and, what is equally important, are **unscored**. The latter point is important because it essentially has two very practical implications, a) that this type of exercise is rather easy to implement, even for teachers who are not computing experts and without having to run any programs on a web server, and b) that the unnecessary pressure of a testing environment is avoided and students can thus be more at ease in their exploration.

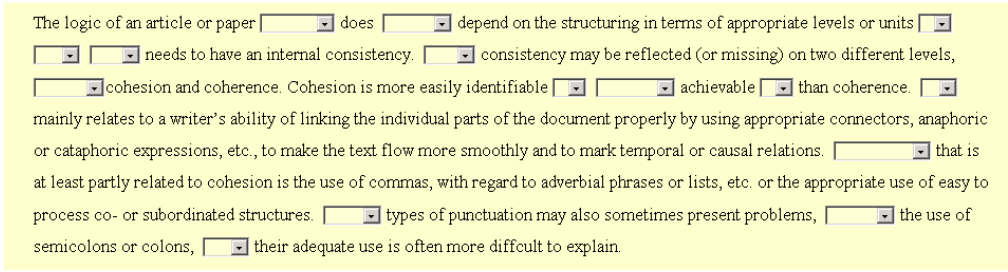

Figure 1 - unfilled gap filling exercise sample

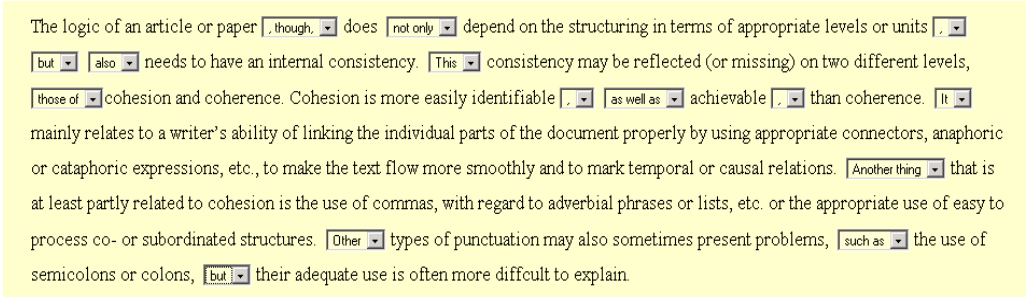

Figure 2 - filled in gap filling exercise sample

The first exercise consists in 'gap filling', where there is only a binary choice from a drop-down list, i.e. whether to leave a blank in the context, or to select a cohesive marker to fill this blank. The idea behind this is simply to let students select the different options for the given text and to see for themselves how the use of cohesive devices may make the text more readable. This is illustrated above by two screenshots from a sample web page on cohesion and coherence, one where the blanks are left empty and the other where they have been filled in.

Of course, any number of intermediate stages in filling the gaps will be possible, but here, students should at least realise that in some of the cases, some elements (such as e.g. some commas) are actually indispensable, whereas others do represent a clear option.

The second type expands on this idea, but in the form of 'multiple choice' options that not only demonstrate how cohesive markers may improve readability, but also how markers from different 'classes' may change the meaning in more or less subtle ways.

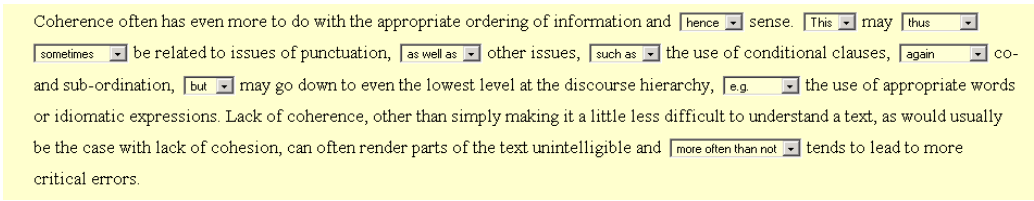

Figure 3 - filled in multiple choice exercise sample

To illustrate this point, let's look at the other choices that were available for the final option group. Here, apart from the chosen *more often than not*, which is a multi-word construction, the single-word items *therefore*, *thus*, *often*, and *frequently* were also available. Out of these, *therefore* and *thus* express a causal connection, whereas all the other options represent forms

of *hedging* that have largely lost their original 'temporal' or iterative meanings. Furthermore, students should realise that, although *often* still appears as one of the options, in this particular case it would not be viable stylistically because the same word already occurs before in the same sentence.

Coherence obviously is more difficult one to identify, partly because it rarely manifest itself on the surface level, and also because it 'comes in many different shapes'. It is usually also not coherence itself that we tend to notice in a text – because we generally take it for granted that a well-designed text is coherent –, but rather the *lack* of it. Whereas we saw in the practical cohesion exercises that cohesive markers need not be present in all cases, so that often a text is still quite understandable without them, the absence of coherence would at the very least render some parts, if not the whole of the text, incomprehensible or very difficult to process, as coherence expresses the logical structure and interrelatedness of the individual textual elements.

In order to illustrate some of the different facets that may cause this lack of logical fit, let's take a look at an abridged extract from the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), from an essay produced by a Czech learner:

> Some people say that in our modern world there is no longer a place for dreaming and imagination. […] I would say that there is a place for dreaming in our world but ***it still disappears***. [...] Many people live in a hurry. ***They are swallowed up the time***. [...] ***Everybody*** has ***its*** ups and downs***?*** [...] In my opinion everybody dreams. ***Somebody*** had a dreaming time ***in its childhood***, especially ***in the mature age***. Teen-agers have their heads full of dreams, their feelings are ***in contrary*** to the real world. […] We***,*** adults know and understand that (ICLE-CZ-KRAL-0001.1)

This excerpt shows a variety of 'coherence-blocking' constructions, such as incorrect use of pronouns/reference, e.g. "***Everybody*** has ***its***", "***Somebody*** had a dreaming time ***in its childhood***", a contradiction, "***in its childhood***, especially ***in the mature age***", the misuse of a preposition(al) phrase, "***in contrary*** to", rather than *in contrast to* or *contrary to*, some uninterpretable constructions, "it still disappears" (presumably *it keeps disappearing*) and "They are swallowed up the time" (presumably *Their time is being swallowed up*), as well as the use of two incongruent punctuation marks, the question mark in "Everybody has its ups and downs" and the comma after "We" in the final sentence. Other features that block cohesion may be semantic misuse (incorrect words, such as e.g. false friends), misuse of articles or phrasal verbs, lack of (minor) punctuation, etc.

Perhaps the best teaching method for raising awareness concerning issues of coherence is to conduct an analysis/exploration of error tagged data, so that students can be shown the many different grammatical and other errors that may lead to coherence loss. Below, you can see an example of one way of dealing with this, a web page where coherence errors are colour-coded, and provided with an explanatory tool tip attached to the affected spans of text.

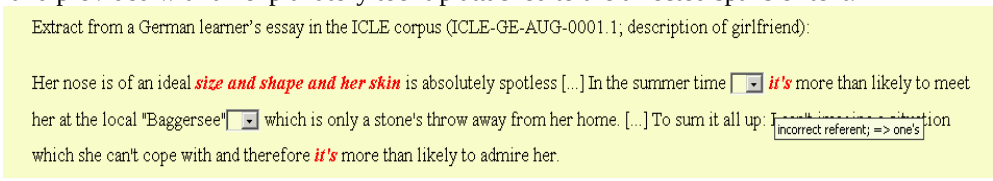

Figure 4 - an error tagged text used to illustrate coherence problems

Of course, providing the tool tips means that the errors will already have been pre-classified by the teacher producing the materials, whereas not adding them would leave the option open for students to come up with their own classifications as an additional exercise.

Other types of exercise useful in this context may be *concordancing* on articles, prepositions, adverbials, quantifiers, etc.

Modality & Hedging

The writing of many inexperienced writers is often too factual/absolute, which may lead to an exposure to sometimes harsh criticism, especially if the writing is not supported by appropriate 'backup' evidence. Teaching this can be done in a relatively straightforward way by letting students run concordances on appropriate academic articles, as well as learner essays, where the lack of hedging tends to demonstrate the inexperience of the writers fairly clearly. Of course, it is also necessary to provide students with a brief description of what hedging is and an initial list of potential indicators of it, such as modal auxiliaries (*may*, *could*, *might*, *should*, plus negations), modal nouns (*possibility*, *probability*, *likelihood*, *(by) chance*), modal adverbs/adverbial constructions/downtoners (*rather*, *fairly*, *maybe*, *potentially*, *possibly*, *sometimes*, *occasionally*, *frequently*, *from time to time*, etc.), verbs of evaluation (*judge*, *esteem*, *consider*, *regard (as)*) or belief (*think*, *believe*, *suppose*, *assume*, *estimate*, *feel*), etc. Concordancing on especially modal auxiliaries should minimally allow students to come to the conclusions that a) hedging is an important part of academic text production and b) that it is intimately linked to the idea of evaluation and hence occurs primarily, though not exclusively, in clauses whose subject is in the first person. Once these realisations have occurred, further exercises could include identifying and categorising additional hedging constructions from a variety of different academic texts.

Commitment & Stance

The 'counterpart' to hedging/modality is the expression of commitment or stance. While, on the one hand, it is necessary for those who produce academic texts to suitably moderate their claims and thus protect themselves from criticism, it is, on the other hand, also quite necessary to clearly state one's own position on a topic to the listener or reader. The questions here are actually:

- How much commitment makes a text more accessible to the reader/listener?
- Is it better to use the highly impersonal, 'scientific' style already criticised earlier or to adopt a more personal and at the same time also probably less densely packed one?
- Does the use of passives really make a text more factual?

If we look at the following excerpt cited in Hyland, (2004: 14), I think the answer is quite obvious.

> To determine if the increase in elastic shear moduli seen with MAP2c could be due solely to bundling of ac tautin filaments, the relative light scatter of solutions of actin filaments were measured. It was noted that at dilute molar ratios of MAP2c to actin there was no increase in light scatter. Higher molar ratios increased the scattering. These results suggest that dilute concentrations of MAP2c may have caused actin gelation by organizing the actin filaments into an isotropic network.

A further debatable – and corpus-researchable – issue is the use of the first person plural pronoun. While *we* certainly has its justified uses when there are either multiple collaborators to be acknowledged in the production of an academic text or the author/speaker is trying to engage the readers/listeners (*inclusive we*), we – in the sense just mentioned – also still occasionally find the use of 'royal' *we*, especially in the writings of 'would-be authorities' or authors from certain non-native (mainly non-European/-western) contexts. Such uses may sometimes leave the recipient with a distinct impression of arrogance on the part of the producer and are therefore perhaps best avoided. In general, I believe that it is important to

encourage students to commit themselves, provided they use appropriate arguments, substantiated by *suitable evidence* from *authoritative resources*.

Core Academic Vocabulary & Expressions

Another important feature of academic texts is their vocabulary. This vocabulary is usually assumed to be very different from everyday-life vocabulary, more technical and complex. Because of the assumed differences to everyday English, sometimes special lists, such as the Academic Word List (AWL) are recommended for learners. However, there is a very general problem in defining what is academic language, and especially general academic language. In order to illustrate this, let's take a look at the abstract of Coxhead's article on the "New Academic Word List" (Coxhead, 2000):

> This article describes the development and evaluation of a new academic word list (Coxhead, 1998), which was compiled from a corpus of 3.5 million running words of written academic text by examining the range and frequency of words outside the first 2,000 most frequently occurring words of English, as described by West (1953). The AWL contains 570 word families that account for approximately 10.0% of the total words (tokens) in academic texts but only 1.4% of the total words in a fiction collection of the same size. This difference in coverage provides evidence that the list contains predominantly academic words. By highlighting the words that university students meet in a wide range of academic texts, the AWL shows learners with academic goals which words are most worth studying. The list also provides a useful basis for further research into the nature of academic vocabulary.

Coxhead here claims that because the vocabulary in the AWL only covers a rather limited percentage of words that occur in a corpus of fiction, this vocabulary is necessarily academic and contains words that "students meet in a wide range of academic texts". However, looking at the composition of the corpus the AWL is based on[1], we can see very clearly that there is quite a heavy imbalance towards economics and law. Here, the compilers of the corpus do not seem to have distinguished properly between the subject areas that made up the four different faculties or, in other words, not to have realised that the sub-disciplines in these two faculties/disciplines mentioned above are much closer to one another than in the other two faculties. This failure would also explain why in group 1 – i.e. that of the most frequent academic words – such rather too genre specific terms as e.g. *economy*, *finance*, *legislate*, etc., appear.

Therefore, although the general approach of creating lists of academic vocabulary by 'subtracting' core items of vocabulary from lists derived from academic texts intuitively seems to have some validity, we need to be extremely careful in which way we apply it. If we decide to teach our students the academic vocabulary that they may need in their own subject areas, we can probably do this quite easily because all we have to do is use this method with a corpus of writings from our own discipline, which may be relatively easy to obtain. The alternative to this – if we insisted upon teaching general academic English, whatever this may really be – would be to expose students to carefully balanced corpora from a variety of different disciplines, each time trying hard to exclude truly subject-specific terminology.

In general, it may make more sense to stick to limited specific disciplines, instead of relying on one huge, and potentially biased, word list. Also, while it is certainly important for students to have an appropriate knowledge of vocabulary, simply providing them with lists to learn hardly seems enough. Rather, we should probably enable them to devise appropriate recognition strategies for what is academic about the use of different words or combinations of

[1] see http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/research/awl/info.html#corpus

them, something which can most likely only be achieved through the exploration of a multitude of academic texts on various levels, again using the computer as a tool to support this process.

First amongst these levels of analysis could be one that is probably often neglected, but that nevertheless seems highly suited to raising students' awareness of how academic vocabulary may be constructed. This is the level of morphology, where we can use alphabetically sorted word lists in order to investigate derivational processes in terms of prefixation, e.g. different forms of negative prefixing, prefixing employing 'prepositions' (such as in {inter}{action}, {inter}{related}, {sub}{strate}, {super}{charge}, etc.) or other learned prefixes (such as e.g. {eco}), etc., or reverse-sorted lists that help to discover typical verbalisation or nominalisation processes.

On the lexico-syntactic level, students should learn to identify frequent words (via frequency lists), and common constructions, such as *collocations* or *lexical bundles/n-gram clusters*, as well as to understand their significance in the text production process. Facilities for creating such lists from suitable materials exist in a variety of commercial (e.g. Wordsmith) or free programs (e.g. AntConc).

An issue that is clearly related to teaching academic vocabulary concerns the use of new international forms of Englishes as opposed to native standards. In other words, should we use simplified forms/vocabulary for the 'International Market', as some scholars seem to be suggesting? Without wishing to be prescriptive here, I would argue against this because of the danger of turning academic English into a form of *controlled language* (c.f. Kittredge, 2003)[2], which may lead to adverse effects in terms of impoverishing the diverse means of expression that have evolved over centuries in the native speaker communities for the very purpose of finding ever better means of actually describing the worlds around us, something which is more essential in academic language than perhaps any other type of language.

'Writing Conventions'

A further feature of academic writing are certain conventions that have established themselves over the years. Often, students seem to have a hard time understanding how to use these conventions or indeed why they may be necessary. Some conventions are, of course, highly motivated, whereas others may simply represent certain 'fashions' or (typographic) trends. Among the latter, I have frequently observed that many of our students tend to add spaces around pairs of words/terms separated by forward slashes, e.g. turning the prior alternative listing into 'words / terms', which rather seems to disturb the unity intended by the original grouping and should hence be avoided. On the other hand, sensible (i.e. motivated) conventions may be very important in order to help clarify important points. Let's take an example from linguistics, concerning the different types of bracketing or other typographical means that can be employed to mark conceptual differences: the plural from of the word *horses* has a *graphemic* representation <horses>, but is made up of two *morphemes* {horse}{s}, a distinction that can easily be expressed by using the latter format, while the *concept* behind the word may be expressed in small caps, e.g. HORSE (generally in the singular) or simply given in single quotes to indicate that the word is *mentioned*, rather than *used*. Similarly the phonemic/graphemic distinction between singular and plural can be demonstrated by giving the representations <horse>-<horses> vs. /ho□s/-/ho□s□z/.

Other conventions that often represent conceptual problems to students are related to citation (formats) and methods. Here, it should be clearly pointed out to students that citing one's sources in an appropriate manner is an essential part of academic procedure, which at the

[2] as has recently been established in certain industry sectors for simplifying the exchange of information

same time demonstrates that one has sighted the appropriate literature, as well as 'showing one's respect' towards the academic achievements of others. Related to this is the problem of misunderstood footnotes. Quite frequently, one encounters complete (long) bibliographical references in excessive numbers of footnotes at the bottom of each page. Here, it is quite essential that EAP trainers – whether they be teachers or course tutors – should make students aware of the redundancy involved in the use of complete citations, which can be avoided by using a short reference style with fully expanded references in the bibliography, as well as pointing out that footnotes (or endnotes) should purely serve as asides, i.e. only contain material that may be of additional interest to the reader, but are not essential for the actual chain of argumentation inside the text.

A similar thing goes for the use of specific types of meaningful formatting, such as italics/boldface, or the use of single vs. double quotes. The important point here is to make students aware of the fact that there is a certain degree of flexibility on the part of any author to highlight important items of information. At the same time, though, it ought to be made clear that there are some pre-defined conventions regarding the presentation of content as well, such as using italics in order to represent (example) words from a (foreign) language under discussion, double quotes for 'reciting' whole passages, or single ones to make reference to a word or to indicate that it might be used in a slightly atypical way from the standard usage or ironically.

An 'eternally applicable' convention is that academic written materials should be largely free of errors, apart from maybe the occasional typo that is easy to miss. Nevertheless, both native and non-native writers often do not seem to take enough care of spellchecking and proofreading their writing products properly, even though at least spelling errors, unless they are related to actually existing dictionary words, can easily be found by using the built-in spell checker of the program used to produce the materials.

Spoken Interaction

In raising awareness of academic interaction in spoken language, the same common-sense principles as for developing an understanding of academic categories need to be evoked, so that students can understand that the content and form of an oral academic text are largely controlled by the audience to be addressed, in conjunction with the actual information to be conveyed. However, since spoken language 'works' in a different way from written language, students need to be made aware of the different means of making a spoken text coherent and cohesive, apart from the need to debunk some existing myths, based on old fashioned ideas about rhetoric.

Let's start our discussion by focusing on the latter. Unfortunately, most text books used in teaching non-native speakers still seem to be almost completely based on invented materials, rather than employing naturalistic corpus data. Students, in turn, therefore often seem to think that people actually speak the way we read in text books, i.e. to assume that skilled speakers always speak grammatically correct (full) English (sentences), never need to correct themselves, or never use hesitation markers and fillers (*ems* & *ers*).

An appropriate teaching method to solve this problem would be to use realistic, pragmatically annotated, transactional or classroom/seminar dialogues, such as the following example from the *spaadia corpus* (see Leech & Weisser, 2007 or Weisser, 2004 for more information):

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<dialogue corpus="trainline" lang="en" id="02">
<turn id="1" speaker="A">
<frag id="1" sp-act="greet" polarity="positive" topic="opening" mode="deixis-greet">
good afternoon
</frag>
```

<frag id="2" sp-act="identify-self" polarity="positive" topic="intro" mode="deixis">
Virgin train line Sandra speaking
</frag>
<q-wh id="3" sp-act="req-direct" polarity="positive" topic="journey-preference"
mode="open">
for which journey do you wish to purchase a ticket
</q-wh>
</turn>
<turn id="2" speaker="B">
<frag id="4" sp-act="direct" polarity="positive" topic="to-location" mode="closure">
er Euston to Manchester please
</frag>
</turn>
<turn id="3" speaker="A">
<dm id="5" sp-act="init">
{#} ***now***
</dm>
<q-yn id="6" sp-act="req-info" polarity="positive" topic="creditcard" mode="closed">
do you hold a current debit or credit card
</q-yn>
</turn>
<turn id="4" speaker="B">
<dm id="7" sp-act="ackn" polarity="positive">
aha
</dm>

Not only does this type of annotated corpus clearly show that spoken interaction does not always use full grammatical sentences (here syntactically marked in *frag* tags), but also that hesitation is a very normal phenomenon that helps speakers plan or revise what they're saying in real time, as well as react to queries in an appropriate manner without too much redundancy. Furthermore, it becomes immediately clear that many of the 'non-grammatical' one-word utterances are actually *discourse markers* (*dm* tags), which are used to guide and control the interaction. A further feature that can also be seen in examples, such as the one above, is that questions in spoken language do not always appear as they would in text books, i.e. with the question word occurring at the beginning, but that the first element in many spoken utterances is often either a preposition or conjunction.

Again, as before, the idea is not necessarily to cover all potential types of academic dialogue, but to raise students' awareness of real-life spoken language and the strategies it employs in conveying information.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to point out that there seem to be some major problems concerning a working definition of EAP, what some of these issues are, and how they need to and can possibly – at least partially – be overcome. My main argument here is that, instead of spending many hours on teaching students to recognise very specific details related to individual 'genres', it should prove much more useful and educating to spend considerably more time analysing real academic documents from diverse source domains in various ways, and thus raise the students' awareness of academic *thinking*, *argumentation* and *procedures*, thereby enabling them more and more to become truly autonomous learners who will be able to switch from one academic category, or even domain, to another with relative ease.

Certainly, in order to achieve this, it will be necessary to provide suitable tools and methods for conveying this information in a mainly computer-mediated form. Obviously, this raises some further issues, due to a degree of computer-literacy on the part of university teachers and students which is still not always advanced enough to deal with complicated

methods of analysis or production of materials. This fact makes it even more necessary to do two things:

a) to demonstrate how sensible and useful online-materials can be created using relatively simple means, as I've tried to demonstrate with my two examples for raising awareness of cohesion and coherence
b) to provide tools and resources for teachers and students that make it possible to present and analyse more complex linguistic phenomena in a way that does not force the average student or teacher to have an advanced level of understanding of computational technology.

An attempt at producing such a tool is the Text Feature Analyser (TFA; Weisser, 2007), a program that allows the 'average computer user' to read in a text and try to determine various features that may contribute to its complexity, such as its type/token ratio, lexical density (c.f. Ventola, 1996), as well as some of the other textual features discussed in this article.

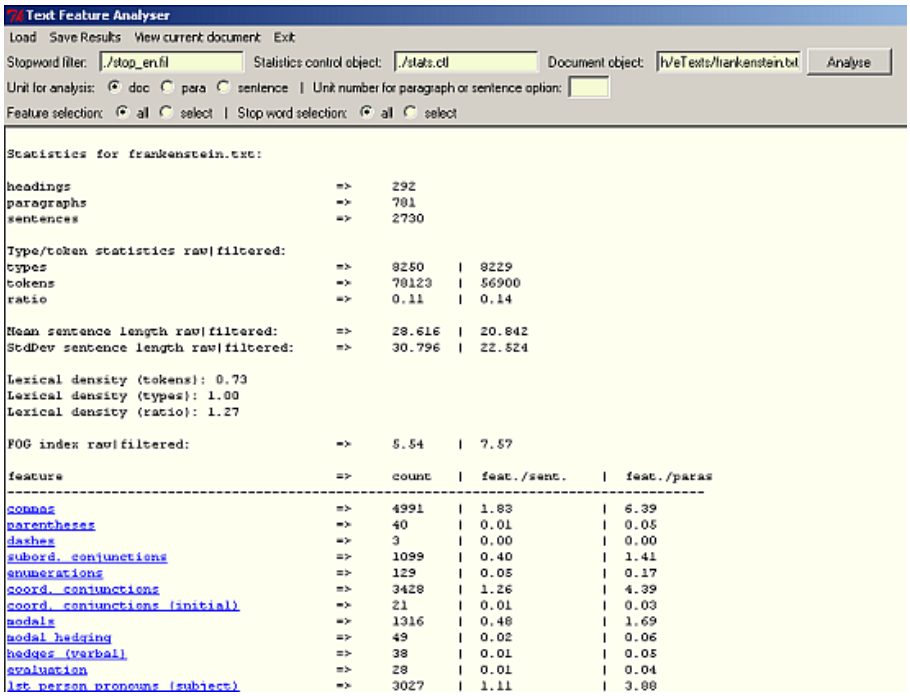

Figure 5 - the Text Feature Analyser

One of the main advantages of the TFA is that it also allows for an easy customisation or redefinition of the features to be analysed. This is based on a flexible mechanism of specifying features that can range from simple lists of words to extremely complex textual patterns, depending on the level of the user, as well as providing concordances of all these customised features through hyperlinks (depicted in blue and underlined in the graphic above). These provide an opportunity for the user to explore these features quickly for/in the particular feature selected, as well as enabling them to verify whether the patterns have been specified correctly[3].

[3] often, though, even 'incorrectly' specified patterns can help to achieve a learning effect…

Of course, information technology, and here especially electronic publishing, has also opened up further avenues, some of them positive and some negative, which I can only mention in passing. On the one hand, electronic publishing has made it much easier for the EAP teacher to find materials that can easily be adapted to the needs described above. On the other hand, it has introduced new 'software constraints', forcing writers to become 'publishers', even if they may not know how to handle the technology properly, and may thus end up struggling more with *form* than actually producing suitable *content*. This ease of being able to produce downloadable word-processed or online documents equally goes hand in hand with a rather detrimental 'publish or perish' attitude that has lead to an (over)abundance of papers, which often lack in quality or encourage some irresponsible authors to simply reuse the same materials over and over again, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to find and digest this wealth of information. Here, perhaps, it is about time to teach students, as well as established researchers, a more responsible attitude.

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