



*International students' challenges in academic writing: A case study from a prominent U.S. university

Nazmiye Gürel Cennetkuşu^a † 

^a Harran University, Şanlıurfa, Turkey

APA Citation:

Gürel Cennetkuşu, N. (2017). International students' challenges in academic writing: A case study from a prominent U.S. university. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 13(2), 309-323.

Submission Date:24/05/2017

Acceptance Date:06/06/2017

Abstract

Because of the importance of English as a scientific lingua franca among academic communities, a great emphasis is put on English education - especially in higher education - in countries where English is a second or foreign language. Therefore, the significant productions of graduate studies such as research articles and dissertations are often required to be written in English. This study examines the needs, means, and successful practices of academic writing in English through a comprehensive survey, in-depth interviews, and samples of academic writing. Results indicate that if parties in higher education (students, professors, and instructors) become conscious of each other's expectations and practices, higher education through second/foreign language would most likely produce successful writers.

© 2017 JLLS and the Authors - Published by JLLS.

Keywords: Higher education; English education; second/foreign language; academic writing; challenges

1. Introduction

This study examines the needs, means, and successful practices of academic writing in English as a second/foreign language through a comprehensive survey, in-depth interviews, and samples of academic writing.

1.1. Literature review

On the international level, academic communication is carried out in English as it is the language of science. The spread, effect, and importance of English on the academic communities and academic communication cannot be ignored (Ammon, 2007; Hamel, 2007). Thus, in countries where English is a second or foreign language a great emphasis is put on English education.

In addition, an increasing number of universities around the world offer undergraduate and graduate programs in English where English is a second or foreign language. A significant number of

* This research was funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey by 2219 Post-Doctoral Research Study Grant.

† Corresponding author. Nazmiye Gürel Cennetkuşu Tel.: +0414-318-3000/2050
E-mail address: ngurel@harran.edu.tr

these students are not only required to write for content classes but also undertake the challenge of producing such long texts as master's thesis and/or doctoral dissertations. It is also a fact that having a publication in the second/foreign language is a requirement for academic success (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Therefore, an increasing interest in advanced academic writing has been witnessed. There are studies reporting the difficulties international students at undergraduate and/or graduate levels face while writing papers required for content classes (e.g., Braine, 2002; Braxley, 2005; Gurel-Cennetkusu, 2012). There is also research that pictures the process of acquiring disciplinary discourse by international students for whom English is the second/foreign language (e.g., Fujioka, 2014; Li, 2007; Woodward-Kron, 2008) and challenges of academic writing in English as a foreign language at the graduate level (Buckingham, 2008; Gurel, 2010; Gurel-Cennetkusu, 2011a, 2011b). Moreover, there are those which trace the course of scholarly publication (e.g., Cho, 2009; Huang, 2010; Li, 2006, 2007) and the struggles of multilingual scholars to publish in English to get recognized in their fields (e.g., Bocanegra-Valle, 2014; Curry & Lillis, 2004; Nasiri, 2013).

In her grounded theory study, Braxley (2005) conducted interviews with five Asian graduate students studying at a US university to reveal the problems of academic writing in English as a second language and to determine how these students cope to master the academic genre. Braxley states that the foremost difficulty international students faced is their lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic writing as what they were taught and what was expected from them here at a US university were quite different. Thus, the students were reported to seek help from friends, writing tutors and/or instructors, and academic texts to meet the writing demands of their degree programs.

Li (2007) offers a case study of a non-native English speaker and a graduate student studying in a non-Anglophone context (i.e., China) who attempts to write for publication in English-medium journals. The study explores how the participant engages in dialog with the local research community (his lab-mates and supervisor) and global specialist research community to get his paper published. The study shows that the participant's key strategy was his engagement with the published articles in his field. Li (2007) suggests that "a critical awareness for the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of research writing by utilizing various sources of learning" (p. 73) should be raised for the students who attempt to write for international publication in English.

It is clear from a thorough literature review that there is a need to study comparatively what the students face as a challenge in academic writing in the second/foreign language and how they try to overcome such challenges and what the content course professors and second/foreign language instructors see as challenges and how they approach such challenges. The communication between these two agents (students and professors/instructors) in the process is too important to be ignored as it sheds light on successful practices of academic writing. In addition, it is crucial to use both (qualitative and quantitative) means of data collection to obtain a clearer picture. This study does both the results of which would hopefully help design a curriculum for academic writing needs of the graduate students.

1.2. Research questions

This study explores the needs, means, and successful practices of graduate-level academic writing in English as a second/foreign language. Specifically, it is aimed to find out (1) the challenges that international graduate students face and the strategies they utilize to overcome those challenges during academic writing in English as a second/foreign language, (2) any misconnection between what the international graduate students report to experience in academic writing as challenges and what their

professors/instructors observe, and (3) the practices which would yield successful results and be suggested for other graduate-level programs.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study uses a mixed-method study using both quantitative and qualitative means of data collection. Data from a comprehensive survey -which was adopted and modified from Dong's (1998) Thesis/Dissertation Writing Scale and Questionnaire- both for graduate students and course instructors, constitutes the quantitative part of this study. A descriptive statistical analysis is applied to the survey questions. The qualitative part of the study is comprised of multiple case studies that are analyzed to create a cross-case analysis. In addition, written documents such as graduate program manuals, course syllabi, writing samples from the students and online resources such as manuals and writing samples from the most prominent US universities' writing departments and/or writing centers are collected and qualitatively analyzed. Data coming from the interviews, written documents, and online resources complement the data coming from surveys and thus provide a more complete and detailed picture.

2.2. Participants

Participants of this study are 1) international graduate students who are enrolled in an education or social sciences graduate program and 2) course instructors who teach international graduate students at a prominent US university.

2.3. Data collection and Analyses

The online link to the survey was sent to the matching departments' graduate students and their advisors first and repeated in several intervals within a four months period. The total number of international graduate students who matched the criteria for the study and filled in the survey is 65. The number of course instructors who participated in the study by completing the survey is 9. Quantitative data were analyzed using the statistical analysis software called SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables were used to calculate the percentages of responses. Where appropriate, statistical tests were run to compare the frequencies of responses to reveal correlations among variables. Also, coding categories were created for the responses to open-ended questions in the survey.

The participants in the semi-structured interviews included 7 international graduate students, 3 professors, and 3 writing center consultants. Some of the participants were interviewed more than once as they presented a unique case which deserved a more detailed and focused inquisition. The duration of the interviews, which were audio-taped and transcribed in their entirety, ranged from 25 minutes to two and a half hours. All the interviews were transcribed in their entirety. After transcription of interviews, data was annotated and categorized in light of the research questions of the study. Interview data was underlined, highlighted, annotated, cross-checked, and categorized according to those clusters. Each category and subcategory was given a code.

Written documents such as graduate program manuals, 25 course syllabi, 25 writing samples from the students and online resources such as manuals and writing samples (87 complete form of documents in total) from the most prominent 16 US universities' writing departments and/or writing centers are collected and qualitatively analyzed simultaneously.

3. Findings

The data for this study includes a number of different sources such as interviews, surveys, samples of students' writing, course manuals, and etc. which makes it not possible to present all the findings under each categorized group of data source. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the findings are presented in accordance with and under the light of the research questions.

3.1. Difficulties Faced

65 international graduate students took the survey 75.38% of whom were master's and 24.62% of whom were doctoral students. Of these students, 78.46% said that they had not gone to an English preparatory school/course while 21.54% had.

To reveal the problematic areas that cause difficulty for international graduate students, a detailed question was asked answers of which are presented in Table 1.

Although professors considered 'using proper grammar' (55.56%), 'connections and transitions' (44.44%), and 'presenting ideas clearly' (44.44%) as the most problematic areas, the students thought that their biggest challenge is 'having less rich vocabulary and expressions' (43.75%) and 'choosing correct words (field-related terminology)' (21.31%).

Casanave and Hubbard (1992) assert in their study that "much of the key vocabulary in ST [science and technology] fields is technical and technical vocabulary is more 'universal' in English" (p. 42) and thus "ST faculty perceived vocabulary use to be much less of a problem" (p. 43). It is clear that one needs more than technical vocabulary to be able to write successfully in social sciences as having limited vocabulary may seriously hinder the ability to express ideas properly:

it seems that I used maybe even some same words in different situations but it goes like they do not fit very well.. like.. I still try to fit in because I don't have other words to use. So.. I would say, first of all, poor in vocabulary, using like new vocabulary.. this is one thing. (Student Interview 1, 13-17)

I think the basic challenge is transferring the ideas from their native language into English. And.. They do not have the necessary vocabulary to express their ideas. (Instructor Interview 2, 12-13)

It is crucial to note that 87.69% of the students have not had any academic writing course during their graduate education. The analysis of answers to this question suggests that one single course on academic writing covers all different types of academic genre which casts doubt on the efficiency of the instruction.

When asked how the students define their academic writing ability, only 9.23% replied as 'poor' while the other 9.23% replied as 'very good'. 41.54% thought their academic writing ability is 'good' while the rest believed it is 'average' (40%). On the other hand, professors reported that their international graduate students' writing ability is either 'average' (44.44%) or 'poor' (33.33%). Only 22.22% of the professors defined it as 'good'.

When the students were asked whether their overall writing ability plays any negative role during academic writing process in the second/foreign language, 46.77% of the students replied as 'slightly negative' while only 1.61% replied as 'very negative'. The remainder of the students either replied as 'negative' or 'not negative at all' (25.81%). However, the professors' responses presented a different picture. 44.44% of the professors thought that it is 'slightly negative', 33.33% believed it is 'negative', and 22.22% considered it 'very negative'.

Table 1. Problematic areas for students in academic writing.

	1	2	3	4	Total
reading the relevant literature	50.00% 30	26.67% 16	13.33% 8	10.00% 6	60
organizing paragraphs	33.33% 20	41.67% 25	18.33% 11	6.67% 4	60
organizing the whole text	32.79% 20	34.43% 21	26.23% 16	6.56% 4	61
having less rich vocabulary and expressions	10.94% 7	18.75% 12	26.56% 17	43.75% 28	64
choosing correct words (field-related terminology)	16.39% 10	32.79% 20	29.51% 18	21.31% 13	61
using proper grammar	20.97% 13	41.94% 26	24.19% 15	12.90% 8	62
using proper mechanical conventions (e.g. APA style)	24.59% 15	37.70% 23	26.23% 16	11.48% 7	61
outlining each chapter (what should be in each section)	33.87% 21	41.94% 26	19.35% 12	4.84% 3	62
connections and transitions	21.31% 13	47.54% 29	22.95% 14	8.20% 5	61
presenting ideas in a logical way	22.95% 14	47.54% 29	19.67% 12	9.84% 6	61
presenting ideas clearly	30.00% 18	36.67% 22	25.00% 15	8.33% 5	60
stating problem clearly	26.23% 16	47.54% 29	18.03% 11	8.20% 5	61
drawing conclusions	29.51% 18	39.34% 24	22.95% 14	8.20% 5	61
avoiding plagiarism (how to quote or paraphrase)	41.94% 26	33.87% 21	20.97% 13	3.23% 2	62

When it comes to the effect of their native language in the process of academic writing in the second/foreign language, 50.79% of the students replied as ‘not negative at all’ while 34.92% replied as ‘slightly negative’. Considering the fact that they rely on their native language when facing a difficulty in the second/foreign language, the result is not completely surprising. Professors’ responses for the same question ranged from ‘negative’ or ‘slightly negative’ (33%).

Collier (1995) states that “academic writing skills, literacy development, concept formation, subject knowledge, and learning strategies developed in the first language will all transfer to the second language” (p. 4). The effect of the first language or of the years of training in the first language might be negative:

I write in English in the way that I write in Spanish. So that gives me problem because in Spanish you can do that very very long sentences, very very long paragraphs. And when I read that in English doesn’t make any sense. So I have to start cutting the things and making shorter the sentences and.. simplifying the language because in Spanish you can be

[laughs].. you can put a lot of things around a word so.. but in English that doesn't work that way (Student Interview 3, 5-9)

that's just the expectation in American academy that you write in a very direct blunt manner that is academic right.. that is not particularly elegant and graceful prose. That is just about clarity (Instructor Interview 1, 23-25)

It is clear that not having the ability of creating ideas and presenting them in the foreign language causes these students to rely on the higher-mental functions of the native language. This approach may ease the problems of composing in the foreign language. However, it turns out to be a major factor when the text is reviewed as while relying on the native language resources the students cannot avoid making structural and meaning-based mistakes as "what is considered logical in one culture may not be in another" (Casanave, 2004, p. 27).

If the differences between the first language and the second/foreign language are radical, it causes greater problems to acquire and use grammatical features:

Besides that the use of 'the' makes things difficult. I mean as we do not have 'the' in our mother tongue, the use of 'the' is very difficult. The use of a/an is very difficult. Yeah these are nightmares for us (Student Interview 4, 23-26)

For example we say 'today I am going to blah blah blah' but in English we just say the of the sentence and we didn't have the.. I mean.. how can I say that.. we didn't have the past time of the verbs.. we don't have that time change in the verbs. So.. we should remind ourselves every time to.. change the time.. is/was something like that (Student Interview 6, 13-16)

These challenges represent themselves as mistakes in students' writing. That might be the reason why the professors assert that the greatest problems are grammar and syntax:

well.. I think grammar and syntax are always the biggest challenges. I can always tell my international students (Professor Interview 1, 52-53)

When the students were asked about the genres that they had practiced during their graduate education, they reported that how to write research papers ranked the top (See Table 2). Professors stated that research papers (77.78%) and summaries/reviews (77.78%) are the most common writing practices they require for their courses. It is important to note that the students at the graduate level get to practice a wide range of academic genres as course instructors require writing of some sort every week such as weekly entries to online discussion boards, reviews of reading materials, and the like.

Table 2. Genres practiced most by international students.

Answer Choices	Responses	
How to write reports	73.08%	38
How to write reviews	44.23%	23
How to write critical book reviews	13.46%	7
How to write critical literature reviews	34.62%	18
How to write research papers	75.00%	39
How to write grants	13.46%	7
How to write research proposals	34.62%	18
Total Respondents: 52		

Question #17 addressed the most difficult sections of an academic paper to write. The results indicate that the most difficult section to write for the international graduate students is discussion (25%) which is followed by implications (21.31%). This result is consistent with the professors' answers (discussion 44.44% and implications 44.44%). These sections require successful presentation of critical analysis and transformation of knowledge. That might be the reason why these ranked the top. The least difficult section is abstract (47.46%) which is followed by introduction (37.29%).

3.2. Sources of Assistance /Strategies Utilized

The students were asked about the role of their native language in the process of academic writing in the second/foreign language. 81.82% of the students stated that when they get stuck with finding the right word, they look for a word in their native language first and find its equivalent in the second/foreign language. They also reported that they think in their native language first and then write in English (40.00%).

Composing academic texts require use of words that cannot be easily found in dictionaries as they are mostly advanced and subject-specific. When stuck with ideas, trying to find words or expressions, the students turn to their native languages:

I try sometimes translate from my own language to English but not that much because I know that would not always work (Student Interview 1, 151-152)

Only 5.45% of the students stated that they write in their first language and then translate it into the second language.

When it comes to the assistance provided by the course instructors, 34.48% of the students thought that they are provided little assistance as the course instructors read and give brief oral or written comments while 31.03% thought the assistance provided is moderate. In contrary to 20.69% of the students who stated they are given extended oral or written comments, 13.79% believed the assistance provided is inadequate.

Students also express, many times over and over during the interviews, the need for more detailed and clear feedback from the course instructors.

Some of them they give some detail but most of them they don't. As I told you, it's like.. saying 'this is awkward' or 'I don't understand what you mean here' or 'revise for clarity'. For me, I don't think this is a thorough feedback. I can't go back and fix or learn from because I would still have to figure out what is exactly the problem (Student Interview 1, 35-38)

To be honest, feedback from professors is not enough. It's either very vague or unclear or even you know nonexistent (Student Interview 2, 51-52)

Analysis of comments made on students' writing reflects the kind of feedback provided. Below is the categorized and word-to-word quoted feedback provided for the international students:

- 1) Syntax (40%):
 - awkward sentence
 - Too much information in one sentence
 - Too complicated
- 2) Lack of elaboration (36%):
 - Expand your thoughts
 - Needs further elaboration
- 3) Word choice (28%):
 - 'retelling' or 'summarizing'?

- ‘requires’ or ‘recommends’?
- 4) Content (28%):
 - ‘these procedures...’ what procedures?
 - Be consistent with the terms
 - Provide a more critical review
 - 5) Organization (16%):
 - Missing section where you synthesize what you have found
 - 6) Clarity (12%):
 - Revise for clarity
 - Be clear, leave no room for misinterpretation
 - 7) Use of tense (8%):
 - Keep the tense consistent
 - Use correct tense
 - 8) Reference/Plagiarism (8%):
 - Have a reference to avoid plagiarism
 - Cite to support your paraphrasing
 - 9) APA (8%):
 - Use APA correctly
 - Pay attention to APA

Professors, on the other hand, believed that the assistance they provided on the students’ writing is either much containing extended comments (44.00%) or moderate (44.00%). It is seen that the international graduate students are in great need of feedback provided by the course instructors. The more detailed and clearer the feedback is, the easier for the students to figure out how they are supposed to correct their mistakes and to learn how to write better in the second/foreign language.

Question #11 in the Professors’ Survey asked about the assistance they provided for their international graduate students. Detailed analysis of the responses is given in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Kinds of assistance provided.

Answer Choices	Responses
choosing the topic	62.50% 5
reading the relevant literature	62.50% 5
making decisions about citing articles	25.00% 2
organizing paragraphs	50.00% 4
choosing correct words	75.00% 6
using proper grammar and mechanics	75.00% 6
drafting certain paragraphs	25.00% 2
developing ideas	62.50% 5
deciding headings/subheadings	75.00% 6
outlining each chapter	50.00% 4
connections and transitions	50.00% 4
presenting ideas in a logical way	50.00% 4
stating problem clearly	75.00% 6
drawing conclusions	50.00% 4
avoiding plagiarism	62.50% 5
Total Respondents: 8	

When asked about the effect of given feedback whether it was helpful or not, 49.12% of the students thought it is helpful while 28.07% believed it had no effect.

International graduate students reported that either they turn to fellow students for help (41.94%) in writing in the second/foreign language or no one (33.87%). People outside the department such as a professional editor constituted 19.35% of the help sought. The students believed that feedback from these outside sources is also helpful (64.52%). 77.78% of the professors reported the same.

For example, peer-help is considered helpful to a certain degree:

I think peers could be really helpful because at least there is a set of advice that tells you have a problem of flow, or style, or the argument is not good but it doesn't go beyond that for me. Because there are things that they can't see as professors you know (Student Interview 2, 74-76)

I always tell those folks to read, look for your peers, exchange papers, get used to providing feedback as well as receiving feedback (Professor Interview 1, 120-121)

While writing in the second/foreign language, the students reported that they refer mostly to dictionaries (52.46) and journal articles published in their fields (41.67%). The least useful sources are grammar books (52.54%) as accounted by the students.

In contrast, professors believe that dictionaries are among the least useful written sources to refer to. They reported that scholarly journals (50.00%), spell-checks (44.44%), and manuals (42.86%) are the most useful resources.

Scholarly publications, especially articles, are reported as the main written sources consulted while writing in the second/foreign language. Reading and modeling scholarly articles are accounted as a very common strategy as these resources are utilized by the graduate students to clarify various issues such as organization, presentation of ideas, word choice, sentence structures, and the like:

to follow samples of writing.. and the target language for example.. if I'm writing to a certain journal, I would actually see how people write in that journal, what's accepted, and you know what's the flow, what vocabulary do they use, how do they present their ideas and trying to sample them. So by sampling and it covers a lot of negative effects I have in my writing (Student Interview 2, 40-44)

I think reading is one of the things you can do because when you read you read the structure of the language and you get more vocabulary (Student Interview 3, 77-78)

The students were also asked about the strategies that they use to overcome the challenges that they encountered while writing in the second/foreign language. They reported that 'revising and writing drafts' (50.85%), 'relying on past experiences in academic writing' (42.37%), and 'making use of guidelines provided by course instructors' (38.60) are the most common strategies that they utilize.

Practicing writing is considered as one of the keys to improve one's writing ability in the second/foreign language:

write every day.. write lots and lots in English.. long essay about.. you know.. not about music but about things so that I get used to.. words more often so if I need a word I will have there. I think my writing is better because of me, because of my engagement with the language (Student Interview 7, 54-57)

So sometimes they do need repetition, they need revision which what they really need to learn.. revision is when you learn more about writing. You write the best draft that

you can and then when you force to make the best draft a better draft is where you really really learn (Professor Interview 2, 46-49)

On the other hand, professors believed that ‘using spell-checks or manuals to edit mechanical mistakes’ (50.00%) is the most common strategy which is followed by ‘relying on past experiences in academic writing’ (25.00%) and ‘doing a great deal of reading of literature’ (25.00%). The least utilized strategies reported by the students include ‘making use of peer help’ and ‘using a native speaker or a professional editor to check mistakes’ which was consistent with the responses of professors.

4. Discussion and Implications

Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) state that “many would probably agree that writing is a very complex task when performed in one’s first language and a considerably more difficult enterprise when carried out in a foreign language” (p. 517). When it comes to academic writing at the graduate level, it can be said that the tasks are more difficult to accomplish in social sciences as writing in these disciplines requires to have a better command of the second/foreign language. Having a good reservoir of technical terms and concepts, which is more universal in hard sciences, is not enough to communicate knowledge in social sciences. A similar line of pedagogic approach could be followed for all graduate-level students; however, an academic writing course for social sciences students could be more intense as needs of the students differ from discipline to discipline.

In the light of the extensive data collection, research, and analyses conducted for the purposes of this study, key stones of creating a successful graduate-level academic writing curricula are determined as follows:

Needs analysis: Development of any successful curricula starts with needs analysis. Previous graduate-level academic writing research and the results of this study could easily be used as a basis. Specific realignments depending on the various factors such as target population and administrative policies should be carried out.

Placement exam: It is found out that most US universities require their undergraduate and graduate students take a placement exam in writing so that they can be placed in appropriate composition classes. Such an approach should be followed in countries where English is a second/foreign language before accepting the students in academic writing courses offered in higher education. These placement exams might be delivered by English Language Institutes, Writing Centers, or departments that offer the course.

Gradual and continuous instruction in academic writing: Tardy (2005) states that “as students move through the academic ranks of education, they progress gradually from tasks of ‘knowledge-telling’, in which they write to prove their understanding of existing knowledge, to more complex tasks of ‘knowledge-transforming’, in which they actively construct new knowledge” (p. 325). As the students move to more advanced levels, their needs regarding foreign language instruction change dramatically and previous instructions fall short in meeting those needs. Therefore, writing instruction should be gradual and continuous based upon and constructed according to the students’ changing needs.

It is also important to note here that these writing classes should: (1) include meaningful practices for the graduate students so that the students do not consider writing as an extra burden but as a means of being successful in their programs; (2) provide ample amount of practice in academic genres as these students are reported to lack experience in writing in the second/foreign language; (3) focus on tasks that emphasize reading-writing connections crucial in academic contexts as Grabe (2001)

suggests ‘many activities and skills for combining reading and writing need to be practiced if they are to be strong foundations for the more complex tasks required in academic disciplines’ (p. 37); (4) teach how to find information and use it appropriately (how to avoid plagiarism), and (5) raise consciousness and help students develop metacognition on their writing so that they could become writers who can claim authorship.

The instructor: The way to help graduate students become successful writers in English depends not on having instructors of the Writing Center or English Language Institute get familiar with only one subject matter and help only those students of that specific academic field. That is not an effective solution. The key is to have the faculty offer academic writing courses in the program because only the faculty both have the necessary skills and knowledge to help graduate students develop their writing skills in the second/foreign language. Only the faculty can guide the graduate students to acquire the means to participate in the academic discourse community through writing in the second/foreign language.

To get the faculty to be involved in teaching academic writing, some US universities offer stipends in return to their effort. In addition, courses are required and workshops are offered for the faculty who are willing to teach academic writing courses in their programs. Moreover, the rest of the faculty is encouraged to join in workshops to integrate more writing tasks into their course syllabuses regardless of the subject they are teaching. Same approach should be followed by universities in countries where English is a second/foreign language.

Strong basis in the first language: In their study, Köse and Şahin (2008) found out that first year Turkish university students has a score of 48.87 out of 100 for their compositions they wrote in their native language. It is shown that these students were not capable of communicating their ideas appropriately in writing even in their first language as these students did not acquire the necessary language skills during primary and secondary schools.

Language skills transfer. If a student is not capable of writing in his/her first language, s/he will certainly struggle more when s/he writes in the second/foreign language. As it is not possible for the faculty to exercise practices to improve first language writing skills, it is recommended that contrastive grammar and rhetoric should be included in the course syllabus whenever possible and/or necessary to raise the consciousness of the students and to help them develop metacognitive knowledge about their writing.

Feedback provided: Feedback is crucial for the graduate students to improve their writing skills in English. Analysis of sample students’ writing shows line by line intensive grammar and punctuation corrections done by the course instructors in addition to feedback discussed above. However, the students are not satisfied with the feedback they get most of the time as they claim feedback is useless if it does not teach you how to avoid making the same mistake again.

Therefore, instructors who give academic writing courses should (1) provide detailed feedback on all aspects of writing such as grammar, syntax, organization, style, and content; (2) offer sufficient and meaningful feedback on their students’ writing that would result in improvement; (3) give feedback not only on the final product but also on drafts at intermediate stages; (4) offer tutorials (face to face or online) for discussions on writing samples of the students so that the students have a better idea of how they can improve their writing skills in the second/foreign language; and (5) encourage peer-support whenever possible.

Writing Centers (WCs) and English Language Institutes (ELIs): WCs and ELIs should continue to provide individualized and customized support for the graduate students. They can offer supplementary elective courses, workshops, and boot camps; provide online tutoring opportunities;

make available various resources online so that the students can easily reach and use them; and help to form peer-support groups.

5. Conclusion

In this study that examines the needs, means, and successful practices of academic writing in the second/foreign language, voices of all parties including graduate students, content course professors, and instructors are heard through surveys, interviews, and writing samples. The results of the study indicate that professors and graduate students think differently about some crucial aspects of academic writing. For example, most of the graduate students believe that their academic writing ability is “good” (41.54%) while only a limited number of (22.22%) professors defined their ability as “good”.

While the students think that their biggest obstacle is vocabulary –either having less rich vocabulary and expressions or field-related terminology-, their professors believe that the most serious problem is about grammar and presenting ideas clearly and smoothly. The students and professor also differ in their belief about effects of native language in academic writing and the assistance/feedback provided.

It is clear that there is a misconnection between what the professors observe and what the students experience in the process of composing an academic text. Such misconnection could be eliminated through a careful needs analysis which would yield successful curricula of academic writing courses. Such gradual and focused academic writing classes offered to graduate students in foreign language contexts will remedy the challenges faced during writing in the second/foreign language. This will not only help the graduate students finish their programs and be granted degrees but also prepare them to publish in the second/foreign language on the international level as future scholars.

References

- Ammon, U. (2007). Global scientific communication Open questions and policy suggestions. *AILA Review*, 20(1), 123-133.
- Angelova, M. & Riazantseva, A. (1999). “If you don’t tell me, how can I know?”: A case study of four international students learning to write the US way. *Written Communication*, 16, 4, 491-525.
- Babin, E. & Harrison, K. (1999). *Contemporary Composition Theories: A Guide to Theorists and Terms*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Bocanegra-Valle, A. (2014). ‘English is my default academic language’: Voices from LSP scholars publishing in a multilingual journals. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 13, 65-77.
- Braine, G. (2002). Academic literacy and the nonnative speaker graduate student. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 1, 59-68.
- Braxley, K. (2005). Mastering academic English: International graduate students’ use of dialogue and speech genres to meet the writing demands of graduate school. In K. H. Hall, G. Vitanova, & L. Marchenkova (Eds.). *Dialogue with Bakhtin on second and foreign language learning* (pp. 11-32). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Buckingham, L. (2008). Development of English academic writing competence by Turkish scholars. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 3, 1-18.

- Casanave, C., & Hubbard, P. (1992). The writing assignments and writing problems of doctoral students: Faculty perceptions, pedagogical issues, and needed research. *English for Specific Purposes, 11*(1), 33-49.
- Casanave, C. P. (2004). *Controversies in Second Language Writing: Dilemmas and Decisions in Research and Instruction*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Cho, D. W. (2009). Science journal paper writing in an EFL context: The case of Korea. *English for Specific Purposes, 28*, 230-239.
- Collier, V. P. (1995). Acquiring a second language for school. *Directions in Language and Education, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1* (4), 1-10.
- Curry, M. J. & Lillis, T. (2004). Multilingual scholars and the imperative to publish in English: Negotiating interests, demands, and rewards. *TESOL Quarterly, 38*, 4, 663-688.
- Dong, Y. R. (1998). Non-native graduate students' thesis/dissertation writing in science: Self-reports by students and their advisors from two U.S. institutions. *English for Specific Purposes, 17*, 4, 369-390.
- Englert, C.S., Mariage, T.V., & Dunsmore, K. (2006). Tenets of sociocultural theory in writing instruction research. In C. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of writing research* (pp. 208- 221). New York: Guilford.
- Fujioka, M. (2014). L2 student-U.S. professor interactions through disciplinary writing assignments: An activity theory perspective. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 25*, 40-58.
- Grabe, W. (2001). Reading-writing relations: Theoretical perspectives and instructional practices. In D. Belcher and A. Hirvela (eds.), *Linking literacies: Perspectives on L2 reading-writing connections* (pp. 15-47). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Gürel, N. (2010). *An examination of linguistic and sociocultural variables in writing a dissertation among Turkish doctoral students*. Ph.D., State University, New York. Retrieved from: <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2169357971&Fmt=7&clientId=37478&RQT=309&VName=PQD>
- Gürel Cennetkusu, N. (2011a). Challenges of dissertation writing in foreign language. *E-Journal of New World Sciences Academy: Education Series, 6*, 3.
- Gürel Cennetkusu, N. (2011b). Challenges of dissertation writing in foreign language and strategies used: the perceptions of dissertation supervisors. *EKEV Academic Review, 49*, 217-234.
- Gürel Cennetkusu, N. (2012). Writing a Research Paper in the Foreign Language: A Case Study of Challenges and Strategies. *Bitlis Eren University Journal of Social Sciences Institute, 1*, 1.
- Gürel Cennetkusu, N. (2014). Yabancı dil (İngilizce) eğitimi ve Web uygulamaları. In A. Baytak (Ed.). *Eğitimde Web Teknolojilerinin Kullanımı*. (pp. 55-70). Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Hamel, E. (2007). The dominance of English in the international scientific periodical literature and the future of language use in science. *AILA Review, 20*(1), 53-71.
- Huang, J. C. (2010). Publishing and learning writing for publication in English: Perspectives of NNES PhD students in science. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9*, 1, 33-44.
- Ivanic, R. (2004). Discourses of writing and learning to write. *Language and Education, 18*, 3, 220-245.

- Köse, E. & Şahin, A. (2008). Yükseköğrenime yeni başlayan öğrencilerin düşüncelerini yazılı olarak ifade edebilme becerilerinin değerlendirilmesi. *Milli Eğitim*, 180, 227-237.
- Li, Y. (2006). Negotiating knowledge contribution to multiple discourse communities: A doctoral student of computer science writing for publication. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15, 159-178.
- Li, Y. (2007). Apprentice scholarly writing in a community of practice: An intraview of an NNES graduate student writing a research article. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41, 1, 55-79.
- Lillis, T.M. & Curry, M.J. (2010). Academic writing in a global context: The politics and practices of publishing in English. London: Routledge.
- Nasiri, S. (2013). Exploring the significant role of meta-discourse in academic writing for a discourse community by academic members. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 2, 1, 67-74.
- Tardy, C. M. (2005). "It's like a story": Rhetorical knowledge development in advanced academic literacy. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4, 325-338.
- Valdes, G. (2004). The teaching of academic language to minority second language learners. In A. F. Ball, & S. W. Freedman (Eds.). *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language, Literacy, and Learning*. (pp. 66-98). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Woodward-Kron, R. (2008). More than just a jargon- the nature and role of specialist language in learning disciplinary knowledge. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 7, 234-249.

Uluslararası öğrencilerin akademik yazmada karşılaştığı güçlükler: Seçkin bir Birleşik Devletler üniversitesinde durum çalışması

Öz

Akademik camiada İngilizcenin ortak bilim dili olarak önemi nedeniyle, İngilizcenin ikinci veya yabancı dil olduğu ülkelerde –özellikle yükseköğretimde- İngilizce eğitime çok önem verilmektedir. Bu nedenle, lisansüstü çalışmaların araştırma makalesi ve tezler gibi önemli eserlerinin genellikle İngilizce yazılması zorunludur. Bu çalışma; kapsamlı bir anket, derinlemesine görüşmeler ve akademik yazma örnekleri yoluyla İngilizce akademik yazmadaki ihtiyaçları, araçları ve başarılı pratikleri incelemektedir. Sonuçlar, yükseköğretimdeki tarafların (öğrencilerin, profesörlerin ve öğretim görevlilerinin) birbirlerinin beklentileri ve pratikleri konusunda bilinçli olmaları durumunda, ikinci/yabancı dilde yapılan yükseköğretimin yüksek ihtimalle başarılı yazarlar üreteceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: yükseköğretim; İngilizce eğitimi; ikinci/yabancı dil; akademik yazma; güçlükler.

AUTHOR BIODATA

Nazmiye Gurel-Cennetkusu got her BA from English Language Teaching Department, Education Faculty, Hacettepe University, Turkey. She pursued her graduate studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo, New York, USA where she got her Ed.M. degree on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and her Ph.D. on Foreign and Second Language Education. Being an assistant professor at Western Languages and Literatures Department, she is the director of the School of Foreign Languages, Harran University, Turkey. Her research interests are advanced second language acquisition, advanced academic writing in the second/foreign language, and cultural studies.