ACADEMIC WRITING AND NEW ENGLISHES: UNIFYING THE CONTRASTS

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Abstract

This contribution tries to unify two recent research strands in English linguistics: studies in academic writing and in New Englishes. This is useful because, in line with the prominent theory of social constructionism, discourses in both strands can be seen as practices of communities that negotiate their cultural norms. The relationship between language, cognition, and (national) culture is illustrated on the basis of several models, research and its application in teaching is discussed. A proposed socio-cognitive model offers new insights into old concepts and stimulates exchange in academic discourses between researchers from different cultures.

Key words

academic writing, New Englishes, social constructionism, genre, models, socio-cognitive model

Preface

This contribution unites two distinct strands of research specializations: my 30 years of research in English around the world and my ten years of interest in Academic English, which to some uninformed observer may sound like contrasts. I intend to show, however, that both strands have a lot in common, since all (not only non-native) users of English are forced to think critically about their personal stance towards their own texts in the world-wide academic discourse today.

I begin with a personal anecdote (as would be expected of an American scholar, who tries to capture the attention of his audience or readership) or a critical incident (as I like to play with intercultural expectations):

During a recent conference in Albania, I met colleagues from South Eastern Europe who seemed to feel offended even at the slightest polite addition to their own presentations. It was one of those “critical” incidents that are so famous in intercultural communication where participants have different backgrounds, expectations and interpretations. Young colleagues from South-Eastern Europe seemed to feel that they had to protect their work, since it was well-presented according to all formal criteria; whereas older colleagues from Western Europe seemed to feel that they had to “offer” advice, since they had been invited to