A European MA Module in Academic Writing - a staff - student discussion

Josef Schmied
Chair English Language & Linguistics
Chemnitz University of Technology
www.tu-chemnitz.de/phil/english/schmied
josef.schmied@phil.tu-chemnitz.de
1. **Introduction:** learner-teacher discussion

1. Background
   Bologna developments at MA level: DE, FR, CR, RU
   integrating language practice and linguistics


3. Key activities

4. Methodologies, esp. technical

5. Conclusion
2. Concepts

2.1 Constructivism

Social constructionism and social constructivism are sociological theories of knowledge that consider how social phenomena develop in social contexts. Within constructionist thought, a social construction (social construct) is a concept or practice that is the construct (or artifact) of a particular group. When we say that something is socially constructed, we are focusing on its dependence on contingent variables of our social selves.

2.2 Interaction

Hyland (e.g. 2005, 2009): author stance and engagement are crucial variables in academic interaction

• interaction between scientists through publications
• interaction between scientists and their texts according to audience
2.3 Editing/rewriting and stance

exercises to show how stance can be changed:

- “re-write the article from the opposite theory perspective”?
- “re-write the article so that it is less convincing”?
- “invent all the evidence, statistics, examples ... you need”? 
2.4 Genre

influential since Swales (1990), e.g. a student classification exercise
according to discourse community

- research discourse
- instructional discourse
- popular discourse
- student discourse
- newspaper science discourse
## Genres in discourse communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>research “output”</th>
<th>teacher “talk”/e-learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ research articles</td>
<td>▪ ppt presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ book reviews</td>
<td>▪ lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ abstracts</td>
<td>▪ student presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ books and handbook articles</td>
<td>▪ textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ project proposals, reports</td>
<td>▪ www pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ conference presentations</td>
<td>▪ Wikis and other platforms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>science “journalism”</th>
<th>student &quot;literacy&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ popular science articles</td>
<td>▪ fieldwork notes/essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ popular science books</td>
<td>▪ Mag/BA thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ newspaper science articles</td>
<td>▪ seminar presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Author-specific**

- culture-specific

**Discipline-specific**

- culture-specific
3. Key activities

3.1 Reading

  passive reading: get to know the community of practice
  critical reading: question every expression
  “read” a table, diagram, bar chart, etc.
  (e.g. in Biber et al. 1999)

3.2 Scaffolded writing

3.3 Self-assessment
Scaffolded writing: editing specialised science texts

complexity:
- simplify sentence, paragraph structures
  - through parallelisms
  - clear theme - rheme sequences
- transparent lexical choices through
  - terminological databases
  - explicitness / transparency in definitions

hedging:
- control all stance features carefully

coherence:
- from explicit to implicit cohesive features
Scaffolded writing: editing popular science texts

reader attraction: “sexy” headlines through
- personalisation
- sensationalisation

complexity:
- simplify sentence, paragraph structures
  - 1 NP per clause, 1 sentence per paragraph
- lexical choices:
  - simplify technical lexical structures through modification
  - simplify complex NPs through hypernyms in an ontological hierarchy plus modification
  - find transparent, explicit lexical options
4. Methodologies

Elearning components
Moodle - Wiki
group work across universities

specialisation components?
from specialised to popular science to newspaper

genre modification?
from research article to ppt presentation
Cancer drug 'smart cell' can attack tumours from inside

By Mark Henderson, Science Correspondent

AN ANTI-CANCER “smart cell” that uses nanotechnology to penetrate tumours and destroy them from the inside has been developed in America. The drug-packed “nanocell” has been successfully tested on two forms of cancer in mice, shrinking tumours and prolonging survival far more effectively than other therapies.

If the technique works as well in human beings, it could transform the treatment of many cancers, allowing doctors to harness nanotechnology to kill tumours without affecting healthy tissue.

At present, cancer is generally treated by surgery, or by chemotherapy and radiotherapy, which cause serious side-effects as they destroy healthy cells, too. The potential of nanotechnology to improve on this, creating drugs that attack cancer cells alone, excites many scientists.

Ram Sasisekharan, Professor of Biological Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), who led the research, said: “The fundamental challenges in cancer chemotherapy are its toxicity to healthy cells and drug resistance by cancer cells.”

He said that nanocells promised to overcome both problems. In experiments on mice with melanoma, a form of skin cancer, and the Lewis variant of lung cancer, the nanocell proved considerably more effective than standard treatments.

Some 80 per cent of the mice with melanoma treated in this way survived for at least 65 days. This compared with survival of 30 days for mice treated with the best current therapy, and 20 days for untreated animals. There were also benefits against lung cancer, though these were less dramatic, which suggests that the technology will need to be adjusted to attack different forms of the disease.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article548769.ece
5. Conclusion: M.A. module “Academic Writing”

- which 3/4 courses?
- include skills/tasks/qualifications?
  - journalistic writing?
  - project management?
- (marketing) values?
  - employability: EAP/ESP? specialists for other faculties
    - joint working platform (Wiki)
  - culture-specific adaptations (intercultural communication)
    (cf. Ventola/Maurenen eds. 1996)

- problems:
  - self-assessment? (transparency)
  - splendid form - no content?
References


