CHAPTER 5

Challenges for Brazilian Post/Graduate Students
Writing in the Academy: Insights for Future
Pedagogical Interventions

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Introduction

In academia, English is recognised as the lingua franca of science (Wood, 2000). Academic journals demonstrate their quality through their “impact factor”, a measure based on the number of citations of their articles; unless those articles are in English, they are unlikely to be widely cited (Wood, 2000). Furthermore, the use of English provides the expansion of professional networking among academics (Wood, 2000), considered to be one of the key factors for the international integration of researchers from the peripheral regions (Lillis & Curry, 2010). However, studies show that two serious impediments to publication in English by the international researchers are language (Duszak & Kewkowicks, 2008; Man, Weinkauf, Tsang & Sin, 2004; Uzuner, 2008) and rhetorical difficulties (Li, 2007; Uzuner, 2008).

International publication requires a good level of proficiency in English. For example, Scientometrics reveals a strong correlation between English language proficiency and publication; indeed, this variable is more influential than financial investment in research (Man, Weinkauf, Tsang & Sin, 2004). Vasconcelos, Leta & Sorenson (2007) confirmed this correlation for the Brazilian context. They also found that most of the researchers read English much better than they write, and argue that this is the result of the Brazilian English for Specific Purposes project (Holmes & Celani, 2006).¹ The government research funding agencies have put increasing pressure on academics to publish in highly ranked international journals. Therefore, it is necessary to create material conditions in the universities to develop the research literacies, and specifically the English research writing abilities, of researchers and post/graduate students (Motta-Roth, 2009; Vasconcelos, Leta & Sorenson, 2007).

¹ The Brazilian ESP Project was implemented in the 1980s with the main goal of teaching the academic community to read academic texts in English. The other language skills were not emphasised.
Post/graduate students’ research writing has been a topic of increasing interest in academic literacy. The current study contributes to this area by investigating post/graduate students’ difficulties with writing introductions to research articles during the process of writing. Students’ understanding of the differences between writing for university assessment and writing for publication were explored. In addition, this study attempts to connect the course content with the performance of Brazilian post/graduate students in Energy Studies. In other words, the chapter aims to capture the subjects’ socialisation into academic writing conventions in English. Move 2 from the “Create a Research Space” (CARS) model (Swales 1990/2004) was used for the analysis of the introduction section. The analysis of the data highlights implications for the design of writing courses for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students requiring further literacy instruction.

Professional Academic Writing Development in Post/Graduates in Brazil

In order to understand the situation of English academic writing in Brazil, it is important to consider three aspects: a) the adoption of the “publish or perish” policy by the government that creates an urgent need for publications in English; b) an overview of existing studies on academic writing in English; c) pedagogical initiatives for academic writing instruction in English.

The increasing demand on Brazilian academics and post/graduate students to publish in English originates from CAPES (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior), the department responsible for the management of post/graduate schooling in Brazil. It has been structuring, evaluating and funding the post/graduate programmes across Brazil in both private and public universities since the 1970s (Kuenzer & Morais, 2005).

With the fall of the dictatorship in 1985, there was a strong desire for autonomy in different sectors of Brazilian society (Kuenzer & Morais, 2005). Brazilian universities were assigned the goal to achieve autonomy in scientific production, which would create economic benefits as well as academic autonomy (Kuenzer & Morais, 2005). Since 1985 the focus has shifted gradually from structuring the post/graduate school system and providing professors for the higher education system to producing scientific research. This greatly affected the system adopted by CAPES to assess the post/graduate school system. As part of these evaluation criteria, publication was prioritised. With the strengthening of globalisation, publication was now required in English and in highly ranked international journals.