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ACADEMIC LITERACIES

A critical lens on writing and reading in the academy

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Introduction

‘Academic literacies’ is a relatively new empirical and theoretical field¹ setting out to explore reading and writing in academia as social practice, using ethnographically-oriented methodologies and drawing on a range of critical theories. The pluralisation of ‘literacies’ signals an interest in academic reading and writing not only as diverse and situated in specific disciplinary contexts, but also as ideologically shaped, reflecting institutional structures and relations of power. This ideological concern gives rise to a transformative agenda encompassing individual writers, the conventions and practices of the academy, and the wider social relations in which all are embedded.

Academic literacies combines an empirical interest in the relationship between linguistic/rhetorical conventions and knowledge-making practices in academia as currently configured, with a critically driven vision of how these could be different and (though this will always be contested) more richly varied and more equitable. In many ways, academic literacies remains on the margins of academic writing theory and pedagogy, but has contributed dynamism to a number of research domains concerned with academic writing, including English for academic purposes (EAP).

This chapter aims to provide a broad overview of the field, pointing to key empirical and theoretical landmarks. The chapter also focuses specifically on the interface between academic literacies and EAP, in keeping with the particular concerns of this volume. A key aim is to explore connections and divergences with particular traditions within EAP, and in particular to articulate some of the fruitful connections between academic literacies (henceforward ‘Ac Lits’) and work in the domain known as ‘critical EAP’.

We begin by offering a historical account of the emergence and development of this field, followed by a consideration of some of the key themes raised by scholars in foundational, as well as in more recent, contributions. We then briefly review a key area of current debate: the relationship of Ac Lits-informed ‘critique’ to practice. The following section focuses on research methodology in Ac Lits, outlining its overarching ethnographic orientation. The final two sections explicitly focus on key divergences and connections between Ac Lits and work within EAP, pointing to the generative questions raised by both. We conclude

by calling for greater dialogue between Ac Lits and critical EAP in order to develop rich understandings of what it means to ‘do’ academic knowledge-making in the contemporary world.

Historical perspectives

Ac Lits emerged in the 1990s in the UK and in South Africa, in national contexts where the higher education systems were undergoing profound change. In the UK, the policy context was one of higher education (HE) expansion, ‘Widening Participation’² and increasing diversity of the student population.

The initial concern was not primarily international students or multilingualism, a key focus of attention in EAP, but ‘local’ students (whether monolingual or multilingual) whose increasing presence in higher education threw into relief taken-for-granted academic literacy practices, and problematised the idea that academic literacy in a particular language (assumed to be English) was relatively straightforward to teach and learn and, once learned, was transferable from one context to another (Ivanič and Lea, 2006; Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001, 2014).

In South Africa, interest in the writing and reading practised at university emerged in the national context of post-Apartheid expansion of higher education where concerns with access, diversity, power and equality were central to a political agenda of social transformation (Angelil-Carter, 1998; Thesen and Cooper, 2014; Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). In both these national contexts, researchers began to focus on academic *writing*, principally because of the high stakes of writing for assessment, but also as a response to deficit discourses in wide circulation (in national media, as well as educational circles) which focused on students’ ‘inability’ to write (in English) (for discussions of ‘deficit’, see for example, Lea, 1994; Lillis and Turner, 2001; Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). Ac Lits research was driven to a large extent by the concerns of practitioners – those with a role in teaching, learning and language development in higher education – who recognised the inadequacy of such deficit approaches. It was also becoming clear that ‘default’ teaching and learning practices (such as lecture-monologues or the ubiquitous essay) were no longer fit for purpose in relation to a diverse student body whose acculturation into academic literacies could not be assumed on entry to university, and that ‘business as usual’ would in any case be ideologically unacceptable in an expanded HE sector premised upon openness and diversity as explicit political goals (for overviews of these debates, see Lillis, 2001; Mann, 2008).

A key strand of this questioning of familiar HE pedagogies was a challenge to individualised, psychologised approaches to learning and to normative assumptions about academic writing, both of which, it was argued, fostered unhelpful deficit perceptions of students and – of particular concern to academic literacies researchers – their language and literacy practices (Haggis, 2003; Lea and Street, 1998), echoing arguments made by adult educators (e.g. Gardener, 1992). Drawing on anthropologically-based New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Barton et al., 2000; Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001; Gee, 1996), Ac Lits researchers reframed the student writing ‘problem’, turning the gaze on academic institutions (universities, disciplines) focalised through the experiences and perspectives of student writers (Ivanič, 1998; Lea, 1994; Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001).

Street’s (1984) notion of ‘autonomous’ versus ‘ideological’ models of literacy was (and is) key to the Ac Lits conceptual apparatus. Autonomous framings of literacy conceptualise it as separate/separable from context, as a fixed set of skills or competencies which can be

possessed – or lacked – leading to destructive binary perceptions of learners as literate/illiterate and to remedial, bolt-on writing pedagogies. Street, Lea and others recognised that the ‘essayist literacy’ which dominated (and still dominates) the academy was just such an autonomous model (see Lillis, 2001; Lillis and Turner, 2001). The theorisation of reading and writing in the academy as no less contingent and contested than any other set of literacy practices, in spite of ideological denial, led to the development of Lea and Street’s (1998) now widely disseminated three-part heuristic or ‘three models’ of academic writing, framed as:

- 1 decontextualised *skills*
- 2 more or less implicit *academic socialisation* into given genres and practices
- 3 situated, shifting and contested *literacies*.

An important aspect of this tripartite model (not always taken up in subsequent debates) is that each tier ‘successively encapsulates the other’ (Lea and Street, 1998: 158–9). In research terms, this means that attention to academic writing as literacies does not exclude questions generated by the other two conceptual levels, but seeks a ‘more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities’ (*ibid.*). At around the same time as Lea and Street’s work, Ivanič (1998) was using NLS-derived methodologies to generate insights into students’ experiences of academic writing, particularly in relation to issues of identity. Ivanič’s 1998 study combined textual analysis drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA) (e.g. Fairclough, 1995) with insider accounts of text production, demonstrating how ethnographic data could enrich understandings of what it means to ‘do’ academic writing.

Viewing academic writing through a social practice/student writer lens exposed a damaging gap in understanding between tutors and students (Ivanič, 1998; Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001), and threw light on students’ struggles as they tried to negotiate a pathway through the maze of tacit and sometimes contradictory expectations. The use of CDA enabled a critical analysis of institutional language; for example, Lea and Street discussing the language of feedback, noted tutors’ use of ‘categorical modality, using imperatives and assertions, with little mitigation or qualification’. They argue that such feedback comments enact tutors’ ‘right to criticise’, and as such are a marker of their power and authority over students (1998: 169). This aspect of the work made an important contribution to scholarship in the field of HE assessment and feedback (see also Ivanič et al., 2000). Links were also made with the much longer tradition of writing pedagogy/research in the United States, including Composition Studies (e.g. in Ivanič, 1998), which had begun to tackle questions of academic literacy and higher education access several decades earlier. By drawing on these different traditions – pedagogical, anthropological and critical linguistic – Ac Lits researchers were able to explore the rewards, risks and losses for academic writers, not only in terms of academic success but also of meaning and identity (e.g. Angelil-Carter, 1998; Lillis, 2001). Insights derived from ethnographic studies were sharpened through a parallel emerging interest in the epistemological complexity of academic discourse, and through work subjecting dominant academic rhetorical traditions to critical scrutiny (Candlin and Hyland, 1999; Jones, Turner and Street, 1999), again influenced in part by work in the US-based fields of writing in the disciplines (e.g. Bazerman, 1988) and writing across the curriculum (e.g. Russell, 1991).

Key themes in academic literacies research

A number of overlapping themes emerged from Ac Lits research activity which have continued to be developed:

- *Students often experience the demands placed on them as writers as opaque and obscure.* This critique is captured by Lillis' concept of 'the institutional practice of mystery' (2001: 58) (a notion found useful by some EAP researchers and practitioners, e.g. Harwood and Hadley, 2004), developed in the context of her longitudinal ethnographic study of ten undergraduate writers from 'non-traditional' backgrounds. Ac Lits research provides an empirical basis for recasting difficulties in academic writing as an institutional issue rather than one of individual failure, and has included work on trainee HE teachers (Stierer, 2008), undergraduates at prestigious institutions (Boz, 2009) and of academics themselves (Gourlay, 2011; Lea and Stierer, 2011; Lillis and Curry, 2010). Ac Lits work has been taken up more widely in critical approaches to higher education pedagogy, e.g. Haggis (2003), Mann (2008).
- *Disciplinary discourses are historically situated and contested(able).* The challenges for students studying within more than one discipline are well documented by Lea and Street (1998, 1999), showing that demands vary within the discipline, even from one tutor to another, a finding supported in other studies (Baynham, 2000; Ivanič, 1998; Read et al., 2001). Other research throws light on new 'hybrid' academic writing genres, associated in particular with vocational degree courses, and the confusion (amongst students and tutors) which often surrounds discourses and genres (Baynham, 2000; Creme, 2000; Lea, 2012; Lillis and Rai, 2011; Stierer, 2008). These empirical findings challenge unitary notions of academic writing, exploding the myths of 'transferability' – that writing is a discrete, portable package of competencies – and of 'transience' – that the student writing 'problem' is caused by a temporary influx of 'underprepared' or 'disadvantaged' students, and can be bracketed for remedial action, until such students get up to speed, or things return to 'normal' (Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006).
- *Identity is a significant dimension in academic writing.* Work by Ivanič (1998), Lea (1998), Lillis (2001) and Thesen (2001), among others, highlights the identity-related consequences for students and scholars who bring 'other' experiences and discourses – those less valued in the academy as currently configured – with them to their studies. Drawing on critical and post-structuralist work on discourse and subjectivity, such work makes explicit the ways in which language is closely bound up with not only possibilities for meaning-making, but possibilities for 'being' in the world. These and later studies (e.g. Boz, 2009) see identity/ies not only as a function of individual biography and circumstance, but as a political question closely connected with the distribution of cultural capital and the differential value attributed to different meaning-making resources, in terms of discourses, languages and language varieties (e.g. Thesen and Cooper, 2014; Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006).
- *There is a need to open up the academy to a broader range of semiotic/linguistic practices as valid 'funds of knowledge'* (Moll et al., 1992). Despite the *de facto* diversity and hybridity of academic discourse referred to above, Ac Lits researchers have argued that the entrenched privileging of essayist literacy perpetuates inequalities in the academy, closing down diversity in knowledge-making, working against policy goals of widening access. Some studies throw light on the role of evaluation and assessment by gatekeepers in maintaining these conventions, and regulating access to particular academic 'inner

circles' (e.g. Lillis and Curry, 2010). Others focus on students' out-of-college literacies as a basis for exploring ways in which gaps between home and college literacies can be bridged through changed institutional practices and pedagogies (Ivanič et al., 2009; Lea and Jones, 2010; Paxton, 2007). Ac Lits, thus, specifically addresses diversification of the kinds of semiotic resources that could be used for academic meaning-making, exploring ways in which the academy can open up to new genres and practices (e.g. Archer, 2006; Creme, 2000; Curry, 2007; English, 2011; Lillis, 2011; Thesen, 2001) as a means towards institutional equity but also towards the enrichment of academic knowledge-making. The 'internationalisation' of the academy has meant that Ac Lits research has increasingly followed the South African example in turning its attention to the importance of adopting multilingual approaches to academic knowledge production, with some researchers focusing on more 'advanced' academic writers such as research students, and scholars writing for publication (Lillis and Curry, 2010).

- *There is a need to analyse practices in contemporary academia and the professions more generally.* In keeping with its stance of openness to diversity and change, increasingly researchers in Ac Lits have extended their research foci. One key logical extension has been in terms of writers – broadening beyond a focus on 'learners' to include everyday professional literacy practices, e.g. social workers (Lillis and Rai, 2011) and academics (Lea and Stierer, 2011), as well as academics seeking publication (Lillis and Curry, 2010). Another key extension has been the increasing attention paid by academic literacies-informed researchers to new and proliferating text production practices in a digital age of academia (Coleman, 2010; Goodfellow and Lea, 2007, 2013; Lea and Jones, 2010; McKenna and MacAvinia, 2011) as part of rethinking what is meant by writing and reading in contemporary society (Lillis, 2013).

An issue of ongoing concern: the relationship between 'critique' and practice

The critical orientation of Ac Lits, as in the case of critical EAP (discussed below), has caused questions to be raised about its usefulness for teachers working in 'mainstream' contexts (e.g. Wingate and Tribble, 2012). Ac Lits researchers have always acknowledged the need for a multilayered approach which incorporates attention to issues more closely aligned with models 1 and 2 of Lea and Street's heuristic (1998, see above), such as the need to raise students' awareness of valued academic genres, and to support them to present 'polished' work which does not draw attention to itself through 'errors'. The need to find ways of drawing on academic literacies critique to build pedagogy is emphasised in Lillis (2003, 2011) where, drawing on Bakhtin, she proposes and illustrates a writing pedagogy aimed at dialogic rather than dialectic meaning-making. Lea (2004) and Paxton and Frith (2014) focus on the implications of Ac Lits critique for curriculum design.

What Ac Lits seeks to explicitly avoid is the idea that students first need to learn 'the basics' and only then can be exposed to a pedagogy which leaves space for questioning and change. Questioning, for students and teachers, can be seen as a distraction from getting down to the real business of learning to master academic discourses, with the danger that questioning is infinitely postponed, or reserved only for those already admitted to academic 'inner circles' – and that the identities, knowledges and semiotic resources which student writers bring from outside the academy are gradually left behind, to the detriment of all. Thus, criticality is key to any pragmatism centred on writers' desires for meaning-making as well as on academic success. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that it may be easier to implement

dialogic and critical pedagogies in higher education spaces where the constraints are not so huge, for example at postgraduate level or in particularly privileged institutional contexts (Tuck, 2013).

The question of what Ac Lits scholarship has to offer with regard to developing transformative practice is one taken seriously as illustrated in work by Lea (2004), Lillis (2003, 2011), Street and Leung (2009) and Street (<http://teachingeap.wordpress.com/2013/04/24/blogpost-by-brian-street-academic-literacies>). A recent example of the explicit attempt to define and illustrate what it means to adopt or 'work with' Ac Lits for pedagogy or course design is the *Working with Academic Literacies* collection, where teacher-researchers provide case studies of pedagogic interventions at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and across disciplinary contexts (Lillis et al., 2015). Case studies from across disciplinary boundaries in ten different countries illustrate how teacher-researchers are seeking to transform pedagogies of academic writing and reading, to transform the kinds of resources, genres and semiotic practices that are used/able in academia, and to transform the ways in which institutions conceptualise what it means to engage successfully in academic literacy practices and to develop provision which meets their policy goals of inclusivity and diversity.

Main research methods

A social practice perspective entails a view of writing as inseparable from context, hence the need for ethnographic methodologies which facilitate analysis of texts as part of contexts. Thus, as well as analysing samples of academic writing, in draft and as 'finished' products, Ac Lits researchers may, for example:

- elicit writer views, and/or literacy histories, often through interviews centred around particular texts;
- gather textual, field-note, photographic and interview data which throw light on institutional contexts and/or writers' interests;
- conduct participant observation of literacy events as a lens onto practice.

One core generative tension of ethnography is the dynamic between insider (emic) perspectives (usually of writers themselves) and the outsider (etic) perspective of the researcher-analyst. The desire to move beyond text, to seek understandings of writing which cannot be derived solely from the expert or etic analysis of text, was a key driver in the work of some early researchers in the field who were conscious of the limitations of formal linguistic analysis alone (Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2001).

Given its concern with the production and evaluation of academic texts, Ac Lits research necessarily incorporates an interest in texts as part of broader, open-ended data generation. However, the ways in which texts are analysed in any given study varies considerably. An indication of the range is provided by the work of Ivanič, whose 1998 study of eight student writers involved extensive textual analysis, using CDA, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and frames from Goffman (e.g. 1969), alongside other data such as interviews with students and tutors and institutional documentation. A later study, in contrast, focused primarily on tracing UK further education students' vernacular literacy practices, employing a range of creative data-gathering instruments, such as annotated floor plans and photo-ethnographies (Mannion, Ivanič and Literacies For Learning in Further Education Research Group, 2007), but with relatively little close attention to the characteristics of the texts students were producing in college (but see Ivanič, 2006). Others have focused on the multimodal

affordances and constraints of vernacular and official forms of academic text-making for knowledge production (e.g. Thesen, 2001; Archer, 2006; English, 2011). Some studies have focused on the dynamic processes of text production, using notions such as ‘text histories’ and ‘text trajectories’ to track entextualisation and recontextualisation practices. In such studies (e.g. Lillis and Curry, 2010), analytic attention is placed on identifying key features of academic texts, as well as tracking how and when such features come into being in the process of text production.

It’s possible to see a continuum of research focus within Ac Lits where the role of textual data varies depending on the particular empirical focus and on researcher orientations and backgrounds. The question of the role of text analysis within the overarching ethnographic framework, and the relationship between texts and practices, is still a richly problematic and contested one. Lillis (2008), drawing on linguistic ethnography (e.g. Rampton, 2007), has argued for more context-sensitive categories for analysing texts, more consistent with an ethnographic epistemology, for example using notions such as ‘indexicality’ and ‘orientation’.

Academic literacies and EAP

This brief account of the key concerns of Ac Lits points to a number of shared motivations with the field of EAP writ large but also to a number of differences. It’s important to consider the similarities and differences, identifying in particular the intellectual space in which Ac Lits and a specific tradition within EAP, critical EAP, converge. Needless to say, this is an ongoing debate and what we offer is one perspective here.

Both fields have arisen out of practitioner-led concerns and an interest in bringing theory and empirical research to bear to help students – and increasingly academics – to succeed as writers and communicators in the increasingly globalised, English-dominant academy. They share an interest in foregrounding the often tacit nature of academic conventions and in making these visible; researchers in both fields have also emphasised the importance of investigating academic literacy as a highly situated practice. EAP has been interested in investigating the detailed discoursal requirements of different disciplines which is echoed in the attention to academic literacy as social practice in Ac Lits work. As a corollary, in both EAP and Ac Lits research, the ‘target’ or valued rhetorical practices of any particular context have been the object of empirical enquiry, rather than assumed. Indeed, a shared overarching goal in EAP (evidenced by chapters in this volume) and Ac Lits has been to foreground the constitutive role of language in the academy, challenging its often marginal positioning in academic work (Turner, 2011b).

Nevertheless, there are key differences between EAP and Ac Lits in the stances towards the phenomena being explored:

- The key object or phenomenon under exploration in EAP tends to be the text, whereas in Ac Lits it tends to be the producer or meaning-maker. In an attempt to make visible academic conventions, there is a tendency in EAP to reify such conventions and, in so-doing, construe them as relatively fixed. Ac Lits sees such conventions as always contested/able.
- The explicit language of focus in EAP is ‘English’, with the target linguistic medium, English, construed in a very specific way (albeit often implicitly): that is, as a stable linguistic resource, as ‘standard (academic) English’ and as used by assumed ‘native’ speakers’. In contrast, in Ac Lits, the specific nature and status of ‘English’ has been explicitly challenged, not least because the focus on ‘non-traditional’ students and

their desires for ‘vernacular’ English(es) necessarily problematises common sense assumptions about there being one kind of ‘native’ speaker or one kind of acceptable ‘native (academic) English’.

- In EAP, the overriding metaphor adopted to describe students’ participation has been that of novice–expert trajectory. Whilst this metaphor is also used in Ac Lits, the emphasis tends to be on the diversity of life experiences and knowledges brought by students into the academy, which challenges any simple dichotomies between novice and expert.
- The ideological orientation towards pedagogy differs in emphasis in EAP and Ac Lits. EAP research (whether in EAP or disciplinary-specific spaces) usually operates from the standpoint that once target conventions, genres and discourses are identified, students can and should be inducted into these. Flexibility is valued but primarily in terms of the students’ ability to manage existing conventions: thus, students are encouraged to be agile adaptors, ‘navigating’ the expectations of different audiences (e.g. see Belcher, 2009). In Ac Lits, on the other hand, shift and change are seen as inherent in academic discourse itself, and agility and responsiveness as the responsibility of academic communities and gatekeepers as well as of students. The EAP orientation to pedagogy has been described as ‘normative’ (Lillis and Scott, 2007), in contrast to the ‘transformative’ orientation in Ac Lits. What is meant by transformative and how this connects with the orientation of a key strand of EAP, ‘critical EAP’, is discussed below.

Of course, in pointing to differences, here we are foregrounding what we see as ‘mainstream EAP’, some aspects of which have been strongly challenged from within EAP itself, notably ‘critical EAP’ (e.g. Benesch, 2001; Turner, 2004, 2012). In the final section below we summarise what we see as key convergences between Ac Lits and critical EAP.

Future directions: a converging space – critical EAP and Ac Lits

Rather than assume the two fields can straightforwardly be combined or their differences collapsed (as in Wingate and Tribble, 2012), it’s important to be aware of where convergences between EAP and Ac Lits lie. The key convergence is in ideological orientation, signalled by the use of ‘critical’ in critical EAP and ‘literacies’ in Ac Lits. We highlight what we see as key convergences and future directions for research into academic literacy practices in academia.

Rethinking the producer

As Hyland points out (2014), critical EAP involves a shift from a rationalistic approach to ‘needs’ analysis’, towards a language pedagogy built on ‘rights’ analysis as set out by Benesch:

Critical EAP allows ESL teachers and students to examine externally imposed demands and negotiate their responses to them, by addressing the following questions: Who formulated these requirements and why? Should they be fulfilled? Should they be modified? What are the consequences of trying to change current conditions? What is gained by obeying, and what is lost?

(2001, p. 53)

This opening-up of such questions is strongly echoed in Ac Lits work in ongoing debates about how to involve producers in choices around academic meaning-making.

Rethinking the linguistic and semiotic resources for academic meaning-making

Challenges to monolingualist assumptions for academic meaning-making have long been voiced in Ac Lits and EAP work, particularly from multilingual contexts such as South Africa, often engaging directly with work in the fields of contrastive rhetoric and second language writing (Angelil-Carter, 1998). Key questions being asked in critical EAP and Ac Lits include the following: whose English(es) are/should be valued and why? Where and how can/should vernacular language and literacy practices – including code meshing – be used in academic knowledge-making? To what extent can and should a broader range of linguistic and modal resources be used in academic knowledge-making? (English, 2011; Horner et al., 2011; Lillis and Curry, 2010; Pennycook, 1997). Whilst there is some work teasing out these questions, there is considerably more to be done.

Rethinking trajectories

Once the academic space is construed as contested in terms of whose voices and knowledges get to be heard, relying on a default metaphor of apprenticeship – from novice to expert – becomes questionable. Work focusing on both the student-writer (e.g. Angelil-Carter, 1998) and professional academic writers (e.g. Canagarajah, 2002; Flowerdew and Li, 2009; Lillis and Curry, 2010) problematises any straightforward positioning of writers and reader-evaluators within the academy as novices or experts, pointing instead to a diverse range of expertise and trajectories. Work on the academic practices of scholars, rather than students, in particular foregrounds the ways in which presumed trajectories (and therefore assumptions about the writer and reader) are mediated by stratification between the global centre and peripheries (see Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis and Curry, 2010).

Rethinking research methodologies

Whilst there has been important ethnographically-oriented work in EAP (notably Swales, 1998; also Flowerdew and Li, 2009; Johns, 1997), the overriding focus has been on texts in EAP and on practices in Ac Lits. There is considerable convergence in recent calls for the need for methodologies which enable holistic accounts of texts and practices (Hyland, 2014; Lillis, 2008) as well as for dialogic and collaborative methodologies (e.g. Lillis and Rai, 2011; Thesen and Cooper, 2014). The challenge of developing a methodology which takes account of text and practice and engages at micro, meso and macro levels of analysis is ongoing.

Rethinking writing as a networked activity

Empirical approaches to writing as social practice taken up in Ac Lits and critical EAP problematise the predominant focus on the individual writer, foregrounding the many participants in text production. For example, Lillis and Curry's longitudinal study of scholars publishing in English and other languages throws light on the key role of literacy brokers, on writing for publication as a networked activity, and the nature of English as a networked resource. A very different study by Tuck (2012, 2013) focuses on the role of tutors and assessors – rather than students – in shaping undergraduate writing on its way towards the final assessed product. Harwood et al. (2012) and Turner (2011a) have foregrounded the role

of proofreading in text production. Work focusing on digital literacies highlights the need to reconceptualise what it means to produce academic texts, challenging distinctions between ‘writing’ and ‘reading’ (e.g. Lea and Jones, 2010).

Rethinking pedagogy as transformation

Both Ac Lits and critical EAP emphasise the need for transformation in pedagogy and orientations to language and academic production (see, for example, Special Issue of *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 8 (2), 2009, and Lillis et al., 2015). What ‘transformation’ means in specific contexts of production is necessarily a point of debate but key principles can be summarised as follows:

- negotiation and dialogue should be central to the teaching learning, production and evaluation of what counts as ‘academic’ writing;
- orientations to what count as ‘appropriate’ linguistic and semiotic resources that producers bring to meaning-making in the academy need to be expanded to include multimodality, multi- and translingualism, vernacular and official practices;
- in general, core conceptual categories such as ‘English’ and ‘Academic’ need to be explored rather than taken as given, given the multiple patterns of mobility in an increasingly transnational academia and the complex nature of recognising ‘diversity’ in academic production (Horner with Lillis, 2015).

Rethinking ‘risk’ in the academy

Implicit in the drive to open up the academy is the need to rethink ‘risk’ – most obviously what is risked, and by whom – by questioning existing conventions. A recent collection of papers by South African researchers tackles this challenge head-on, seeking to theorise risk in the context of postgraduate research writing. Thesen and Cooper argue against a reductive framing of risk, exemplified by the sector’s increasing attention to plagiarism and to research ethics approval, which they argue highlights what is acceptable rather than what is possible. Authors offer a productive concept of risk as a ‘tilting point between self and other... between the production and reception of the written word’ (2014: 15), a notion explored in different ways through a series of chapters based around empirical and pedagogic work with postgraduate student writers.

Whilst we identify convergences here, we also recognise that such convergences are often not signalled by writers, with some exceptions, including Harwood, Leung and Street, Turner and writers whose work focuses on writing for publication (e.g. Canagarajah, Lillis and Curry). There is a danger that researchers/pedagogues stay separate – on the basis of whether English is considered to be (by researchers) the first or primary language or second, additional or foreign language – categorisations which both Ac Lits and Critical EAP researchers have actively interrogated. In researching what it means to ‘do’ academic writing and reading in a globalised academy, it will be important that researchers with shared interests and ideological concerns engage with each other’s work, both in order to avoid working within conceptual boundaries they seek to disrupt, and as a means to develop richer understandings of knowledge-making in the contemporary world.

Further reading

Benesch (2001); Lea and Street (1998); Lillis and Scott (2007); Thesen and Cooper (2014)

Related chapters

- 2 General and specific EAP
- 17 Ethnographic perspectives on English for academic purposes research
- 22 Critical perspectives

Notes

- 1 The term's origin as a descriptor for the field derives in part from the use of 'literacies' to denote a social practice perspective in New Literacy Studies, but it was in circulation from the late 1980s onwards in a range of contexts. For discussion, see Lillis and Scott (2007).
- 2 Widening Participation is the umbrella term used for a raft of 'progressive' policies set in motion in the 1990s in the UK, increasing the undergraduate population and opening up university admissions for students from underrepresented social groups.

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