



# English as a Lingua Franca in academic writing - tutors' and students' perspectives

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## EIL-ELF

English as an International language  
English as a lingua franca


"we teach this language [English] to help people communicate easily, talk to each other without linguistic and even cultural barriers, understand each other better ... to bring people closer"  
(Jenkins 2014)

"how foreign can it [English] be internationally, since people all over the world communicate in English?" (Jenkins 2014)



# ELF in Academic Writing

Academic language is 'never  
anyone's mother tongue'  
(Jenkins 2014)





# My study

## **Sample:**

- Total of 8 native and non-native students both at undergraduate and postgraduate level
- Total of 6 tutors working with postgraduates

## **Main research question:**

- How important is language in academic writing?

## **The context:**

- Postgraduate and undergraduate university courses which have specific requirements in their handbooks that are also reflected in the feedback

# Feedback

- ▶ Undergrad Students' Handbook for SLLF- Work of A grade standard  
***Excellent command of language, including accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. The use of a suitable scholarly register, fluency, flair and an assured use of difficult and specialised terminology.***
- ▶ Postgrad Students' Handbook for SLLF- **ACADEMIC EXPRESSION**

*'In terms of written English, there are a number of instances of poor sentence structure and grammar which makes your argument difficult to follow at times. Always check your subject-verb agreement and the general sentence structure.'*

- ▶ 'Students who are having difficulty with written English should take advantage of the support offered by the Language Centre (<http://language-centre.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/in-sessionals>), and/or use the following online (intranet only) resource: <http://aeo.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/>'



# STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

How do you feel about writing in English  
in an academic context?

**'It's a struggle!'**

# Why is it such a struggle?

Some of the biggest struggles postgraduates encountered was the structure, critical analysis, citations and referencing.

- 'You need to be precise and justify everything'
- 'Be careful with words that generalise: ie 'always' 'never'
- 'The biggest challenge in writing essays was to put my views and ideas into a formal and objective language and making it coherent throughout'



# STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Has the IELTS prepared you for academic writing?

**'No!'**





# STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

## Has your English been corrected in academic assignments?

- 'My use of reporting verbs 'believe', 'claim', 'think', 'suggest', etc. and use of some markers like but, however, so etc. have been corrected. Also, in some places I have been advised to not use informal words and present my ideas objectively.'
- 'YES. I was making 'stupid' mistakes like getting the wrong tense or choosing the wrong word.'



# TUTORS' PERSPECTIVE

Do you correct students' English?

'I am not the 'grammar  
police!'



# TUTORS' PERSPECTIVE

ELT → ELF

'As we were initially trained as ELT teachers, it is difficult for us to completely let go of the focus on forms and focus on substantive content.'



# TUTORS' PERSPECTIVE

'I consciously try and refrain from overdoing it but still do it.'


When checking student work even at the MA level the focus is on:

- ▶ Formality of language
- ▶ Hedging
- ▶ Cohesion
- ▶ Nominalisation
- ▶ Consistency



# TUTORS' PERSPECTIVE

Development of a good  
argument and structuring  
supporting ideas **coherently**





## TUTORS' PERSPECTIVE

Poorly written text will  
struggle to offer a  
convincing argument.





# A glimpse into the future

So, is language that important in academic writing?

'In the culture of mass marketization of education can we afford as an institution, to hold student work to the high standards of the past, or should we lower our expectations to help students achieve better degrees?'



**THANK YOU!**

**For last year's words belong to last year's  
language  
And next year's words await another voice.**

(T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding, Four Quartets Book 4, lines 118-119)





# References

- ▶ Jenkins, J., & Leung, C. (2014). *English as a lingua franca*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
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