

## 23 The Development of a Genre-Based Writing Course for Graduate Students in Two Fields

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### INTRODUCTION

Published academic papers are generally seen as a key factor in sharing knowledge from research with peers, promoting researchers in their scientific communities and creating a proper environment for scientific discussion. However, one of the problems faced by novice researchers is how to master academic genres. Figueiredo and Bonini (2006), for instance, found out that although many of their students were part of a Master's program, they showed little or no familiarity with the effective use of scientific discourse. To deal with this shortcoming, the authors devised a course that aimed at developing the students' skills in academic writing in their mother tongue. The results showed that students benefited from the course in different aspects, such as acquiring a view of genres as social practices and the notion that genres circulate within an academic community. However, the data also showed that students still remained as novices in the academic discourse community and, thus, were not confident enough to reflect upon the discourse, the practices and the genres accepted within the academic community they aim to be members of.

It may be argued that the constraints of academic writing pose difficulties for authors of any language. No matter the language the text is written in, students have to negotiate the genre conventions, the knowledge and the values of academic writing in their struggle for a personal voice. On the one hand, novices want and need to have their papers published, and, on the other, they are aware neither of how the community conventions work nor of what may be done to develop their academic writing skills.

The need to master academic genres is unquestionable, but the means to achieve mastery seem to be limited. Graduate courses in Brazil do not include disciplines whose aims are to develop the students' writing skills, not even in their mother tongue (the course described by Figueiredo and Bonini is an exception, and is not part of the regular graduate program in which it was taught). However, students are supposed to publish the results of their investigations. Some programs even consider publication as part of the requirements for obtaining the degree. The programs considered in this paper, i.e., graduate courses in Dentistry and Genetics, require their students to publish papers in English by the time they are about to finish the program, that is, after two years in a

Master's program and after four years in a PhD program.

The students are supposed to have studied English earlier in their education, since they are expected to efficiently use English writing skills during their graduate program. According to Canagarajah (2002), "ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students are not aliens to the English language or Anglo-American culture anymore" (p. 10). However, the fact that a graduate student is not alien to a foreign language or its culture does not mean that he/she is able to write texts in that language; texts that are already difficult to produce in his/her own mother tongue, let alone in a foreign language. The gap between "not being alien to" English and being able to use it properly in academic writing is huge. Recognizing and reading academic texts proficiently is not a guarantee that one is able to produce texts according to the constraints of academic genres which are likely to be accepted by individual academic discourse communities.

This paper therefore presents a specific course in academic writing in English for graduate students devised to fit the students' background knowledge, needs and motivations to develop academic skills.

### **COURSE TEXT**

Swales and Feak's *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (1994) is a textbook that develops academic writing skills "for people who are not native speakers of English yet are studying for graduate degrees (at both masters and doctoral levels) through or partly through the medium of English" (p.1). The material is composed of eight units whose aim is to propose tasks, activities and discussions that range from small-scale language points to studying the discourse of a chosen discipline. The first three units are essentially preparatory while the others include genre-specific activities. The book was designed for non-native graduate students with a focus on making a good impression with academic writing and concerned with improving academic texts.

The units develop from the concepts of audience, purposes, strategies, organization, style and flow to the construction of an academic paper (units seven and eight), where the rhetorical proposal for writing introductions (CARS—Create a Research Space) (Swales, 1990, p. 141) is shown with some modifications (discussed in Aranha, 2004), especially concerned with the labels "moves" and "steps" and with obligatory and optional elements. The units also include a specific part on grammar aspects entitled "language focus" with detailed grammar rules of the most common linguistic features in academic texts (relative clauses, articles, passive voice, adverbial clauses, prepositions, reference, linkers, and nominal clauses, among others).

The authors use texts "from a wide range of disciplines—from mechanical engineering to musical theory" and avoid "laying down rules about what a member

of a disciplinary community should (or should not) do in a particular writing situation” (p. 3). The tasks always require that students find examples from their fields, thus, it is implied that multidisciplinary classes are encouraged. Bhatia’s work with academic abstracts (1993, pp. 78-79) widens and elucidates the discussions in Swales and Feak (pp. 210-217).

The potential instructors are likely to be experienced teachers of academic writing. According to Swales and Feak, they aimed for “a textbook that can be used selectively and that easily allows teachers to substitute activities and texts more suited to their own particular circumstances” (p. 5).

Although in the concepts that underlie a course syllabus the idea of “contact zone” model endorsed by Canagarajah (2002) might be considered, in practice we did not have sufficient time to allow students to strategically negotiate with the academic discursive conventions and create multivocal genres. Nor did we have time to create “safe houses” (p. 182) for our students to practice the discourses of their home communities or develop discourses oppositional to the dominant academic discourse.

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**

The graduate courses in Genetics and Dentistry at UNESP (São Paulo State University) require students to have reading proficiency in English when they enter the program. This proficiency is measured by an exam which is part of the selection process. If the candidate is not approved at this level, he/she automatically fails.

Reading assignments in English are common for the two courses, once most of the bibliographical materials in those areas are in English. In these particular fields, even some Brazilian journals are published in English. Besides being able to read, at a certain stage of the course the students are also required to write in English in order to have the results of their research studies published.

In this context, a course that would suffice their writing needs was first demanded by the Dentistry faculty of UNESP-Araraquara to the Modern Language Department of that same University in 2004. The faculty needed a course that empowered students to write, and consequently, to publish the results of their research findings. The Dentistry faculty of Araraquara holds one of the most important courses in Brazil, with a level A graduate program. Professors from that university are usually granted with scholarships and their academic records depend upon their publications as well as upon their advisees’. Besides, Masters and Doctoral students are potential candidates for teaching positions in the several Dentistry schools in the country, which means that their CVs must display references to their published works.

Graduate subjects within the Dentistry program are allotted 32 hours per

semester and I was given one semester to teach academic writing. A genre-based writing course was designed under the limitation of time, based on Swales and Feak's (1994) proposal, ESP needs analysis, and my own experience in teaching in private schools. The course also seemed to have the advantages pointed out by Hyland (2004, p. 10), i.e., the instructions were explicit, and the course contents were systematic, needs-based, supportive, empowering, critical and able to raise the students' consciousness.

The classes were distributed along eight weeks, with four hours of instructions per week, in total a 32-hour discipline. In order to apply for the course, students were required to be developing a paper for publication, so these students were in their last year either in the Masters or the Doctoral programs. Complete results were not necessary, but the research should be at an advanced stage and the methodology should be complete.

The group was composed of 17 students who had the characteristics required. The classes were taught every fortnight so that students would have time to prepare their homework.

The schedule was organized as follows:

<p>First week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A needs analysis questionnaire was applied in order to check if these particular students' previous language knowledge and needs were appropriate for the course. This stage was also important to verify if all the students who applied for the course had completed part of their investigations.</li> <li>• In order to make their background knowledge explicit, an activity which included parts from different sections was planned. The parts of papers were presented both in</li> </ul>
	<p>Portuguese and in English; the aim of the activity was to check if the students could recognize all of them, independently of the language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The activity above created an environment for the presentation of the concepts of genre and discourse community, which were first introduced informally.</li> </ul>

Second week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The first chapter of Swales and Feak's book was presented so as to introduce ideas of audience, purpose and strategy, organization, style and flow. This activity was prepared in power point form and included the main parts of the chapter selected by the teacher.</li><li>• Excerpts from their own fields were selected as examples. It is important to emphasize that the group was not multi-disciplinary and the fields only varied within the Dentistry area. The activity intended to make students recognize aspects of the ideas presented earlier in texts produced by their peers. At this point, both Portuguese and English texts were used, although Swales and Feak's chapter included only examples in English. It was assumed that the understanding of the ideas would be emphasized if both languages were taken into account.</li><li>• Discussions of the rationale of academic genres were carried out at different times and awareness about academic constraints and expectations seemed to be rising. Formal definitions of genre and discourse communities were presented based on Swales (1990).</li></ul>
Third week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A handout which covered the second chapter of Swales and Feak's book was prepared. The main purpose of this chapter is to work with different sorts of definitions which could be used in different parts of a paper, but mainly in the introduction. This material followed the authors' proposal and included texts from different fields to introduce the ideas of general/specific texts, different types of definitions and generalizations.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The follow-up activity was to make students write in English for the first time in the course, aiming at making them describe their field of study, specifically the one in which the research findings were to be published.</li></ul>

<p>Fourth week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All the paragraphs written by the students as homework were presented to the whole class as a way of acquainting everybody with the research papers being developed by the members of the group.</li><li>• A second moment was devoted to brainstorming the parts of an academic paper. Students were aware of the standard parts of a paper and knew that different journals required specific items. As mentioned before, reading papers in English is a requirement in the course and most of the students accomplished this task very well. Besides, many of them had already submitted a paper, so they were aware of the section entitled “A notice to authors” present in journals. The activity was supported by their background knowledge and, in very few cases, introduced new information. It is important to mention that whatever was new came from peers and not from the instructor, which helped stress the notion of membership of a discourse community.</li><li>• An activity which included sentences from the main parts of a research paper, i.e., abstract, introduction, methods, results and discussion, was developed. These parts, according to Swales and Feak (p. 155), compose a typical organization pattern named IMRD. Students were supposed to label sentences according to the parts of the research article where they were likely to have appeared. Only examples in English, from their own fields, were considered.</li><li>• As homework, students were assigned to write the methods and the results of their papers.</li></ul>
<p>Fifth week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The methods and results sections previously assigned as homework were brought to class on a floppy disk to be used in the following class.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The idea of move analysis was introduced and the constraints of academic genres were once again discussed. The rhetorical moves proposed by Bhatia (1993, pp. 77-78) for abstracts were presented and verified in many published abstracts from their field.</li><li>• As homework, students were supposed to bring the abstract of their papers in a disk.</li></ul>
Sixth week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The methods and results sections were presented and discussed with the whole class. The teacher previously selected examples of difficulties at language and discourse levels, which were then discussed by the class.</li><li>• Once the abstracts were brought in disks, the teacher presented them in power point, verified the presence or absence of the four moves presented earlier and discussed the rationale to the understanding of the whole paper.</li><li>• Students were asked to make final arrangements in the sections already studied.</li></ul>
Seventh week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The idea of moves was elucidated once again and the CARS model (Swales &amp; Feak, 1994) was introduced. The 1994 model was preferred to the 1990 one based on the discussion in Aranha (2004, pp. 28-32).</li><li>• Different introductions from their own field were discussed. They had been already published and did not present grammar problems.</li><li>• As homework, students were supposed to bring the introductions of their own papers in a floppy disk.</li></ul>
Eighth week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All the introductions were discussed in power point. Most of them did not present Move 2—establishing a niche.</li><li>• Each introduction was discussed with its author in further individual meetings, not previously set by the program.</li></ul>

The first week was crucial in raising students' awareness about their background knowledge. Although they could not explain how they recognized the extracts presented both in Portuguese and in English, they did not present difficulties in labeling the different sections. This fact was used to show them how important it is to think about choices when writing their own papers, since in their case, their writing would probably be recognized by their peers in the future.

During the second week, students, especially from the doctorate program, brought papers of their own to share with their classmates. They were critical about them, although many had already been published. They even suggested changes that might have been made to improve the contents.

The third week of the course raised many questions about cross-disciplinary comparisons. First, when texts from other fields were presented, the students did not present the same level of background knowledge as they displayed in their own field. It was problematic to them to discuss issues of structure, purposes, points of view and organization in texts alien to their fields. The main problem seemed to be the content of these texts, not the language. Students did not have opinions to share when the subject was not common to them. Students also seemed to have low motivation to perform the tasks proposed.

The fourth week was crucial for students to analyze their own production. The students showed great interest concerning the subjects of works whose sentences they were supposed to label. The sentences displayed important information in their fields, which made the apathy of the previous class disappear. Although Swales and Feak mention the advantages of a multidisciplinary class over a monodisciplinary one (p. 3), i.e., rhetorical consciousness and lack of a competitive environment, our context showed that the latter has advantages in relation to students' motivation, theme relevance and material organization.

The activities of the fifth week emphasized the fact that some of their previous papers had not been adequately prepared and did not display the language nor fit the constraints of academic genres. Broad discussions were carried out and many examples were brought to class and evaluated by peers. The doctoral students were enthusiastic in re-evaluating their own production and the Master's students took advantage of the discussion so as not to make the same mistakes. Genre awareness seemed to be improving and students were very motivated.

According to Swales and Feak (2004, p. 159), "the methods is usually the easiest section to write and, in fact, it is often the section that the researchers write first." As this part of the research was supposed to have been carried out before applying for the course, it was assumed that students would not present difficulties. The methods and results sections presented by the students followed the rhetorical structure of the papers they were used to reading. Except for a few

grammar inadequacies, such as lack of verb-agreement and the use of passive voice, the texts did not present problems that could impair reading comprehension. Because students were evaluating their own production, interest and participation were high.

Bhatia's model for abstract content includes four moves, i.e., introducing purposes, describing methodology, summarizing results and presenting conclusions. Abstracts from published papers presented these four in most of the cases, but the ones selected from the students' papers did not. For example, an abstract like the one below was considered thoroughly inadequate because it did not clearly show the purpose of the work (although it could be inferred that the purpose was to differentiate the insects using  $\alpha$ -amylase system) nor results or conclusions, only methodology. In addition, the number of grammar errors weakened understanding. Remedial grammar exercises as well as grammar consciousness raising and information about abstract rhetorical organization were necessary so that the student would improve her writing.

In this work we used  $\alpha$ -amylase system to differentiation of *Drosophila melanogaster*, *D. simulans* and hybrids and *D. mulleri*, *D. arizonae* and hybrids. The analysis was realized by PAGE containing amylose solution to detect isozyme  $\alpha$ -amylase. In all parental lineages was observed an only one band amylase but with different mobility among these species. Two bands were observed in hybrids corresponding at sum of patterns verified in parental lineages, independently of cross direction. The staining method PAS (Periodic Acid Schiff) widely used in histological studies to detect glycoproteins was adapted to analysis in PAGE and make registry permanent of experiments.

After specific attention to grammar problems, direct instructions about the role of abstracts and the importance of this section to the whole paper, and many drafts, the student revised the abstract as follows:

Our investigations suggest that the staining method PAS (Periodic Acid Schiff), widely used in histological studies to detect glycoproteins, can be a technique used in PAGE and become a permanent register of the experiments. These analysis were carried out to differentiate *Drosophila melanogaster*, *D. simulans* and hybrids; *D. mulleri*, *D. arizonae* and hybrids by PAGE containing amylose solution to detect isozyme  $\alpha$ -amylase. In all parental lineages, only one band amylase was observed but with different mobilities

among these species. Two bands were observed in hybrids corresponding to a sum of patterns verified in parental lineages, independently of cross direction.

It was also very common to find abstracts with contents proper to introductions—such as the establishment of the field—or with just the methodology move, as the one mentioned before. The example below shows that although the text does not present grammar problems, the beginning of the abstract could be omitted (as it was in the final version). The introduction of that paper began the same way, with exactly the same two sentences. Consciousness raising about text structure and rhetoric redefined places of information.

The occupational noises from equipment used during the dental treatment are extremely harmful to the health of the dentist, promote the reduction of the auditory capacity and also take professionals to stress, fatigue, irritability, nervousness, low productivity and blood pressure alteration. Due to the fact that such noises cannot be eliminated, the early awareness of the dentists about these risks in their work becomes important. The present work observes the perception of dentistry students concerning the exposure to the occupational noise. A questionnaire . . . (methodology and result follow).

The awareness of the different places for different information seemed to have helped students improve their own papers, since, at the end, most of the abstracts did present four moves and did not contain any relevant grammar mistakes.

According to the model proposed by Swales and Feak, an introduction of an academic paper has three moves<sup>1</sup>, each comprised of different steps. The first move (M1) establishes the territory of the research and can be expressed by a review of previous research (considered obligatory to the realization of this move) or by showing that the research area is central, important, relevant (considered optional). The second move (M2) establishes the niche of the research and is expressed either by a gap, or questions, or by knowledge extension (all obligatory to the realization of the move, but one excluding the other). The third move (M3) establishes the occupation of the niche previously stated by indicating purposes or establishing the nature of the research being presented (obligatory) and by optional steps: announcing principal findings or indicating the structure of the paper. The model—Moves in Research Paper Introductions—as proposed by Swales and Feak (1994, p. 175), is described in Figure 1.

<b>MOVE 1</b>	<b>Establishing a research territory</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) showing that the area of study is relevant, important, crucial or making general comments (optional)</li> <li>(b) introducing or reviewing items of previous research (obligatory)</li> </ul>
<b>MOVE 2</b>	<b>Establishing a niche</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) indicating a gap in previous research, raising questions about previous research, or expanding previous knowledge (obligatory)</li> </ul>
<b>MOVE 3</b>	<b>Occupying the niche</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) showing purposes or establishing the nature of the research (obligatory)</li> <li>(b) announcing principal findings (optional)</li> <li>(c) indicating the structure of the research paper (optional)</li> </ul>

FIGURE 1: THE MODEL OF MOVES IN RESEARCH PAPER INTRODUCTIONS (SWALES & FEAK, 1994, P. 175)

Move 2—establishing a niche—is considered the “hinge” that connects M1 (what has already been done) to M3 (what is going to be done by that specific paper) (Swales & Feak, 1994, p. 185). During the 7th class, the ideas developed by Aranha (2004), which assume that (a) M2 is the most difficult move in an introduction because it is not usually short (as suggested by Swales & Feak, 1994, p. 186); and (b) all the arguments in M1 and M3 depend upon the purpose of M2, i.e., whether M2 is introducing a gap or extending knowledge were discussed.

Swales and Feak’s proposal states that most M2s create a niche by indicating a gap, i.e., by showing that the research story so far is not yet complete. This move is expressed by the use of contrastive linguistics devices (*however, but, nevertheless*), of some verbs or verb phrases (*failed to consider, lack, disregarded, ignored, misinterpreted, overlooked, be restricted to*), of some adjectives (*controversial, incomplete, questionable, scarce, inconclusive*), and some nouns (*limitation, failure*). Aranha analyses 30 introductions in Biology and shows some disagreement in relation to the size of M2 and the use of contrastive elements to indicate this move. From 30 introductions analyzed, 19 of them contained questions or knowledge extension and 11 contained a gap. This information is against Swales

and Feak's statement about the greater number of gaps in M2. They also stated that most M2s are short:

*Most Move 2s establish a niche by indicating a gap—by showing that the research story so far is not yet complete. Move 2s then are a particular kind of critique.*

*Usually Move 2s are quite short, often consisting of no more than a sentence. Sometimes, however, Move 2s can be quite complicated.* (p. 186)

The size of M2 found in Aranha's (2004) data varies from one sentence to more than ten, which also contradicts the statement above. This may be due to the area of study chosen (Biology, cancer, cells) where researchers seek to broaden the existing knowledge and treatment alternatives. It is crucial to use other authors' findings to advance the research and to share results and information in search of a cure.

The conjunctions of opposition, such as *however*, *but* and *although*, are said to be used in M2s that show a gap in previous research. The data show that the occurrence of such conjunctions not only introduces a gap to be fulfilled by that paper but also points to gaps in the literature review of the area. These gaps remain after the publication of the paper and the reason to show them is to indicate that the authors are aware of the limitations of their work. The authors do not have the intention of filling the gaps. In these cases, the conjunctions occur in M1. The example below shows the use of *however* in M1, indicating a gap within the review. The M2 in this introduction expands previous knowledge.

In humans (review\*)<sup>2</sup> and rats (\*), estrogen receptor (ER) is localized within a subpopulation of mammary epithelial cells, whereas ER is expressed in a subpopulation of both epithelial and stromal cells in the mouse mammary gland (\*). In human breast, epithelial proliferation and expression of ER appear to be mutually exclusive (\*). Similarly, ER is typically not expressed in proliferating mammary epithelial cells of mice (\*) and rats (\*); **however**, the relationship does not appear to be as clear as in human cells.

The M3 from this introduction derives from knowledge extension. The conjunction was used to establish a territory (M1) and presents a gap in the review which will not be fulfilled by that work. The gap will remain. The example below shows M3 of the same introduction.

The objective of this investigation was to ascertain patterns of mammary cell proliferation and duct formation by employing bromodeoxyuriden labeling and three-dimensional reconstruction, and to evaluate the relationship between expressions of ER and progesterone receptor (PR) and the proliferation of epithelial cells in the bovine mammary gland.

The aim of signaling an unfulfilled gap may be to show that the state of the arts still presents questionable facts or gaps partially fulfilled by other works. From 30 introductions analyzed by Aranha (2004), 20 occurrences of *however* were found in 11 introductions and the function was to establish a territory, not a niche. Other conjunctions—*although, yet, despite*—also appear in M1 in introductions whose M2 was knowledge extension and not a gap. Aranha (2004) shows that these conjunctions have more than one communicative purpose and not a single one of the initiating M2s indicate a gap. This distinction was pedagogically crucial in the context of the present paper.

It is important to notice that, especially for Masters' students, it is very complicated to question established previous research results, since they are novices in the discourse community and the risk of being linguistically and discursively naïve is high. It is safer to continue tradition. Another fact is that both graduate programs develop projects to which most of the students are related; the results of their papers are part of a broader project and, therefore, depend on the previous works developed by others on the same theme.

At the end of the course, students felt the need for more explicit grammar rules, although not many different problems were detected. The occurrences concentrate on specific linguistic features. Because the group was relatively large, students also felt the need for more individual attention. Most of them had the sections ready for publication after long individual discussions in the introduction sections, mainly considering the need for M2 and the implications of its presence in the introductory section. These discussions were carried out individually and lasted about an hour. They took place after the seventh and eighth classes.

Genre awareness increased a great deal with this individual work. Demand for more classes was mentioned by all students but they said they could feel improvement in the way they wrote and in the way they viewed the use of language for academic purposes. Unfortunately, there was no time to study the discussion section, although many students sent theirs by mail later and I corrected and suggested modifications. Needless to say, the 32 hours assigned for this course are far from being enough.

## REVIEWING THE RESULTS

The ideal design of any course should take into account “what the students know, what they are able to do, and what they are interested in learning” (Hyland, 2004, p. 93). The first version of the course described in this paper considered this ideal. It was assumed that students were fully aware of the constraints of the academic genre in their mother tongue and partially in English, since they could recognize parts of different sections in academic papers. In short, it was assumed that they would be able to write academic texts, especially sections such as methodology because they have reproducible characteristics and do not display rhetoric effort or linguistic polish. It was also assumed that learners were interested in learning due to the pressure of publishing or perishing. Thus, the main objective of the course was to make them aware of the linguistic constraints of academic writing in a foreign language. In other words, we expected problems at the language level, in the realization of the moves through steps, and not at the level of academic genres. Besides, we believed that being able to recognize different parts of academic papers meant being likely to produce them.

Most of these assumptions were proved wrong, except the one concerning the students’ interest in learning. However, these assumptions did not come out of the blue. They were based on a previous work that described workshops in which similar activities were used, i.e., activities which aimed at recognizing and labeling different sections of academic papers (Aranha, 2002). This previous experience showed us that students usually knew more than they thought but could not express this knowledge, maybe because of shyness, lack of confidence, or fear. In addition, the absence of foreign language proficiency seemed to prevent them even further from expressing themselves. The process of recognition and awareness raising made them more confident and served, at that time, as a positive start for deepening the study of academic texts.

Unfortunately, a clear separation between the academic discourse of proficient writers (the ones students were used to reading) and one’s own (the one students were expected to produce) was evident after the end of the first course. Canagarajah (2005, p. 17) states that “ESOL writers have to be made reflexively aware of the medium they are using, developing a critical understanding of its potentialities and limitation as they appropriate and reconstruct the language to represent their interests.” We realized that being aware did not mean being “reflexively aware”; therefore, it seemed that the reflexive part somehow depended upon considering academic discourse as part of their lives and not as something that belonged to proficient writers, i.e., the authors they were expected to read.

The following assumptions served as the basis for the reformulation of the course:

- (a) The act of recognizing (reading) is different from the act of producing (writing) academic genre regardless of the language;
- (b) Students needed more individual attention, as what they wanted to say or show of their research was crucial for the understanding of linguistic and discourse aspects;
- (c) Students seemed to be at very different linguistic threshold levels, although all of them had been previously considered competent by an entrance test, so more grammar and vocabulary were essential for writing production.

In other words, the teaching experience indicated that their alleged background in reading was not the main factor concerning the quality of their written production, and different linguistic aspects needed specific attention, forms of correction and strategies for awareness raising.

### ***Some improvements based on the results***

After the first WAC experience with the course offered to the Dentistry Faculty of Araraquara in 2004, the course “Redação acadêmica em língua inglesa” (Academic writing in English) was offered as an elective subject for the graduate program in Genetics at the Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas at UNESP, São José do Rio Preto, at the request of the course coordinator.

The original course schedule was maintained, with classes every other week. The first and second weeks were condensed into only one, since the needs analysis questionnaire was answered at home and sent by mail up to the end of the first week to serve as a guide for the following classes. Students were also asked to send their methodology section to be discussed in class, without previous explanation. The time allotted to this section was little as Dentistry students had showed very few problems with this section. Thus, it was assumed that this section would not contain basic mistakes. Moreover, it was also assumed that students’ linguistic threshold level would allow them to write this section properly.

Once the questionnaires arrived, it was detected that this group presented lower linguistic knowledge than the one in Dentistry. Besides, they did not have as much contact with papers published in English as the other group. Therefore, their methodology section expressed exactly these differences, with mistakes that ranged from basic noun-verb agreement to complete unexpected syntax and vocabulary inadequacies, as in this example which contains errors of verb form, lexical choice and syntactic arrangement:

*The Schiff's reactive were throw out and the gels washed with sodium metabissulfite at 0.5% overnight.*

In this example, a basic lack of noun-verb agreement can be detected in the use of *were* instead of *was* to agree with a singular subject. Besides, at the vocabulary level, the use of *throw out* instead of *discard* shows little or no awareness of academic constraints in relation to the proper register for an academic paper. Another point to be considered is the misplacement of the adverb *overnight*. Examples with the same types of mistakes were common.

After the analysis of the students' methodology sections, the following issues had to be considered before the course could continue:

- (a) After the first class, it was noticed that students did not have a well enough developed level of English to start studying genre in that language. Genre, as a concept, would have to be introduced in texts in Portuguese.
- (b) The twenty-eight remaining hours would be insufficient to develop a paper as a whole, although many of the students were in the last year and needed to have their papers done. It was clear that the proposal they applied for had to be changed.
- (c) The grammar points which had been previously selected for this course, based on the requirements from the Dentistry students, would have to be expanded and more detailed, because a wider linguistic knowledge had to be achieved before the students could produce their final papers in English.

The second week began as a result of the evaluation of these issues. Students were made aware of the limitations of the course and the impossibility of having their papers ready for publication after finishing it due to lack of hours in the course. It was stated that they would have to spend more time on their papers than they had expected outside class. Although they had their research studies almost finished and were about to end the course, English and genre were subjects to be discussed and implemented before they risked submitting their papers to be published. It seemed that papers had just been translated from Portuguese into English, and as a consequence they did not look like academic papers, not even in students' mother tongue.

Activities to raise the students' awareness about genre were carried out with texts in Portuguese, in order to allow students to recognize the differences between the language they spoke and the language they were supposed to write in. Besides, much reading of papers was assigned and students were asked to find

out characteristics that seemed singular to the genre “research article.” What was considered unnecessary for the Dentistry students had to be emphasized for the Genetics ones.

The course contents for the following weeks suffered reformulation in terms of methodology as well. Two classes on grammar were planned and included items such as passive voice, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, countable and non-countable nouns, sentence order and parallelism. As far as possible, examples were taken from their own methodology sections sent in the first class. A selection was made based on the “language focus” sections from Swales and Feak (1994) and from Aranha’s (2004) results about transitivity and verb usage.

The classes were divided into two moments: in the first, students presented questions and findings from the papers they read, and, in the second, the teacher presented the selected material. After three classes that concentrated mainly on awareness raising about genre and discourse communities and about how language plays a role in both, the students were asked to rewrite their methodology sections for the fourth class. It was expected that, by then, they would have realized how they could improve that particular section of their papers.

The notions of audience, purpose and strategy, organization, style and flow, formerly part of the second class, were only introduced in the fourth class, before each section was discussed and reviewed by all students. Style and flow could then be analyzed in their own texts. Students became more aware of their own production and of the need for improving their linguistic knowledge to start writing about their research. We also increased students’ awareness of the requirements of specific genres and the importance of being heard by specific discourse communities.

The following classes (from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> week) focused basically on two sections: abstracts and introductions. The students’ productions were brought to class and served as examples for discussions about appropriateness, context and mutual understanding. The idea of background information required by different audiences was extensively discussed because selecting information was considered a crucial aspect by the whole group. Texts were rewritten many times and in some cases not only to meet the teacher’s demands, but for reformulating papers considered inadequate by their own authors after discussions and awareness raising. The fact that students read and reread their own work contributed considerably to the final quality of the sections.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

It is safe to say that, as a result of the two courses on academic writing offered to graduate students, there was an increase in their interest in genre studies in their specific academic contexts, as the concepts of genre and genre conventions

improved the students' texts considerably. However, the boundaries between genre and register, or rather, between language appropriateness and information selection and organization are still open and need further research.

Another point to be emphasized is the fact that pedagogical genre potential may vary according to the proficiency level in the language texts are written in, but the awareness of the concept of genre does seem to help any novice scholar researcher to write and to increase his/her chances of getting published.

These two WAC experiences were successful and the course schedule and contents have been improved based on the results. In 2006, another course was given for Dentistry students in Araraquara and the Medical School in São José do Rio Preto has scheduled a course to begin in March, 2008.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Similarly to the model proposed in 1990 (cars), the 1994 model is explained by an ecological metaphor.

<sup>2</sup> The symbol means bibliography review.

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