

## **Necessities of Developing Diverse Cultural Potentials in Academic Discourse**

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February 2013

### **Abstract**

The absolute hegemony of *international* code of (academic) communication has resulted in the development and spread of the discorsal voice of the culture form which *historical* English has emerged, and, as a consequence, any violation from the generic conventions and thinking patterns born out of such a discourse has resulted in the deprivation of non-native thinkers form active participation in production, publication and distribution of their academic findings. The argument in this paper is based on the proposal that if some of the formulated, standardized patterns of the production of academic knowledge are to be challenged and a new movement towards scientific, academic pluralism is to begin, development of a wider atmosphere for a better treatment and acknowledgment of cultural-historical voices of thinkers of different ethnic, cultural backgrounds seems inevitable. This approach necessitates some different,

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non-conventional ways of defining the role of language in general and English in particular in academic communication. Our conception of 'international' in this proposal is the development of a *virtual* code which possesses the capacity of reflecting and encoding various national-cultural discourses within international academic communication. This multi-voiced English would encourage alternative ways of thinking about and understanding the realities of the world, discourage its users from non-critical reading of the superficial patterns of texts, and develop the understanding of its users about the underlying ideologies of discourses shaping and constructing the realities of our world.

**Key words:** Academic English, Discourse, Scientific Pluralism, Virtual Language, Multi-voiced English

### Introduction

English owes its developing role in international communication to historical factors, emergence of global trade, and elevation of the status of this code by the United States and the United Kingdom for economic and political purposes. Although the beginning of the dominance of English in different human affairs is marked by the development of military and strategic activities of especially US after World War II, its impact is by no means limited to such issues.

During the years following World War II, English was introduced as the key for the development of nations, and the problem of underdevelopment was usually associated with the problem of *not* knowing English. The early whispers of this could be felt in a London conference in 1960 on *Second Language Learning and National Development in Asia, Africa and Latin America*: "... the language problem in development stems from at least three communication needs which are increasingly being recognized both in the developing countries themselves and in other countries aiding in their development: internal communication, transmission of science and technology, and international communication" (as cited in Mackay and Mountford, 1978, p. vi).

The 'triumphalist English' of those years indulged scholars of English for Specific Purposes in a certain 'deception' that what Third World nations

needed was "a rapid acceleration in their resources of human capital, which could be achieved by a hurried transmission of Western technical and scientific know-how delivered through the medium of English and supported by appropriate EAP programs" (Swales, 1997. p. 374). Such misconceptions and deceptions (that at best stemmed from philanthropic attitudes of scholars like John Swales in developing a culturally and politically 'neutral' enterprise) led, in an unquestionable way, to the explosion of international academic, scientific and technical English for the construction and distribution of human knowledge.

The current outcome of this explosion is that in some fields of science more than 90 percent of the constructed literature is in English, and majority of prestigious journals are published in English. Hence, it seems that active participation of the thinkers and scholars of most academic fields in production and comprehension of the discourses of those fields requires a suitable command of English. Various political and economic factors such as the number of international organizations and companies and the development of the World Wide Web and the Internet have intensified the feelings of needs for learning English, and non-native contexts are investing on the learning and use of English in their academic centers. Many post-colonial contexts such as Hong Kong, South Africa, India and Singapore are highlighting the significance and relevance of this language for the development of their higher education. This approach can also be seen in post-Soviet countries of Central Asia and Caucasus. The countries competing for the attraction of foreign students (e.g. Germany, France, Malaysia, Turkey) have also recognized the key function of English in this burgeoning business. The situation in Anglophone contexts themselves is also interesting: in early 1990s, the number of non-American students studying at US universities in science and engineering was more than the number of American students (Jenkins *et al*, 1993), and until 2004, more than one million students had been studying in English out of their own countries (Ward, 2004).

### **Consequences of dominance of English in academic contexts**

The consequences and impacts of the dominance of English in the construction and distribution of academic knowledge are very complex.

However, highlighting some of these consequences would assist us in developing the present argument.

One tragic consequence of the outlined hegemony would be the annihilation and death of linguistic diversity which used to be seen as an essential quality of and prerequisite for construction of knowledge. A short glance at the history of human reveals that different languages have played invaluable roles in the development of various branches of science. The role of Greek in the production of the concepts of philosophy, the role of Arabic in the construction of the concepts of logic, algebra, mathematics, and medicine and the role of Chinese in the development of the concepts of astronomy are just a few representative examples of the contributions of languages to our understanding of the realities of our world. It seems that the discourses embedded within those cultural contexts had adapted and adjusted the native languages as suitable instruments of the construction of knowledge and had also granted them a historical advantage and primacy for better fulfillment of such functions. Similarly, nobody would question that religious scholars need to know the languages such as Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek and Arabic (wherein the seminal texts were originally created). No one would deny the invaluable role of Swedish as a vehicle for articulating the most developed forms of social democracy and the welfare state, and no one can ignore the role of German scholarship in elaborating and maintaining the persuasive rhetorical device of the footnote, and *Exkurs*, glossed in English as 'digression'.

The present picture, however, reveals a different functional distribution form that human experienced before the development of international lingua franca. In recent years, for example, most of the academic journals which used to publish in European (e.g. Dutch and German) and Eastern (e.g. Japanese) languages have replaced these with English. Russian which had a well-established tradition for representing the academic, scholarly findings of the Eastern Block has almost disappeared and Swedish which used to be an influential language in academic communication is playing almost no role (Swales, 1997; Hyland, 2006). At universities offering a linguistic choice for their PhD candidates, English is the most favored code for thesis writing (Wilson, 2002). Libraries all over the world are encouraged to

subscribe for journals published in English, and academic researchers and writers find publishing in English as the king road for promotion in academic structure.

Most citations are also from materials published in English. For example, in France, academic journals have almost 85 percent of their citations from journals published in English (Navarro, 1995). Moreover, more than 95 percent of journals indexed in *Science Citation Index* use English as their language of publication. This fact has marginalized and will certainly further marginalize non-natives from the active domain of academic development of human knowledge (Gibbs, 1995), and would, no doubt, result in the hegemony of Anglophone discourse.

Another concern is related to the challenge of discourses imposed on academic publication by the editors and referees of journals published in English. These gatekeepers of academic publication often reject 'non-standard' discourses (Flowerdew, 2001; Gazden, 1992). Non-English writers are often unfamiliar with these imposed standards and thus have to resort to professional editors (who usually charge huge amounts of money for their proofreading) for the standardization of their texts.

In fact, what the triumphalist English – or what Swales (1997) called *tyrannosaurus rex* – has caused and created is not the death of languages *per se*; the more tragic side of the story is the silence of voices and discourses which were once major producers and origins of human knowledge. This silence has narrowed down the possibilities of construction of realities of our world to the generic channels of a single culture. Human has lost what Gibbs terms "Lost Science in the Third World". Similarly, Ongstad, a Scandinavian thinker, has observed that when a culture starts to lose its genres, it begins to die (1992). The efforts of thinkers attempting to resist the current trend and revive the historical role of marginalized discourses is usually humiliated and belittled, and the courageous efforts of critics such as Phillipson and Pennycook for reducing the impacts of this trend are faced with the reluctant reactions of dominant powers.

### ***Appraisal of the role of English in academic communication: pragmatism or critique?***

Some still believe that the dominance of English in international academic communication has been the outcome of a neutral, unbiased and

inevitable development. This group suggest that the development of functions of English in academic communication has facilitated the membership of scholars, regardless of their ethnic and national affiliations, in global academic communities (Graddol, 2001), and also facilitated the exchange of human knowledge (Glaze, 2000). International academic communication requires a common code, and English, due to its long standing tradition in this domain, its invaluable functional potentials, and its transnational character, deserves this position. The proponents of this position claim that we can no longer assume English as belonging to a specific ethnic culture and its presence in different functional domains is not a threat to other national languages.

However, the opponent position sees the deceptive growth of English as a destructive force which would lead to the death of other languages, impose the cultural thinking patterns of its native speakers to the speakers of other languages, and create a monolithic discourse in the construction and distribution of academic knowledge. Phillipson (1992) talks about 'linguistic imperialism' and characterizes it as a process which would narrow down the functional domains of other languages, and similarly, Pennycook (1994) reminds us of the role of powerful languages in further limitation of non-English writers' academic opportunities. Now '*publish your best in the West*' is the buzzword of academic centers all over the world.

The fundamental question to be addressed here is whether English should be taken for granted as the key for the active participation of academics in international communication or whether it should be seen as the Trojan Horse which carries the imperialist values and interests of its historical, political owners.

The present literature on English for Academic Purposes is divided in this respect. *Pragmatic* movement in EAP finds its most explicit representation in the views of scholars like John Swales (though we should also acknowledge his current critical position; see for example Swales, 2007). Swales' position in the 1980s and 1990s considers the development of '*academic communicative competence*' as the ultimate goal of EAP. He (and other scholars influential in the development of the genre-based theory of EAP) suggest that the learners of academic English – as the would-be

members of academic discourse communities – should have an awareness of and access to the conventions of language use in academic contexts, which would facilitate their active participation in the production and comprehension of the genres of the community they belong to. In fact, what pragmatism seeks to do (through a mainly genre-based pedagogy) is naturalizing and familiarizing the hegemony of powerful discourses in academic contexts and encouraging the novice members to acquire the functional genres for an easier access to capital and resources. Non-Anglophone members should prepare themselves for the roles which have already been designed for them. Pragmatism suggests that novel ideas in academy are negotiable through discursal conventions and limitations, and these discursal conventions and limitations are essential for the establishment of the boundaries of disciplines. Consequently, some patterns of meaning construction in academy are considered more privileged and other patterns (which usually belong to the home culture of nonnative newcomers) should be marginalized. Understanding and using these powerful, 'standard' patterns and genres would facilitate the fair distribution of valued resources in academic structure (Christie, 1987; Hyland, 2004). The status of thinkers in their discipline and their opportunities for further promotion, then, depends on their intimate familiarity with the acceptable and agreed-upon discourses of the target discourse community. Awareness of and access to valued genres is a type of cultural and symbolic capital (see, for instance, Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Harwood, 2005a, 2005b; Bourdieu, 1998; Everett, 2002; Putnam, 2009). The main responsibility of EAP education would then be fair distribution of this awareness through what Allison (1996) calls 'context-sensitive language pedagogy'.

*Critical approach*, on the other hand, is against this naturalization and familiarization. This approach encourages the newcomers to question the present order. It seeks to empower the thinkers and writers by equipping them with critical thinking and recognizing and valuing native language experiences (Clarke and Ivanic, 1997). The influential figures of this movement (e.g. Cook, 1997 and Benesch, 2001) characterize pragmatism as a kind of '*political quietism*' in line with unquestionable adaptation and adjustment with the discourses of target contexts thinkers. According to Pennycook, an instrumental approach to English as an unbiased, neutral

means of academic communication is an attempt to hide the ideological values and intentions familiarized and naturalized through this language. The goal is development of a tolerance for these ideologies and creation of the appropriate grounds for recreating them. According to Benesch, the critical approach should challenge the presuppositions which naturalize and habitualize the expected behaviors and assignments of the hierarchical structure dominating academic institutions. This approach reflects Fairclough's (1992) characterization of the role of discourse: discourse acts like a bridge between 'local context of situation' and 'institutional context of situation', and this is precisely where the agreed-upon and institutionalized discourses and activities of academy (e.g. assignments, seminars, articles, etc.) stabilize, consolidate and recreate the relevant power structure and relations.

Hence, encouraging the use of powerful and prestigious genres in academy on the basis of a pragmatic point of view means facilitating the access to established, institutionalized social, cultural patterns and values of power. Development of 'academic communicative competence' through genre-based pedagogy as advocated by scholars like Swales implies the negligence of the ideological consequences of membership in powerful discourse communities. Siding with such a position would deprive us of the opportunities of criticizing and challenging the political, cultural and social contexts out of which powerful discourses have emerged.

We argue that siding with *pragmatism* or *critique* is not a value-free option, and the ideal position is one which departs from our approach to a more fundamental relation – the relationship between *discourse* and *reality* (for a comprehensive discussion on the nature of this relationship, see Shi-Xu, 2005). The way we characterize this relationship can determine whether we take the present role of English in international academic communication for granted or challenge and defamiliarize it.

### ***Discourse and reality: is knowledge independent from discourse?***

It may be observed that within mainstream scholarship on language and communication there is a dominant, though often implicit, epistemological stance that speaking and writing are a more or less accurate description of



world - things, events ~~and~~ people. This view has been variously characterized by the scholars of language and communication as the '*conduit view*', '*mapping view*', '*mirror view*', '*picture theory*' or '*transmission model*' (see, for example, Carey, 1992; Gergen, 1994, 1999; Grace, 1987; Hall, 1981; Reddy, 1993). Grace (1987, p.6) characterizes the mapping view thus: "there is a common world out there and our languages are analogous to maps of this world". The representationalist conception of language and communication seems to underlie much of linguistic communication scholarship as well as of other social scientific disciplines working with linguistic data (especially psychology, sociology, history and so on). This may be seen, for instance, in the fact that research often fails to pay sufficient attention to context, including that of the researcher, and to the role that language itself plays in the constitution of knowledge and facts. This can also be seen in the two major perspectives in modern western linguistics, universalism and relativism. The former position holds that mankind shares the basic mental concepts and that, as a result, particular languages represent the world in basically the same way. The latter position holds that individual languages constrain different worldviews and therefore represent the world slightly differently. In either variant, language is taken to be a picture of the world and, so far as the picture is concerned, the difference is merely a matter of degree (Montgomery 1995, pp. 224-5). The representationalist view involves several interrelated assumptions. A first assumption is that there is a real, commonly shared world that is objectively given, 'out there'. It can be accessed by human senses, even though imperfectly; hence there are slight differences in the ways in which different languages represent it. Or at least, in some 'dialectic' or dualistic conception of language and social structure, the material world constrains human ways of experiencing and expressing it. Further, the world is of a different matter, or different order of things, altogether from linguistic communication, which would then require other forms of analysis than linguistic and textual. Second, the thing named linguistic communication is thought to be essentially arbitrary and transparent. Free of norms and values, it has no meaning in itself; it is merely a sort of mirror of reality. 'Real meaning' lies outside language. For this reason, linguistic communication is often conceptualized as an empty 'system' of 'levels', 'categories', 'rules' and

'structures. Its function is solely and universally to refer to, represent, reflect, or at least refract, reality, whether it is the inner experience or the external world or whatever. Finally, the relation of linguistic communication to the world is conceived to be that of reference and representation: it neither casts its own image on to the world nor changes it, for example. Consequently, 'meaning' (or content or message or information) is something that is contained in the linguistic sign (or code). From another perspective, the process of linguistic communication is that of encoding by the producer and decoding by the recipient.

Our contention is that the representationalist view is inadequate for characterizing discourse in general and academic discourse in particular. The problems here are interrelated, but for the sake of exposition we can treat them separately. To start with, we may realize on closer inspection that representationalism as just described is neither natural nor neutral; holding it as the only way to understand human discourse excludes other alternative and potentially useful ways.

Next, the representationalist notion itself fails to recognize that linguistic communication is characterized by human motivation and meaning creation (Grace, 1987, pp. 8-9; Kress, 1991). Consequently, it ignores the active role of language in the mediation and creation of reality. A moment's reflection will reveal that linguistic forms impose meaning (hence cultural norms and values) on the things, people or events they 'represent' (see Lee, 1992) and manipulate perception (Fowler *et al.*, 1979). Further, because the representationalist notion fails to take into account the context within which linguistic communication is inalienably linked, it tends to be logocentric, that is, to take meaning to be encapsulated in the word. Structuralism in linguistics and post-structuralism in literary criticism focus attention on the linguistic system ('grammar' of various kinds) and written texts (including 'text grammar'), respectively. Here text/grammar is taken as the locus of meaning (for example, 'metafunctions' in Halliday's functional linguistics). Consequently, historical, cultural and institutional conditions and circumstances are left out of the picture (Hall 1981). Observe, for example, the lack of ethnographic and institutional research in certain forms of discourse analysis (see Billig, 1999 for a critique of conversation analysis

on this score). Moreover, by portraying language as merely descriptive, representationalism often fails to take note of the performative, or action, aspect of language. Benjamin (1999), Foucault (1970, 1980) and Wittgenstein (1968) have in various ways critically examined the notion of language as the mirror of the mind and of reality in favour of a notion of language as action. Mey (2001, p. 93), following speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), describes the problem accurately when he says: Many linguistic theories take their premises in some rather simpleminded assumptions about human language: that it is nothing but a combination of 'sound and meaning' (thus in most descriptive grammars), or that language can be defined as a set of correct sentences (thus in most generative transformational thinking). The basic flaw in such thinking is that it does not pay attention to language as an activity which produces *speech acts*.

In addition, and more seriously for linguistic communication research, the mirror view renders it impossible to research into the dynamic relation that linguistic communication may have with the world, or, for that matter, individual experience and cultural development. Since the relation of language to the world is assumed to be merely referential, it would make little sense for the language scholar not only to study how language creates reality, but also to ask how language might constitute the world. Because the world itself is understood as a different order of things, how the world, and the peoples and cultures in it, might exist in and depend on the mode of speaking is simply out of the question.

In a closer inspection of the implications of 'representationalism' on our present argument, we can suggest that such (mis)conceptions have their roots in the feelings of "alienation" we have developed towards the nature of language and communication in general and nature of academic discourse in particular: an alienation eloquently expressed in comments like the following (Halliday, 1993/2004, pp. 199-200),

It is not only schoolchildren who have felt alienated by the discourse of science. Within a century of the so called 'scientific revolution' in Europe, people were feeling disturbed, by the picture that science presented, of a universe regulated by automatic physical laws and of a vast gulf between humanity and the rest of nature.

, and also represented in (ironic) advice such as the following given to the authors of academic texts (Hunston, 1994, p. 192):

- a. The scientist must remove himself from reports of his own work and thus avoid all uses of first person
- b. Scientific writing should be objective and precise, with mathematics as its model
- c. Scientific writing should shun metaphor and other flights of rhetorical fancy to seek a univocal relationship between word and object; and
- d. The scientific article should support its claims with empirical evidence from nature, preferably experimental.

However, our conception of the nature of scientific/academic communication in this article has been strongly influenced by a radical shift from *'representationalism'* as outlined above to a *'reality-constitutive'* conception of language and communication. This conception is based upon the assumption that discourse is not separable from, but constitutive of what is conventionally perceived as a neutral, independent object world - or experience and reality, external to discourse. More generally, it may be appreciated that a silent world is unthinkable. Speech plays a pivotal role in the construction of reality and there is no way to separate 'reality' and our language about it. Reality, be it society, culture, history, self, mind, people and things around us, thoughts and feelings inside us – the lived experience or lifeworld - is not just a neutral, independent given, 'out there'. Rather, it involves human cultural perception, categorization, characterization, evaluation and so on. As Shweder (1990) has argued, our world is an 'intentional' one in that it is saturated with our own concepts, interests and desires as the persons who experience it, such that the person and culture 'interpenetrate' each other. Objects or phenomena of enquiry presuppose the researcher's own concepts, classification and theory. Thoughts and experiences can only become shared through language; thoughts and experiences would be vague, unless and until they become verbalized (Kress and Hodge, 1979, p. 5). From another perspective, our social cultural reality is primarily and predominantly a *discursive* one, with individuals, groups and institutions speaking, writing, reading and listening to each other,

accomplishing various practical tasks. According to Shotter (1993), all we have is 'conversational realities'.

In the light of this conception, discourse does not simply describe the world 'as it is'. Nature or reality 'as it is' would not otherwise require discourse. We use discourse to offer a particular, ideologically motivated point of view on, or conception of, reality (Fowler *et al.*, 1979; Volosinov, 1986). And discourse imposes context-specific structure, definition, conception, interpretation, evaluation and so on upon it. It may also be added that reality is also interconnected with discourses, real or potential, in the relevant context. That is, the way that things, people or events are formulated has to do, at least in part, with other ways of speaking by other people, at other times and in other places. Surrounding texts thus produced can, for example, penetrate or help shape the way that reality itself is constructed. Consequently, reality and contextual (or intertextual) discourses may not have clear demarcation lines between them but are fused together, so to speak. (In essence, they are of the same order of things: both are cultural interpretative phenomena.)

The point, in fact, is that reality, real as it is, cannot be independent of social symbolic practice in and through which it (also) becomes relevant, significant and consequential in our life, as object, means or reason for action. More particularly, I want to stress that reality does not exist outside of especially *discursive* practice in and through which it becomes a relevant or significant topic, resource for talking, or object for action.

This way of characterizing the relationship between language and reality has profound implications on defining the nature of academic/scientific discourse which are clearly manifested in 'social constructivism'. Potter suggests (1996, p.7) that "constructionist arguments are not aimed at denying the existence of tables . . . but at exploring the various ways in which their reality is constructed and undermined". On these accounts, no reality escapes discursive construction, or connections with it. Social constructivism has had a significant contribution to our understanding of the nature of academic meanings (a clear manifestation of this impact can be seen in the development of 'metadiscourse' research pioneered by scholars like Hyland) in that the construction of academic knowledge cannot be seen

as independently form the role of discourse. The nature of our understanding of the world and the concepts and categories we use to talk about this understanding are not absolute truths; rather, they are culturally and spatially specific. In other words, our knowledge is not the outcome of our objective descriptions of the world. At least part of it is the result of understanding achieved through the process of linguistic exchange. Regardless of the precision of our experiments and the rigor of our logic, there is always a degree of interpretation, and interpretations are always affected by presuppositions and suppositions brought into the process of research by researchers.

What I am trying to emphasize here is that production and understanding are always filtered through beliefs and opinions. As Stephan Hawking (1993, p.44) suggests a theory may describe a range of observations, but "beyond that it makes no sense to ask if it corresponds to reality, because we do not know what reality is independent of a theory". This finds its most eloquent expression in Rorty's (1979, p. 170) words: knowledge is "the social justification of belief". In academic contexts, this justification is constructed through academic discourses.

Based on the preceding argument, I suggest that the thinkers of academic disciplines cannot get rid of the belief system of the communities they belong to and then define the world in a vacuum. Their persuasive potency does not stem from pure logic, exact methodologies, and unbiased observations. Rather, the development of understanding and persuasion in scientific, academic communication stems from the discourse whose conventions have been negotiated by the members of the relevant discourse community.

In fact, "by the force of our own reflexive gyrations, we have been gaining glimpses of a few dimensions in which the language of knowledge operates. These glimpses are starting to show us how much language is part of complex webs of human activity and meaning making" (Bazerman, 1998, p. 15). In the light of these gyrations, we have understood that scientific knowledge is no unitary or stable thing, although certain tendencies or characteristics may be widespread. Research from social constructivism tells

us that academic discourse is a social, cultural construct not a faceless, objective, impersonal form.

In the light of this understanding, we can again address the fundamental question which has shaped the present discussion: are the dominant discourses of international academic communication free from the ideologies and belief systems of the historical context which has shaped these discourses? Is English playing (or can it play) a neutral, unbiased role in the construction of academic realities? *Critical approach* challenges the (mis) conception that English is playing (or can play) a neutral role here. Following the post-structuralist perspectives, we would treat language as a social experience whose division from ideological, cultural and social contexts is impossible. In this perspective, language is characterized as an influential and active tool for the construction of world views. In fact, the belief that international English is more neutral and more unbiased than national English of Anglophones is simple-mindedness since international English is inextricably intertwined with the belief system of the context(s) from which it has historically emerged.

If, then, international English is to develop (universal) human's knowledge, it cannot and should not be defined within a pragmatic philosophy. Moving towards pluralism in academy (pluralism in knowledge construction), hence, seems to be possible only within a critical paradigm. If we are to broaden the academic atmosphere such that cultural, historical voices of thinkers of different nations can be heard, if we are to challenge some of the 'standard' genres shaping (and of course limiting) human's knowledge, this would be possible within what thinkers like Shi-Xu (2005) call CAD project (Cultural Approach to Discourse). This project suggests two sets of strategies for discourse (in general) research – which, we suggest, can also be used for academic discourse research – the principles of which can be summarized as:

• ***Deconstructive Strategies***

- *Identify and characterize discourses of cultural imperialism*
- *Investigate and confront cultural imperialism in diverse modes and settings*
- *Uncover and undermine 'common sense'*

- *Expose and contradict hidden meanings, silences and inequalities*

• ***Transformative strategies***

- *Investigate and reclaim the voices and identities of the subaltern*
- *Create conditions and need for intercultural communication*
- *Create and advocate discourses of cultural cohesion and prosperity*
- *Cultivate the willpower to speak for cultural cohesion and progress*

Adoption of these strategies would lead us towards the development of a 'political ethnography' in theoretical level, and 'a pedagogy of cultural alternatives' in practical level, which, instead of familiarizing and habitualizing powerful genres, provide the opportunities for challenging the implicit ideologies of standardized genres. This project can operate on the basis of the assumption that since "rhetorical practices embody cultural thought patterns, we should encourage the maintenance of variety and diversity in academic rhetorical practices – excessive standardization may counteract innovation and creative thought by forcing them into standard forms" (Mauranen 1993, p. 172). This would encourage the users of academic English to treat texts as cultural, social and ideological constructs which should be analyzed, criticized and compared – a process which would result in the *deconstruction* of powerful genres (Hammond *et al.* 1999). This can uncover the functional instrumental nature of texts in meeting the interests of some groups and depriving other groups and challenge the universal, objective and unbiased impression they have been granted.

**Pluralism in knowledge construction: necessities of a language with pluralistic potentials**

The final issue to be addressed in this article is about the way the lingua franca of academic communication can be characterized within the present proposal. I think that challenging the standard genres of academic communication and broadening the opportunities for non-prestigious discourses requires different definitions of '*ownership*' and '*international*'. At the moment, active membership and participation in academic discourse and using the advantages of these require acquisition of communicative



conventions which stem from 'standard English'. Of course, non-English thinkers and writers are not obliged to follow these conventions, but it seems that the '*natural*' outcome of negligence of these conventions is marginalization. Your voice will not be heard unless you know how to use these conventions and you do use them. These standards are the indices of institutional ownership of specific discourse communities; they are the symbols of the identity of these communities; they carry their values. Security and survival of these groups depend on the maintenance, consolidation and recreation of these standards. The English dominant in international communication of academic knowledge is not simply a means of communication, but the symbolic possession of a particular culture, expressive of the identity of that culture, its conventions, its values. What the common code of academic communication attempts to preserve and protect is the *communal* rather than the *communicative* features.

The English we require for the development of human's knowledge should be one which serves *all* humankind: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience... But it will have to be a new English, still in communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (Achebe, 1975, p.62). Defined within such a perspective, the E of EAP is no longer the preserve of people living in an offshore European island, or even of a larger group commonly called *inner circle*. As such this alternative E should be able to serve a whole range of different communities and their institutional purposes and these would inevitably transcend traditional communal and cultural boundaries. Hence, the academic communities which are defined by shared knowledge construction concerns should be granted rights of ownership and allowed to adjust and fashion the E to carry the weight of their own cultural experiences.

This helps us think about a *virtual* code of communication in international academic contexts. This virtual code, as Widdowson (2003) formulates, does not seek its international quality in the distribution of standardized, fixed and homogeneous genres and patterns of thinking. Instead, the internationality of this code lies in its capacity for reflecting diverse cultural voices and discourses. The very fact that English is an

international language means that no group, no nation has custody over it. The academic *englishes* we are suggesting here are virtual codes which can carry different cultural experiences in different contexts and do not have to follow rigidly the conventions of meaning making imposed by Anglophone discourses.

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