The role of academic literacy in post-graduate hospitality education
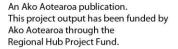
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Abstract

Staff and students in the School of Hospitality and Tourism at AUT, and practitioners working in a number of hotels in Auckland, participated in a project investigating the role of academic literacy in postgraduate hospitality study. The project investigated stakeholders' perceptions as to what they regarded as appropriate standards of literacy and how challenges in this area could be addressed. First language speakers of English (L1) were over-represented in the student cohort, yet even among this group it was apparent that academic writing was problematic. As well as linguistic and structuring difficulties, it appeared that the educational practices many had experienced in their undergraduate studies had not equipped them to communicate effectively in writing at this level.

Lecturers were concerned about the lowly status accorded to Hospitality in the academic world. It was a matter of concern that hospitality students, particularly at postgraduate level, be judged as the equal of their peers in other fields. While they shared a concern about students' ability to write effectively they were divided as to how the competing discourses of the academy and the industry should be managed.

The practitioners were concerned that hospitality education at university level was not sufficiently practical. They did not feel that students' ability to write effectively was a major concern although they did want graduates to produce clear, succinct texts.

In this research suggestions have been made as to how these tensions might be addressed by the academic community. These include acknowledging the changing face of tertiary education and considering a more flexible approach to student writing; providing embedded discipline-specific academic literacy support utilising a team teaching approach with an EAP (English for academic purposes) practitioner; pursuing various feedback options on draft writing and acknowledging that writing skills are a 'work in progress'

Contents

1 Background and rationale

Numbers in the School of Hospitality and Tourism at AUT University have been increasing steadily over the past few years. This increase appears to be due mainly to the massification of the higher education globally, the most influential change in higher education in the past twenty years (Guri-Rosenblit, Šebková & Teichler, 2007; Tynjälä, Välimaa & Sarja, 2003; Alexander, 2000). Not surprisingly the opening up of higher education appears to have led to "academic drift" which Edwards and Miller (2008, p.123) characterise as "the valuing and greater uptake of academic practices at the expense of vocational qualifications and practices". This massification means that a "culturally socially and linguistically diverse student population" (Hyland, 2009, p.4) now bring "different identities, understandings and habits of meaning –making to a more diverse range of subjects" (ibid.) Although, as Hyland indicates, this academic drift is apparent across all levels of higher education this project concentrates on postgraduate students in hospitality.

Currently the hospitality postgraduate student cohort is made up almost exclusively of international students, many of whom are second language speakers of English (L2) and those, mainly first language speakers of English, who are returning to further study "for professional updating" (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002, p.314). All the students interviewed in this project had strong ongoing connections with the hospitality industry, either because they were working in the sector or were hospitality lecturers.

Nowadays concepts surrounding the definition of L2 students are problematic. Canagarajah (2001) argues that the global spread of English has ensured that many countries are familiar with its discourse features. In addition a large number of countries make use of English in their education systems so a fair percentage of the cohort enter programmes having studied at tertiary institutions employing English as a medium of instruction. However, what was an adequate command of English for tertiary study in their own countries is often viewed as inadequate for the same purpose in New Zealand (Collins and Slembrouck 2005; Simpson and Cooke 2010; Preece and Martin 2010). Even more problematic is the position of those international students for whom English is a first language but who speak "non-prestigious" varieties of the language (Simpson and Cook, 2010,p.59). For this group it is humiliating to be classified as second language speakers of their home language.

Despite their differing backgrounds many of the students enrolled in postgraduate programmes in the School groups experienced difficulties with academic writing. These difficulties have serious consequences as the ability to write in the appropriate genre is essential for all students but particularly those at postgraduate level. Quite simply if they cannot write what the academy views as acceptable text, they will not pass the qualification (Goodfellow, 2004; Leki and Carson, 1994). Unfortunately as Lillis and Scott (2007) point out what constitutes difficulties with writing is far from straightforward. What does it mean they ask (p.9) "to do academic writing"?

The postgraduate section of the School offers a number of postgraduate hospitality qualifications including a postgraduate diploma, professional masters and a research masters. Expectations regarding writing are indicated to students in their handbooks. Typically, learning outcomes require students to "demonstrate effective writing skills / critique/ critically evaluate/critically assess" (School of Hospitality and Tourism, 2009), and these expectations are reflected in marking criteria. The problem lies, of course, in the interpretation of "effective writing skills" Part of this research was an attempt to explore what the various stakeholders saw as effective writing.

Lea and Street (1998) contend that there are three main perspectives that are used in the evaluating of student writing in higher education. The, first the study skills approach, regards students as deficient, needing to be 'fixed'. This approach is often concerned with surface language errors such as noun/verb agreement and spelling. The second approach, academic socialization, concentrates on introducing student to academic discourse. While this approach has much to recommend it, the biggest flaw is that it assumes a homogenous academic community. This approach advocates the teaching of generic academic skills which are then transferred by the student to the relevant discipline area. Unfortunately writing in the academy is strongly contextualised. Certain ways of writing are acceptable in some disciplines but not in others. In addition the transfer of generic genre knowledge to specific contexts is problematic (James, 2009). In contrast, the strength of the final perspective, the academic literacies, is that it views the literacy requirements of a discipline as involving "a variety of communicative practices" (Lea and Street, 1998, p.159), many of these particular to a specific discipline.

These three approaches are not linear nor are they mutually exclusive. It is quite possible, indeed probable, that some students will need assistance with basic grammatical issues while at the same time dealing with disciplinary genre requirements.

The problems outlined above are not peculiar to postgraduate education in hospitality; they are experienced in all postgraduate areas. However, hospitality, as a new and emerging discipline area, often has its claim to discipline status regarded with scepticism (Pizam, 1988; Brotherton and Wood, 2008). Glazer (1974, p.350) points out that "the route to higher professional standing lies in replacing the professionals and practitioners with the scholars and research writers". If recognition as a discipline depends to a large extent on research and subsequent publications, it is essential that graduates of these postgraduate programmes are viewed as worthy academics. It is thus important for hospitality to move towards an understanding of what is viewed as effective writing.

2 Aims of the study

This research sought therefore to explore the perceptions of postgraduate students, hospitality lecturers and hospitality practitioners of academic literacy and its role in hospitality education. For the purposes of this study academic literacy is viewed as "the complex set of skills ... which are increasingly argued to be vital underpinning or cultural knowledge required for success in academic communities (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p.4). In order to become "effective participant[s] in this community" (Northedge, 2003, p.19) students have to learn to "'think' and 'speak' its discourse" (p.26). Successfully initiating students into these discourse communities would appear to be one of the goals of tertiary education. However, it is important to note that an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo as far as academic discourse is concerned is not healthy, and students and staff should be encouraged to interrogate accepted norms and practices. This issue will be discussed in more depth later in the study.

3 The research questions

The study addressed the following questions:

What are appropriate standards of academic literacy in hospitality education according to:

- the students enrolled in postgraduate hospitality qualifications
- the staff involved in the teaching of postgraduate courses in hospitality management

- industry practitioners

Is there consensus as to acceptable standards of academic writing at postgraduate level in hospitality education?

What are industry expectations of the literacy standards of hospitality graduates?

How can challenges in this area be addressed?

4 Methodology

4.1 Participants

In total 31 participants were interviewed during the course of the study; 14 students, 7 lecturers and 10 industry practitioners.

4.1.1 Students

All students interviewed in this study were involved in one or more of the postgraduate programmes offered in the School. As the researchers were eager to glean the insights of as many students as possible, the invitation was extended to all postgraduate students. Groups of students were addressed by the researchers and the importance of the project to them was emphasised. Unfortunately the response was disappointing. The research project was delayed twice while the researchers attempted to recruit students and it took more than a year to recruit the 14 participants. One can only speculate as to the reasons for their reluctance to participate.

One possibility is that, as almost all the students work in the hospitality industry and have difficulty juggling academic and work commitments, they were reluctant to take the time to be interviewed. However a more likely scenario, it is argued, is that a number of the students were concerned about their levels of English proficiency and viewed a discussion of this proficiency as threatening. This is backed up, to a certain extent, by the interviewees themselves. Half of them identified either as L1 (first language) speakers of English or said they were bilingual. The four cohorts from which these students were drawn were made up of approximately 80% L2 (second language) speakers of English so a more representative group of interviewees would have had a far larger proportion of L2 speakers. In addition those L2 speakers who did volunteer to be interviewed appeared fairly confident about the mastery of English. As appears from the table below the L1 students rated their English for Academic

Purposes competence at an average of 3.6 out of 5; the L2 students were not far behind with an average score of 3.1. While the reluctance of the linguistically less confident students (at least as far as English is concerned) to be interviewed is understandable, it is none the less regrettable. Their insights could be of great value.

The table also shows the age range of the students. There is a fairly even distribution between those over and under 30. While all the students had experience n the hospitality industry a number had more than a decade of such experience.

ID	Ethnicity	Age	First language	Time in NZ	Self rating of English for academic purposes 1-5 1 = not all confident 5 = very confident
S1	Indian	20-24	English / Guajarati	4.5 years	4
S2	Indian	20-24	Hindi	2.5 mths	3.75
S3	Indonesian	25-29	Indonesian	5 months	3.5
S4	Indian	20-24	Malayalam	2 years	3
S5	Indian	20-24	Guajarati	1.5 years	3
S6	NZ	30-34	English/Maori	whole life	4
S7	Singaporean	40+	English	9 years	4
S8	English	40+	English	4 yrs	4
S9	Indian	20-24	English	8 months	3
S10	Chinese	25-29	Chinese	7 yrs	3
S11	Chinese	30-34	Chinese	1 yr	2.5
S12	Chinese	30-34	Chinese	8 yrs	3
S13	NZ	40+	English	whole life	2.5
S14	Indian	20-24	English	8 months	3.5

4.1.2 Lecturers

Of the seven staff members who participated in the research all but one, a career academic, had extensive industry experience ranging from 14 to 21 years. Two of the staff had doctoral qualifications, while the rest all had masters degrees. All staff teaching on postgraduate qualifications in the School agreed to be interviewed.

4.1.3 Hospitality practitioners

The views of the practitioners were sought because of the very close links between the hospitality industry and hospitality education (Barrows and Johan 2008; Lashley, 2004). All of the practitioners interviewed work at managerial levels within international hotel chains situated in New Zealand, and were responsible for coordinating teams to achieve organisational goals. Of the 10 practitioners, six participants worked in human resource (HR) management at various levels including HR management for individual hotel properties, HR managers who oversaw activities of multiple properties and directors of HR for hotel corporations operating in New Zealand. The participants also included one restaurant manager, a front office (FO) manager, one workplace training director and a corporate office manager. The practitioners' hospitality experience ranged from four and a half years to 13 years and the level of qualifications held by the participants included three practitioners with diplomas, five with bachelor degrees and two with postgraduate qualifications.

This is relevant as it appears that hospitality practitioners who do not posses tertiary qualification do not value them. (Lashley, 2004). Indeed, after interviewing 150 managers in the hospitality sector, Lashley notes that some managers treated graduates "with suspicion and were dismissive of the benefits a higher education might provide (p.63). Lack of qualifications would not be an issue for this group. In addition they had an average of 7.7 years experience which indicated that they had a considerable experience on which to draw.

ID	Age	Total experience in hospitality industry	Highest qualification	Position
P01	31-40	11 years	BA	Director of HR
P02	41+	5 years	BA	Director of HR
P03	21-30	6 years	Diploma	Restaurant Manager
P04	31-40	8 years	Masters	HR Manager

P05	31-40	13 years	Diploma	Area HR Manager
P06	21-30	4 years	Degree	HR Manager
P07	21-30	8 years	Degree	HR Manager
P08	21-30	11 years	Dip Culinary Arts	Front Office Manager
P0 9	31-40	6 years	BA	Corporate office Manager
P0 10	21-30	5 years	Postgraduate	Workplace Training Director

4.2 Data collection and analysis

Semi structured interviews lasting 30 -60 minutes were conducted with all participants. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as this allowed the interviewers to enter into a dialogue with the interviewees in seeking and recording qualitative clarification and elaboration of answers (May, 2001; Merriam, 2009). The questions which were used to guide the interviews can be found in Appendix 1. The interviews were transcribed and returned to the interviewees for verification. The interviews were then coded by identifying categories of interest (Tolich and Davidson, 1999). These categories are discussed in the Findings.

5 Findings

5.1 The students

5.1.1 Students' perceptions of the role of academic literacy in postgraduate hospitality studies.

The students focuses on *what* was required as far as academic writing was concerned and *how* they could meet required standards; *why* a certain style of writing was deemed acceptable did not appear to trouble them. While a few evinced some bewilderment as to why their English was not viewed as acceptable, they were not interested in challenging the status quo. They showed little interest in debates around what is seen as effective writing.

5.1.2 1 Students' perceptions of the challenges postgraduate writing

One of the concerns raised by all the Chinese and Indian students (both L1 and L2) was the difference in academic writing expectations between their own countries and New Zealand. The students indicated that evaluation in their undergraduate qualifications had usually

involved examinations and tests. The Indian students, in particular, noted that they were not required to back up their opinions, and that the emphasis was placed on their own ideas. Possibly as a consequence of their approach both groups of students noted that their lecturers found their writing tended to contain too many generalizations and was often not sufficiently focused. This emphasis meant that writing style and referencing played a very secondary role.

The Chinese students also indicated that tests and examinations were the common form of evaluation although they were required to write essays. However, one Chinese student averred that even when writing assignments referencing was not considered of great importance. She noted "we do have a referencing sort of thing but it's not like in New Zealand". She indicated that she would often copy and paste sections of a text book into her essay, without in-text acknowledgement although the source would be listed in the bibliography.

Another related problem experienced by students coming from a non-Western background was the emphasis placed by Western universities on the need for students to find support for their claims they made. This was partly due to their being unaccustomed to acknowledge their sources. One student noted that he preferred what he called 'free writing' complaining that he couldn't "just write in a flow", that the need to support his claims meant that he felt he was hampered from writing "what's on my mind".

Paraphrasing was also problematic. Although this problem is more pertinent for L2 students whose English vocabulary is often limited, L1 students also admitted to finding paraphrasing problematic. One noted: "it's pretty complicated when you start paraphrasing and the reader has to use his brains to unscramble what you have scrambled up." It is hardly surprising then, that if students found it difficult to relay the opinions of authors, they were very uncertain as to how to deal with conflicting opinions in the literature. Interestingly one of the practitioners interviewed remarked that an advantage of tertiary education was that it gave students practice in the exploration of ambiguities.

All the students experienced difficulty with the formality required in academic writing. For some this appeared to be a result of the more informal writing style predominant in the hospitality industry, while others were used to a more informal register in hospitality education. One student commented that in India he:

didn't use much of this academic style. I used to write what I felt. We just wrote something they just looked at our ideas. We understood the topic and that was it – we didn't need to go for any formal English or express ourselves with the right grammar

Students found structuring their writing problematic, both the overall structuring of an assignment or a report, and structuring at paragraph and sentence level. Students were concerned that their writing lacked focus and was not succinct.

Time management also emerged as a real concern. Students acknowledged that they did not allow enough time to proofread and 'fine-tune' their writing. Two spoke specifically of their difficulties with the reading of journal articles and of how time-consuming they found the process.

Finally, and unsurprisingly, the L2 students had difficulties with grammar issues such as prepositions, articles, tense, voice.

These students displayed great maturity in discussing their language difficulties and demonstrated an understanding that "there's no short cut".

5.1.2 Student suggestions as to possible solutions

The students were aware that the standard of language employed in assignments was an issue for lecturers. However, only two believed that it was part of the lecturers' role to assist them with language difficulties. A number indicated that such help was ideal but did not feel that a lecturer was obliged to offer such assistance. Most were comfortable about asking for language assistance when required, only one noting that she would be too embarrassed to approach her lecturers. Although students were comfortable approaching their lecturers for assistance, four mentioned that their lack of time management meant it was highly unlikely that they would produce a draft for comment in good time.

What was clear was that for the students, lecturer feedback was often their first indication that their writing was not up to standard. This reliance can be problematic as often assignments will not be completed and returned until some weeks into the 12 week semester.

Students indicated a variety of strategies to cope with writing issues. A number turned to family and friends for help. Some made use of online writing centres and many attended the generic writing courses offered at the university and the one-to-one help sessions. The assistance offered by the student centres did not meet with unqualified approval. The courses

were seen as too generic and in the one-to-one sessions time was limited. Staff could only read a very small part of a student's assignment and could not offer detailed explanations about grammatical errors. While understanding the time strictures the centres operated under the students felt that this compromised the help that was offered.

Students wanted more discipline specific academic writing tutorials. They argued that these tutorials should be offered very early in the postgraduate programme, possibly before the academic year began. One participant noted "the students don't know what's expected of them, they don't know what kind of academic writing is expected of them so it's hard to ask for help when you don't know you're not doing good enough". Another commented that:

> Most courses don't seem to have academic writing as part of their
> course. If they have it, it's not in the front end, it's buried in the
> middle or the tail end which is not much use ...you have to do it at an
> early stage to get ... ready to do some actual writing

In addition to the timing of instruction, students argued that instructions and feedback needed to be detailed and explicit. Some of the students were not certain what was required of them when they undertook the assessments. One remarked that students "don't know what kind of academic writing is required of them". A typical complaint was that lecturers indicated that they wanted students to write in a particular way but did not supply details or examples of what they wanted. This appears to contradict student assertions that lecturers should not have to assume responsibility for their writing but might be partly due to the fact that only three of the students made use of student services, despite the urgings of staff that they avail themselves of this support. It is also possible that they felt that if lecturers were critical of their writing lecturers should explain what was wanted. As indicated, students felt lecturers were not making their requirements in this regard sufficiently explicit.

5.2 The lecturers

It became apparent during the course of the interviews that lecturers were sensitive about the lowly status accorded hospitality in the academic world. They claimed that Hospitality was viewed as "a sort of craft area"; "the red-headed step-baby of Tourism"; that the perception was that students who chose this as a course of study "must be quite good-looking and superficially attractive but quite dumb really". It was therefore of particular concern that students be able to negate these perceptions, and in this regard the ability to communicate as academics was viewed as very important. One participant emphasized that the lecturer's role

was to educate students not train them for jobs: "Our job is to help open their minds, help them think, help them reason. It's not to teach them to run a front office".

5.2.1 Lecturers' perceptions of the role of academic literacy in postgraduate hospitality studies

The lecturers were very aware of the importance of academic literacy, not only as indicative of its discipline status but also because of the crucial role it plays in students' academic success. They spoke of it in terms of appropriacy, the "right words, right style, right manner", and saw hospitality's major contribution as enabling students to express their thoughts clearly, coherently and logically. They accepted that their most important job was to teach students to think critically and saw academic literacy as an indispensible tool in this regard. They were also critical of writing in their own field that did not appear to meet this expectation, one lecturer noting "sometimes you read a piece of literature and you think well why can't you just say it normally?", and were conscious of the frustration this style of writing caused their students. Staff were aware that students attracted to these courses might be demotivated by this type of language "it's not going to push their buttons". However, the lecturers were divided into two camps as to whether all writing on the programme should meet the conventions and practices of the academic genre. This division appeared to depend on whether lecturers saw their students only as novice academics, or whether they viewed them as both students and hospitality practitioners. A lecturer in the first camp typified this group's sentiment when she said that students:

> are academics while they are students. They have to learn to speak in the language of academia and process their ideas in ways that challenge them because if it's stepped down too much they may not be able to have their reasoning at a sophisticated enough level.

The opposing camp argued that the use of different genres was appropriate

> And I quite often say I don't want any academic mumbo-jumbo in there. I want this to be a report to your superior at work. Therefore I don't want any quotes, no references, nothing, this is you analyzing. So, separate it quite clearly – this is not an academic piece of work. This is for a board of directors.

5.2.2 Lecturers' perceptions of student writing difficulties

A number of the lecturers' concerns mirrored those of the students. Lecturers said that students found it difficult to structure their writing and that their essays often lacked focus and cohesion: "You get a mass regurgitation of facts – all the information presented in the hope that a blind stab might hit the mark". This, of course, also reflects an inability to identify what is important and relevant for a particular topic.

Students' lack of time management skills was also a cause for concern, as were vocabulary and grammar issues, particularly with regard to L2 students. An inability to employ the appropriate register defined as "right words, right style, right manner" was also noted. Mirroring student comments that new and different ideas did not appear to be welcomed was lecturer frustration that students insisted on "being original" when their ideas were not supported by the literature.

Students also had trouble analysing material and often simply reported or described what they had read without attempting to evaluate the material.

5.2.3 Lecturer reaction to students' writing difficulties

Staff were also divided as to their responsibility with regard to students' use of language. Four did not view their role as embracing that of the "English teacher". They noted that there were numerous support services at the university and argued that at this stage students should take responsibility for their own learning. Two staff members attempted to integrate literacy into their class teaching but conceded that it was difficult to find the time to do this. One lecturer would mark a few pages in detail and then tell the students to seek help from the support services. All saw it as part of their responsibility to ensure that students knew what was required of them as far as language was concerned, but the majority felt they lacked the time and expertise to fill linguistic gaps. This difference of opinion does not appear to be peculiar to staff interviewed in this study. Zhu (2004) interviewed lecturers teaching on business and engineering programmes and noted that there were differing views as to what academic literacy was and how problems with student writing should be addressed.

5.3 The practitioners

5.3.1 Practitioners' perceptions of the role of academic literacy in postgraduate hospitality studies

The practitioners appeared somewhat bemused at questions regarding standards of writing. They pointed out that below the level of General Manager most of the writing required of employees is relatively formulaic and /or guided by templates. All the interviewees were quite clear that oral communication was far more important than written. However, even in the very limited writing required of graduates, the practitioners did have concerns and these complaints mirror the concerns raised by both lecturers and students.

5.3.2 Practitioners' perceptions of student writing difficulties

The practitioners' greatest concerns lay with grammar and register. While the former was mainly an issue with L2 speakers a lack of appropriate formality was a problem with L1 students as well. L2 students, on the other hand, were often too formal. A few of the interviewees mentioned a 'different' English . "A lot of them have possibly spoken English from quite an early age but it's a very odd English to us". There was also concern that writing lacked structure and focus and was often repetitive.

5.3.3 Practitioners' attitudes towards hospitality education courses at university level

What is of real concern to hospitality educators is the fact that, while there was an acceptance of some of the benefits of university education among this group, there was a feeling of uncertainty as to whether university education offered more than on the job training. One participant summarized this feeling when he said "I think the competencies are shifting. I don't know how quickly the academic world is keeping up with what's important". There was unease that tertiary education was not sufficiently practical and that it did not encourage a "commercial way of thinking".

There was, however, also a growing realisation that the culture in the hospitality industry is changing, and the majority of participants agreed that a qualification, particularly one at postgraduate level, gave hospitality employees more credibility as they progressed up the chain. Interviewees also felt that university graduates were able to structure their writing more clearly, were more critical in their approach, demonstrated their ability to evaluate new ideas, and were more aware of the bigger picture in the work environment. Practitioners

observed that the graduates had a good work ethic and showed great perseverance. It was also noted by a number of participants that graduates were more confident in the work setting. It is clear, though, that universities have some way to go to prove the worth of their degree qualifications to the industry. This is surprising given Lashley's research (2004) indicating that practitioners who had tertiary qualifications were more likely to view well qualified new entrant to the hospitality industry more favourably.

5.3.4 Practitioner requirements

Practitioners wanted students to be able to think critically and reflect that critical approach in their writing. In order to do so student needed to be able to "see the bigger picture" and take a stand, which they were able to justify, on issues and challenges. They also needed to be able to deal with the ambiguities they encountered in the course of their work. In summary they needed to be able to present succinct coherent articulate reports, written in accessible but grammatically accurate language.

6 Discussion

There is general consensus from students, both first and second language speakers, lecturers and practitioners that graduates' writing ability is often not of the required standard and, as such, jeopardizes their academic performance and may negatively influence their career opportunities. It is also clear that while L2 students require extra assistance with certain language issues (Allison, Cooley, Lewkowicz and Nunan, 1998; Zamel, 1998; Lea and Stierer, 2000; Paltridge, 2002; Borland and Pearce, 2002; Lea, 2004) there are many shared areas of difficulty where language instruction could benefit both groups. However, as far as international students are concerned, there is a need for a greater understanding of their educational background.

Educators need to have some understanding of students' experience of education. As far as academic literacy is concerned they need to know "what textual practices students are most familiar with and how these might relate to the practices they will be engaged in" (Lea, 2004, p.746). It was evident from the interviews that the students felt their creativity was being stifled, and that lecturers merely wanted them to repeat what was in the literature. The lecturers, on the other hand, were frustrated by unsupported claims, broad generalisations and an over reliance on personal experience. As this issue appeared to concern mainly Indian and Chinese students it seems that cultural differences between differing education systems need

to be explored and discussed. It is understandable that when assessment is primarily by means of tests and examinations, it is not practical to expect students to cite the literature extensively.

It is also evident that hospitality academics are divided as to what appropriate standards of literacy are in hospitality education, and that this is exacerbated by varying opinions as to whether hospitality education should favour an academic approach or be more practice oriented. The use of academic literacy in hospitality education does not appear to concern practitioners greatly, but there was a general feeling that graduates did not possess the writing ability one would expect of an employee with a university qualification. It was apparent too, that some of the students had entered hospitality studies expecting the discourse to complement that of their hospitality experience, but instead found the new academic discourse 'discordant and unsettling" (Northedge, 2003, p.23). Perhaps in this regard consideration could be given to making use of what Lea and Street (1998, p.162) term 'empathy writing' to describe new ways of communicating the discipline outside of the academic community. In hospitality this less formal style of writing (without referencing) could be used for assignments requiring reports to general managers or line managers. If lecturers were to employ these empathy texts this would require an overt recognition of audience and the realisation that at times an academic approach is not always appropriate.

One point of general agreement with all participants was that writing, whether for industry or academic purposes, should be grammatically correct, focused, well-structured, coherent, succinct and take audience and purpose into account. However, even this apparent agreement is not straightforward. As indicated earlier, English is used throughout the world, and what is viewed as an adequate command of English for tertiary studies in the students' own countries is often judged as inadequate for the same purposes in other countries, (Collins and Slembrouck, 2005; Simpson and Cooke, 2010; Preece and Martin, 2010), in this particular instance New Zealand. Exacerbating the issue for Indian students is the fact that a number of them are first language speakers of English but unfortunately for them they speak "non-prestigious varieties of English" (Simpson and Cooke, 2010, p.59). One of the practitioners who acknowledged the bilingualism of the students still spoke of their English being "odd to us". Widdowson argues that:

> It is a matter of considerable pride and satisfaction for native speakers of English that their language is an international means of communication. But the point is that it is

only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it (1994, p.385).

The difficulty, of course, is that their language is not always acceptable by the standards of our institution. The question therefore is can we, or should, we be imposing our own standards? Or perhaps to what extent should we be imposing these standards. Widdowson goes on to point out that:

> The very idea of a standard implies stability, and this can only be fixed in reference to the past. But language is of its nature unstable. It is essential protean in nature, adapting its shape to suit changing circumstances. It would otherwise lose its vitality and its communicative and communal value. (1994, p.384).

This issue would appear to be of some significance to Hospitality education. The vast majority of the postgraduate students in our hospitality programmes have worked in the hospitality sector and have established an identity as competent adults. While for many postgraduate students in other disciplines, developing disciplinary identity facilitates increasing language proficiency (Dressen-Hammouda 2008) it can be argued that postgraduate hospitality students have already developed an identity as hospitality practitioners, and might not see the relevance of academic discourse to their profession.

Unfortunately all too often when confronted with the academic literacy demands of the discipline, students come to view themselves as deficient. Such an assessment of their own abilities has a serious impact on their self esteem and sense of agency. Simpson and Cooke describe the difficulties a Nigerian student (a first language speaker of English) whose downward movement in the United Kingdom tertiary education system was "concomitant with … his lack of agency" (2010, p.67). At our own institution research indicates that postgraduate students experiencing language difficulties often feel "really diminished" experiencing feelings of shame and uselessness no matter how sensitively the issues are approached (Strauss, Walton and Madsen, 2003, p.7).. Students are unlikely to be successful in their studies if they view themselves as useless. The students will not be the only losers should this happen. Cadman (2000, p. 488) noted that L2 postgraduate students and their supervisors have identified how the culture of the host country can benefit from adopting "a holistic approach to student development" and spoke of the one-way flow of knowledge being "eddied a little". She contended that we should seek an exchange, rather than a transfer

of knowledge, and warned that if we fail to do so we may lose the voices of these students "into the air" (p. 488).

Understandably universities wish to maintain their reputation and are aware that they are, to a large extent, judged by their graduates. The language issue has no easy solution. The difficulty with some L1 speakers has been discussed but what must also be borne in mind is that Indian students who are not first language speakers of English will have received much of their education through the medium of English and might feel justified in their belief that they can cope with the academic demands of academic language at postgraduate level. Baas (2007) however suggests that the proficiency levels of students educated outside the major elite Indian universities could well be queried even if they have attained the necessary IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score and have an undergraduate qualification.

This concern should not be limited to Indian students. It appears that on the whole it is unwise to work on the premise that students who have required the requisite IELTS score have an adequate mastery of academic English. Elder (1992) notes that the IELTS test appears to be a more accurate predictor of academic success for those students at the lower levels, and it might thus to be of limited use for postgraduate students. In addition there is concern that economic considerations might prompt universities to accept students whose English competency is not adequate for their proposed level of study (Aspland & O'Donoghue, 1994; Bartlett, 2000; Cadman, 2000; Coley, 1999; Dooey & Oliver, 2002). While it is understandable that universities do not unilaterally want to raise entry criteria, and it is likely that students will simply enrol at other institutions with lower entry criteria should universities take this step, these scores should be viewed for what they are - a snapshot of a student's ability as a particular moment in time. In addition, as Lea and Street (1998) point out, writing in the academy is strongly contextualised. Certain ways of writing are acceptable in some disciplines but not in others. Therefore a generic academic writing test is unlikely to yield reliable results at this level.

One possible solution is that students be required to sit diagnostic writing tests very early in their postgraduate academic career. Detecting problems at this stage will help the design and delivery of targeted and timely intervention. However, the development, administration and marking of these tests will be time consuming and expensive. In addition if they are to prove useful predictors for postgraduate students they should be discipline specific.

It appears that Postgraduate hospitality departments face a number of challenges with regard to academic writing at postgraduate level the most important being:

- Disagreement as to what they regard as acceptable use of language
- Uncertainty as to how far their responsibility stretches in regard to teaching academic literacy
- Difficulty coping with student cohorts with vastly differing levels of academic writing proficiency
- Insufficient time and/or expertise to deal with writing difficulties

It would appear that all these issues could be better confronted if Hospitality staff were to work closely with English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners. Practitioners could facilitate discussions around language and what is acceptable and appropriate at this level. As has been indicated in this discussion what counts as acceptable discourse is a complex and nuanced issue. Academics need to take into account that English is a global language; that hospitality is strongly vocationally oriented and that most postgraduate students will have developed their own understanding of what is an acceptable genre for hospitality purposes. This is not to say that academic writing should take second place to writing commonly used in the hospitality industry. Lashley (2004, p.62) points out "the link to tightly defined occupations does bring with it problems, because there can be a tendency to make programmes overly pragmatic and reinforce student tendencies to avoid reflection and theorising". However the acknowledgement that different texts serve different purposes is a useful and healthy distinction.

Perhaps the greatest challenge that lecturers and students face is that the amount of time both cohorts have at their disposal is limited. In an academic semester of some twelve weeks students are expected to engage with the context of the discipline, and at the same time master the skills for demonstrating the engagement. As illustrated in this project even those lecturers who are willing to help students improve academic language find it very difficult to find the time to do so. Students indicated that they found lecturer feedback, with regard to their use of language very valuable, but most appreciated that this was not really the task of the discipline lecturers. Another difficulty is that even if feedback is supplied, the first assignment is often not returned to students before the seventh or eighth week of the semester. This leaves very little time for them to get to grips with their difficulties and seek the necessary assistance.

There is also a problem with the type of assistance available to students. At our university they are generally directed to the generic writing courses offered by student services. However, as has already been pointed out, academic writing is discipline specific and concepts such as structure and argument are not "generic and transferable" (Lea and Street, 1998, p.162). Even raising student awareness of the similarities of the generic and the specific does not appear to promote learning transfer (James, 2009). Research indicates strongly that writing instruction embedded within the discipline is far more valuable that generic writing courses (Lea and Street, 1998; Hyland, 2002).

7. Conclusions and recommendations

7.1. Acknowledgement of the changing face of tertiary education

It was clear from interviews with students and lecturers that there is a gap between the assumptions and expectations of both groups not only as far as academic writing is concerned but also prior learning experiences. If lecturers have greater understanding of the assessment and teaching approaches of the countries from which these students are drawn this would allow them to address the differences between the countries, explaining differences in the host university's approach and making their own expectations more explicit. These expectations could be set out in the workshops detailed in 7.3, and subsequently reinforced by lecturers. However the point that Cadman (2000) makes about seeking an exchange of knowledge is an important one. The experiences and insights of students coming from different work and home environments could greatly enrich the programme.

In this regard it is also important to recognise that there are many varieties of English and what counts as "acceptable" English is a difficult, and often emotive, issue. Seidhofer (2001, p.135) claims that ENL (English as a native language) is the "default referent". This is supported by Simpson and Cooke's complaint of "institutionalised anglocentricity" (2010, p.71). While it is clearly the prerogative of universities to set the linguistic standards required, it is perhaps time that the concept of "acceptable" English is revisited. This question of what kind of language is acceptable is closely linked to the next point.

7.2 Consideration of the type of academic writing accepted by the School

It became apparent during this investigation that there are differences of opinion between lecturers in this regard, and dissension is healthy. However, differing expectations are confusing for students so some kind of compromise needs to be reached. It is suggested that a

clear distinction is made between assignments which are academic in nature and those that focus on the industry. For the former, students are expected to view themselves as academics and use the appropriate speculative and tentative language. However for industry documents a brisk business like approach is appropriate. Lecturers should draw students' attention to these distinctions and point out the differences in the type of language required by each genre. Care should be taken to point out that the differences do not signal that one is more important than the other; the emphasis should be on appropriacy.

7.3 Provision of discipline specific academic literacy support

Ideally discipline staff should work closely with an EAP practitioner (cf Strauss and Mooney in press), and academic literacy should become an integral part of papers offered at this level, with the EAP practitioner and the discipline lecturer team teaching on selected sections of papers. This will allow the EAP practitioner to contextualise writing advice in the discipline and students are more likely to see the relevance and necessity of the help offered. The presentation of the discipline content is accompanied by the development of such skills as summarising and paraphrasing, developing arguments, making claims, writing coherently and cohesively. Referencing is presented as an integral part of the writing process, and not simply as a technical skill to be mastered. In addition, this support will be ongoing and deal with particular writing issues as they arise.

If this team teaching approach is not possible, or while it is being set up, discipline specific writing workshops should be offered to students early in their postgraduate careers. While this support should be front loaded there should be ongoing scaffolding and support for all students who demonstrate the need for it. However it is far preferable to embed academic literacy in the discipline programme. Where it would perhaps be useful to have separate workshops is where L2 students need assistance with language issues that are not a concern for their more linguistically able L2 peers or for L1 students. Such workshops should also make use of materials in hospitality to illustrate and explain issues of concern.

7.4 Assistance with assignments

Students appeared confused as to what was required of them in assignments. If an EAP practitioner is involved in a teaching role, discussion of assignments, including the language of the assignment, would form as important part of class work. Students would interrogate the instructions and the assessment criteria. Various approaches to the structuring of the assignments could be discussed and the EAP practitioner could use discipline specific

examples and models to illustrate the points raised. In addition the EAP practitioner could provide advice to discipline lecturers as to the wording and layout of assignments to assist student comprehension.

7.5 Time management issues

One of the issues that students raised was that they did not receive feedback on their writing until the first assignment was marked, often well after the half way point of the semester. Early intervention means that students will be in a position to utilise feedback in all their assignments. One possible solution is to build into an assessment, a requirement for students to submit a draft (cf Strauss and Mooney, in press). This draft would then be reviewed by the EAP practitioner and/or the discipline lecturer who would comment on issues such as structure, argument, register and use of language etc. The students would then be given an opportunity to revise the assignment using the comment provided. It is acknowledged that this would place a heavy marking burden on staff so a viable alternative is to make use of peer feedback.

Peer feedback appears to be beneficial to student writing although somewhat strangely it is the act of giving feedback rather than of receiving it that seems most beneficial, (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Berg, 1999; Lundstrom and Baker, 2009; Li, Liu and Steckelberg, 2010) probably because students do not appear to treat their peers' comments with great seriousness (Hyland and Hyland, 2006). However, examining others' writing critically clearly helps students' own work.

7.6 Acknowledgement that writing skills are a 'work in progress'

It might be helpful if staff were more lenient in the early months, acknowledging that students are developing their writing skills. However, towards the end of the programme there would be far less tolerance for mistakes. This would ensure that when graduates leave the university they have attained a certain level of competence as far as writing grammatical, succinct and analytical texts is concerned.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

Lecturers/Supervisors

What is your first language?

Can you please tell me briefly about your undergraduate and post-graduate lecturing experience?

What role does academic literacy play in hospitality education?

Do you think this differs at undergraduate and post-graduate level? If so why and how?

Do you think language in your discipline differs from the more traditional discipline areas such as education and social sciences?

Do you think there is any tension between vocational and academic classroom practices?

How responsible do you feel for your students' use of language? Can you expand on this?

How important is the correct use of academic English in your assessments?

Do you give a mark for language?

If so what proportion is it of the final mark and how is it assessed?

If not is there any penalty for poor language?

Do you address language issues in class?

If you do can you explain how you do this?

What do you see as the students' greatest challenges as far as reading/writing English is concerned?

What are their common difficulties with academic writing?

Are you comfortable helping students with language issues?

Do you see this as part of your job?

Do you direct students somewhere for help? If so, where?

What do you see as the greatest challenge regarding academic reading and writing for your students?

What do you think needs to be done?

Do you have any further comments?

Students

What is your first language?

Which of the following age groups do you fit into?

20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, over 40

How long have you lived in New Zealand?

Can you please tell me about your post-graduate and/or undergraduate qualifications?

Have you ever felt tension between vocational and academic aspects of your course? In other words do you perhaps think the academic side gets too much or too little attention? Please comment.

How important, do you think, is the correct use of academic English in your assessments? Do you think content is more important than correct language? What do you think your lecturers feel?

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest) how confident do you feel about academic reading and writing?

What do you see as your greatest challenges in this regard?

Do your lecturers spend time in class on language issues?

Who do you ask for help with your academic writing?

Are you comfortable asking your lecturers for help with language issues? (Have you ever felt embarrassed about writing issues?)

Do you see this as part of their job?

What do you see as the greatest challenge around academic reading and writing in your course?

Can you describe an ideal situation where you would feel fully supported in your academic reading and writing? What would be different?

Industry practitioners

How long have you been working in the hospitality industry?

What is your current position?

What, in your opinion, is the value of postgraduate education in the field of hospitality?

What do you expect from postgraduate students that you would not expect from those with undergraduate qualifications?

Could you discuss the importance of language proficiency for your employees?

Do you experience difficulties with staff in these areas?

What are you expectations of staff with postgraduate qualifications as far as language is concerned?

What are you expectations of staff with postgraduate qualifications as far as *written* language is concerned?

Are there any areas especially around language you would like to see addressed by hospitality lecturers?