

Multiple Perspectives on Specialist English for EAP Tutors

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From Astrophysics Papers to Student Business Case Reports:

Teaching Specialist English in the University Context

Abstract

This paper reports on progress in our research which aims to characterise genres of assessed student writing. (ESRC RES-000-23-0800) We are approaching this task from three general perspectives: an emic perspective from the disciplinary community (tutors, students, course documentation); a register perspective from multi-dimensional analysis of lexico-grammatical features of assignments; and a genre perspective from analysis of generic structure.

Our aim is therefore not only to develop in-depth analyses of specific instances of specialist English, but also to contextualise this in a broader map of university writing. In our paper we plan to show how the two complement each other, and how the 'big picture' can assist EAP tutors in preparing students in very specialist areas.

For illustrative purposes, we consider undergraduate writing in two departments, Engineering and History, where we have so far collected 130 and 100 assignments respectively.

From the emic perspective, we note that most assignments in History are *essays*, while students in Engineering write a larger range of text types (*case-study*, *dissertation*, *essay*, *exercise*, *presentation*, *report*, *review* and *specification*).

From the register perspective we report the results of a preliminary investigation on a sub-corpus of 180 assignments across 12 departments and 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of study using an established set of dimensions of variation (Biber 1988). Engineering and History assignments appear to be quite similar with respect to all dimensions except that between narrative and non-narrative discourse.

From the genre perspective, we identify the generic structures of assignments in History and Engineering. We also explore the role of text partitioning and section headings in genre description.

We welcome feedback from the PIM participants on how the information we have on assignments across the disciplines can most usefully be made available to EAP teachers through the developing BAWE corpus (www.warwick.ac.uk/go/bawe).

1 Emic perspectives from the discourse community

a. Interviews with tutors (Nesi & Gardner 2006); interviews with students (Gardner & Powell 2006), course documentation:

Essay	Anthropology, Archaeology, Biology, Computing, Economics, Engineering , English Studies, Food Sciences, Health, History , Hospitality and Tourism, Law, Mathematics, Medicine, Philosophy, Psychology, Publishing, Theatre Studies
Report	Computing, Food Sciences, Hospitality and Tourism, Law, Psychology
Laboratory Report	Archaeology, Biology, Physics
Project Report	Biology, Economics, Engineering , Mathematics, Sociology
Research Project	Biology, Mathematics, Theatre Studies
Dissertation	Anthropology, Archaeology, Biology, Computing, Law, Medicine, Publishing, Sociology, Theatre Studies
Group Project	Archaeology, Engineering , Health, Physics, Publishing
Poster	Anthropology, Biology, Engineering , Mathematics, Physics, Psychology
Book Review	History , Psychology, Sociology, Theatre Studies
Website Evaluation	Medicine, Theatre Studies
Problem Sheets	Biosciences, Economics, Food Sciences, Hospitality and Tourism, Mathematics
Case Studies	Health, Publishing
Case Notes, Draft Appeal to House of Lords, Advice Notes to a client, Submissions in preparation for a case, Moots, Problem Question (judgment)	Law
Field Study/ Ethnography	Sociology
Patient Case Report	Medicine
Letter from publisher to Author	Publishing
Reflective writing / journal/ blog	Engineering , English Studies, Hospitality and Tourism, Philosophy, Medicine, Theatre Studies
Critical evaluation (of own production or practical task)	Anthropology, English Studies, Computing, Theatre Studies
Marketing Proposal / Plan	Engineering , Publishing
Fiction	Sociology, Law
Press Release, Fact Sheet, Technical Abstract, persuasive writing	Biology, Physics
Letter of advice to friend written from 1830s perspective, Maths in Action project (lay audience)	Mathematics

Table 1 Assignment types and spread (Nesi & Gardner 2006: 104-5) (**bold added**).

b. "Biber Sample": a mid-collection sample.

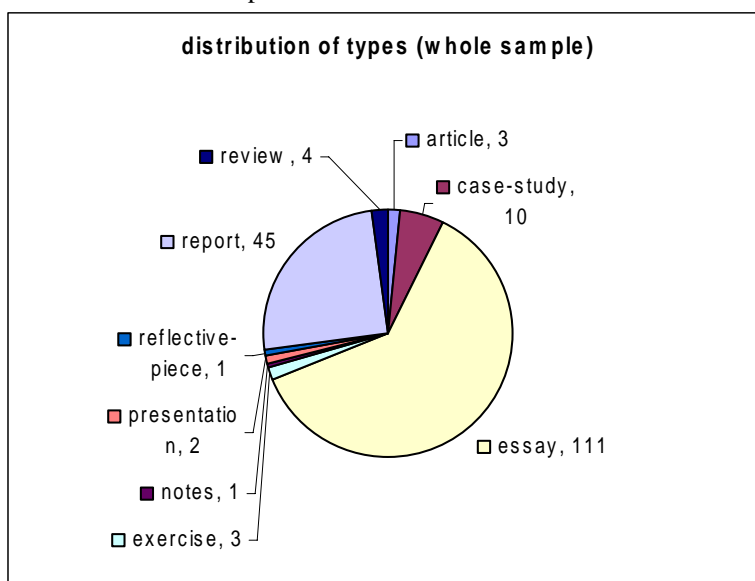


Figure 1 Distribution of text types across the "Biber sample" (N=180)

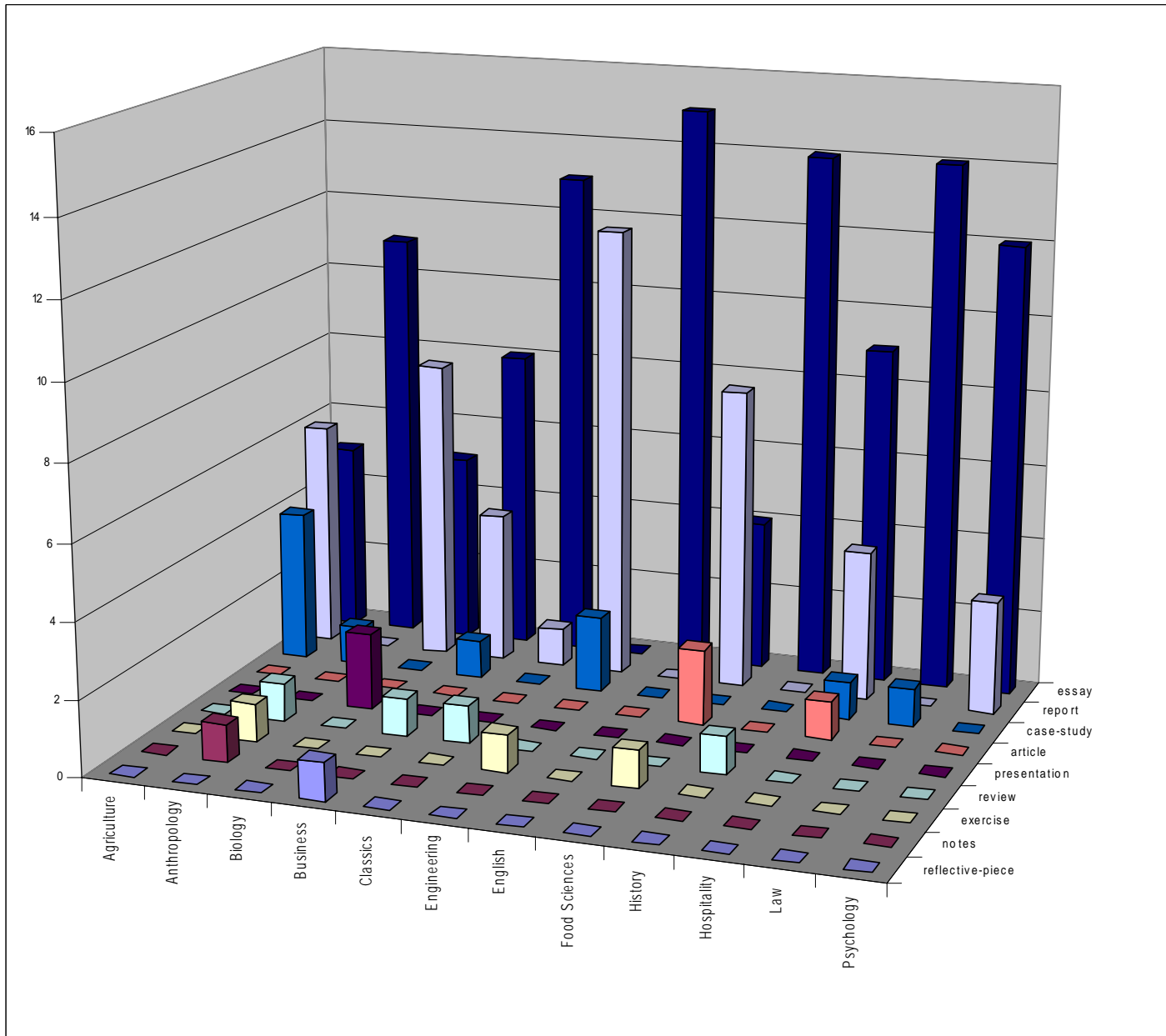


Figure 2 Distribution of texts across all departments ("Biber sample")

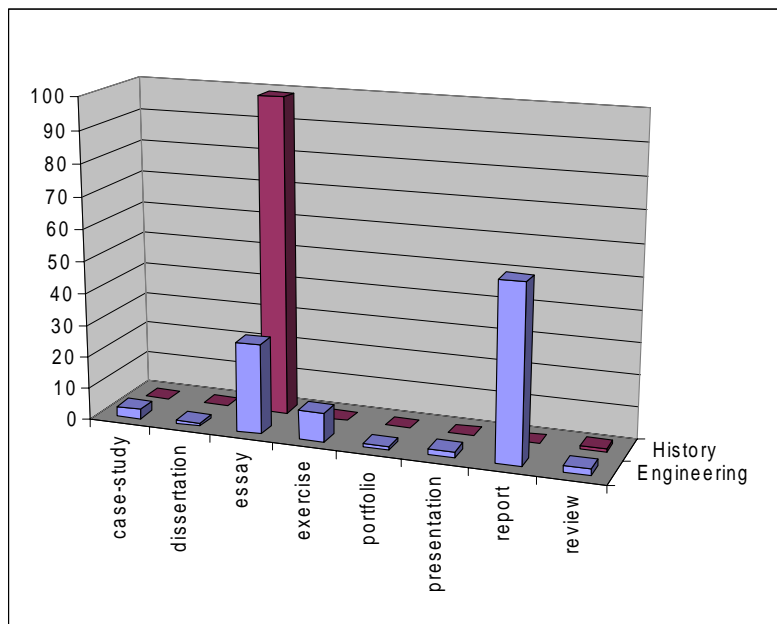


Figure 3 Distribution of text types across the History and Engineering samples ("whole corpus").

2 Register perspective

<p>NARRATIVE</p> <p> Romance fiction</p> <p>7+</p> <p> </p> <p>[.....]</p> <p> </p> <p>0+Popular lore</p> <p> FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS</p> <p> Religion, Editorials</p> <p>-1+PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS, *classics*</p> <p> </p> <p> Press reviews, *history*</p> <p>-2+TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS</p> <p> Professional letters</p> <p> Academic prose</p> <p>-3+Hobbies, *anthropology*</p> <p> BROADCASTS</p> <p>-4+</p> <p> *engineering*</p> <p>NON-NARRATIVE</p>	<p>Features of Narrative/Non-narrative dimension (Conrad and Biber 2001):</p> <p><i>Positive features</i></p> <p>past tense verbs</p> <p>third-person pronouns</p> <p>perfect aspect verbs</p> <p>public verbs</p> <p>synthetic negation</p> <p>present participial clauses</p> <p><i>negative features</i></p> <p>(present tense verbs)</p> <p>(attributive adjectives)</p>
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Table 2 Mean scores of selected BAWE departments and other registers on 1988 Dimension 2: Narrative/Non-narrative discourse. Capitalisation denotes spoken registers; BAWE departments in bold (adapted from Conrad and Biber 2001).

<p>INVOLVED</p> <p> TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS</p> <p>35+FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS</p> <p> </p> <p>[.....]</p> <p> </p> <p>PREPARED SPEECHES</p> <p>0+</p> <p> General fiction</p> <p> Professional letters</p> <p>-5+</p> <p> Science fiction</p> <p> Religion</p> <p>-10+Popular lore, *classics*</p> <p> </p> <p> Press reviews</p> <p>-15+Academic prose, *business*</p> <p> </p> <p> *engineering*, *history*</p> <p> Official documents</p> <p>-20+</p> <p> *biology*</p> <p>INFORMATIONAL</p>	<p>Selected features of Involved/Informational dimension (Conrad and Biber 2001):</p> <p><i>Positive features</i></p> <p>private verbs</p> <p><i>that</i> deletions</p> <p>contractions</p> <p>present tense verbs</p> <p>second-person pronouns</p> <p><i>do</i> as pro-verb</p> <p>analytic negation</p> <p>demonstrative pronouns</p> <p>general emphatics</p> <p>first-person pronouns</p> <p>pronoun <i>it</i></p> <p><i>be</i> as main verb</p> <p>causative subordination</p> <p>discourse particles</p> <p>indefinite pronouns</p> <p>general hedges</p> <p>amplifiers</p> <p>sentence relatives</p> <p><i>wh</i> questions</p> <p><i>negative features</i></p> <p>nouns</p> <p>word length</p> <p>prepositions</p> <p>type/token ratio</p>
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Table 3 Mean scores of selected BAWE departments and other registers on 1988 Dimension 1: Involved/Informational production. Capitalisation denotes spoken registers; BAWE departments in bold (adapted from Conrad and Biber 2001).

departments	classics, english, psychology, anthropology, history	business, agriculture, food sciences, biology, engineering
features	epistemic adverbs (fact, likelihood); pied-piping; <i>seem, appear</i> ; cognitive nouns; noun + <i>that</i>	predictive modal (<i>will, would, shall</i>); action verbs, total nouns

Table 4 Preliminary sketch of first factor in BAWE-specific analysis.

3 Genre Analysis of Assignments from History and Engineering

Data set: all assignments in the current BAWE corpus written by native speakers of English educated entirely in the UK. This happens to include no mature students.

History:

60 assignments written by 17 students in 21 modules on 59 topics.

Most assignments are 2,000 words, some 5,000 and a few in year 3 are 8,500.

Most have a **simple** structure of text with no sub-headings (Gardner and Holmes 2006).

The Generic Structures correspond to those identified for school history (Unsworth 2000:124)

Yr	Types	Analytic Discussion	Analytic Exposition	Factorial Explanation	Challenge	?	Structure
1	22 Essays	10	5	3	2	1	22 Simple
2	22 Essays	10	8	1	3		22 Simple
3	15 Essays 1 Review	5	6	3	2	1	14 Simple 2 Complex
	60	25	19	7	7	2	60

Table 5 History assignments by genre.

Analytical Discussion: (Background)^Issue^Arguments^Position

Purpose: to argue the case for two or more points of view about an issue

Analytical Exposition: (Background)^Thesis^Arguments^Reinforcement of Thesis

Purpose: to put forward a point of view or argument

Factorial Explanation: Outcome^Factors^Reinforcement of Factors

Purpose: to explain the reasons or factors that contribute to a particular outcome

Challenge: (Background)^Arguments^Anti-Thesis

Purpose: to argue against a view

Engineering:

NB Generic Structures are provisional; analysis is ongoing....

40 assignments written by 19 students in 21 modules on 35 topics; one group assignment.

They include figures, tables and graphs and range in length from 2 to 97 pages.

Most have a **complex** structure, with multiple sub-headings, some are **compound** (Gardner and Holmes 2006).

Yr	Types	Lab Report	Design Prop.	Product Eval.	Design Report	Exercise	Diss.	Other	Structure
1	Reports Exercise Case Study	8	2	1		1		2	13 Complex 1 Compound
2	Report	8	2	1		1			11 Complex 1 Compound
3	Report, Exercise Dissertation	1	1	5	2	2	3		12 Complex 2 Compound
		17	5	7	2	4	3	2	40

Table 5 Engineering assignments by genre.

Laboratory Report: to report on tests conducted; (Summary)^Introduction^Theory^Apparatus^Methods^Observations and results^Analysis of Results^Discussion^Conclusion^Bibliography^(Figures & tables)^Appendices

Design Proposal: to put forward a proposal for a system or product: (Summary)^(Background)^Introduction^ Design Feature decisions ^(Costing/Suppliers)^ Conclusions^ (Bibliography)^(Appendices)

Product Evaluation: to evaluate a piece of equipment or procedure: Introduction ^Strengths ^Weaknesses ^(Practice/performance tests) ^Conclusions^(References)

Design Report: to design and test a system:

Summary^Introduction^Theory^Analysis^Comparisons^Conclusions^References

Exercise: to practice a number of isolated generic stages or reflect on method

Task 1^Task 2^..Task n

Dissertation: to develop a design proposal for a system or product in the context of the literature

Abstract^Self-assessment^Introduction^Literature Review^(Theory)^Methodology^Analysis and Results^(Discussion)^Conclusion^Costing^References^(Appendices)

simple	complex/compound
<pre> <?xml version="1.0"?> <BAWE> <header> <level>1</level> <disc>History</disc> <type>essay</type> </header> <text> <head type="title">Do Twentieth Century Massacres Share Common Characteristics?</head> <p>Steven Katz claims in his essay on the historical... <head>Bibliography</head> </text> </BAWE> </pre>	<pre> <?xml version="1.0"?> <BAWE> <header> <p n="essayID">0018b</p> <p n="level">2</p> <p n="dept">Engineering</p> <p n="assignment type">report</p> </header> <text> <div level="1"><head>PART A - Material selection for fresh-water heat exchanger tubes</head> <div level="2"><head>Introduction:</head> <div level="2"><head>Method:</head> <div level="2"><head>Evaluation:</head> <div level="1"><head>PART B - Selection for column spacers under a varying compressive load</head> <div level="2"><head>Introduction:</head> <div level="2"><head>Methods:</head> <div level="2"><head>Evaluation:</head> <div level="1"><head>Assignment 2 - Shape selection: Selection of structural section for a beam</head> <div level="2"><head>Introduction:</head> <div level="2"><head>Method:</head> <div level="2"><head>Evaluation:</head> <div type="bib"><head>Reference:</head> </text> </BAWE> </pre>

4 Outputs

Genre descriptions and similar papers

(<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/celte/research/bawe/papers/>)

Metadata

Tagging:

- title and title page
- table of contents
- abstract or summary
- section headings
- figures and diagrams
- lists (simple, bulleted and ordered)
- quotations
- bibliography
- appendices
- <p> and <s> units

Header:

- contextual data
- text type and genre
- length
- <p> and <s> length
- references
- compound structure
-

References

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