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DECOLONIZING ANGLOPHONE EAP INFLUENCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

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Abstract. *It is widely known that English teaching practices are largely rooted in colonialism and linguistic imperialism – the belief in the superiority of the Western teaching methods and linguistic norms established in such countries as the UK and the US. The current trend to decolonize English teaching has been gaining momentum for over three decades but has not entirely penetrated into the mainstream teaching of English, with English for Academic Purposes not being an exception. Relatively little focus has been placed in the research onto non-English speaking contexts with the purpose of analysing the current state of EAP provision at universities and gauging the influence of the native-speakerist academic English norms on EAP students' writing. In the case of the EU context, it may be particularly pertinent to investigate the potential influence that Brexit might have had in terms of rejecting the imposition of the Standard British English norms and associated teaching approaches. This paper is meant to be a reflection with an attempt to stimulate the discussion of EAP teaching practices and academic discourses in the EU higher education in the post-Brexit era. It will consider the issues in the EAP provision in the EU with the example of Portuguese HE and will reflect on the native-speakerist tendencies within the academia and ways to tackle the dominance of the Anglophone norms. This paper hopes to contribute to the argument in favor of the decolonization of EAP teaching practices in non-English speaking contexts, as decolonization can help foster a more equitable and inclusive world.*

Key words: *English as a Lingua Franca, decolonization, native-speakerism, EAP*

1. INTRODUCTION

As ubiquitous as academic English skills courses are, the prescribed approaches and methodologies are largely, as is the case with many aspects of ELT (English Language Teaching), based on the dominant narrative of primacy and authenticity of the English language varieties prevalent in the inner-circle countries (Kachru 1985). This becomes problematic when the dominant practices from the Anglophone countries are transferred onto other contexts without the consideration of the local student needs and features of the educational environment. In the EU context the policies of the recent years aiming at the standardization of the higher education and research ensured the prevalence of the

Anglophone practices (Bennett 2011) having implications for the teaching of academic English skills. The local traditional discourse may conflict with these imposed practices which academic writers are forced to adopt in order to gain access to globalized academia.

This paper aims to revitalize the conversation surrounding the issue of transference of dominant EAP teaching practices onto non-English speaking contexts. The context of the EU with the example of Portugal will be focused on in this discussion. Firstly, the map of EAP provision in the EU will be reflected on drawing on the example of Portuguese higher education and the role EAP may play in it. Secondly, the native-speakerist tendencies in written academic English and their impact on the teaching of academic writing at a Portuguese university will be discussed. Finally, the possible strategies to address these issues will be considered.

2. THE MAP OF EAP IN THE EU HIGHER EDUCATION

Even though EAP can be generally defined as "language research and instruction that focuses on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic contexts" (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons 2002, 2), the reality is that its teaching is not neutral as what is meant by these "academic contexts" is often bound to the Anglophone academic tradition. EAP is, more often than not, associated with pre-sessional courses in English-speaking countries organized to help prepare international students for their target degree programmes. While EAP researcher voices based in non-English speaking countries have been emerging in the recent years (Dimova 2020; Kaufhold 2015; Polo and Varela 2009; Tatzl 2011), the research in the EU countries has still been rather scattered and focused on various issues making it challenging to obtain a full picture of EAP provision in this region. It is evident that there is no EU-wide equivalent to BALEAP in the UK which means there are no unifying standards or frameworks universities in different EU countries follow. There does not seem to be any such organizations or associations within the various countries meaning that universities within one given country have their own provision possibly tailored to the context of that particular university. This lack of uniformity may not be a negative phenomenon as it probably encourages universities to cater their EAP provision to the needs of the local students and their specific context without being constrained to follow an Anglophone-inspired framework with a prescriptive set of skills. However, the question remains whether it is actually so or whether, just as is the case with ELT at large, the approaches and methods dominant in the English-speaking countries have penetrated the EU space and informed EAP teaching.

As was mentioned earlier, at this stage it is a challenge to recreate a map of EAP provision (for example, courses, materials, and approaches used) in the EU from the pieces of research currently available. One such research was attempted by Ypsilandis and Kantaridou (2007) who found that the universities they surveyed in Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Switzerland, largely enjoyed the freedom to plan their curriculum and used a combination of tailor-made and commercial material, neither of which could be indicative of adherence to the Anglophone tradition or otherwise as the details of this provision are unavailable. One interesting finding was the lack of importance placed on independent learning – one of the central skills developed among EAP learners in the Anglophone contexts. More up-to-date research is needed though to identify any changes as the study referred to here was done between 1997 and 2003. Even so, it is possible that there is indeed no consensus on the value of independent learning among EAP learners in European

universities due to the variety of academic cultures. There is no further data on the specific teaching methods in those contexts but this may also stem from Bell's (2022) observation of the absence of the issue of methodology from EAP research. It is possible that, similarly to the UK, EAP teachers in the EU utilize CLT (Communicative language teaching) or TBL (Task-based learning) but this remains an area of further investigation.

Another example of the "defiance" of the Anglophone norms in the above research (Ypsilandis and Kantaridou 2007) is the lack of use of the international examinations such as IELTS as placement tests to determine students' level prior to commencing an EAP programme. This is said to result in mixed-ability groups and challenges in curriculum and lesson planning. However, even though some standardization in this matter would probably improve both teacher and student experience, attempting to match the local requirements with IELTS or CEFR could also do a disservice as was shown in a non-European context of Hong Kong (Bruce and Hamp-Lyons 2015) where the use of CEFR to assess students brought them an unjustified disadvantage considering they had no need to be evaluated according to these standards in their local context. Also, it could be argued that the wide use of CEFR, exploited by the ELT giants such as Cambridge Assessment who oversee the gatekeeping international English language examinations, increases the dominance of the system which seeks to divide speakers into "native" and "non-native" to continue to sustain this colossal industry. Thus, it is perhaps a positive trend in the EU that universities have the freedom to create their own locally appropriate placement tests and assessment methods.

In the context of Portugal, the purpose of the inclusion of EAP in higher education is probably similar to the other EU countries – to facilitate students' academic writing in English for publication and participation in international conferences, and also to enable them to study on EMI courses at university. However, EMI courses at Portuguese universities are still only emerging, thus raising a question about the rationale behind incorporating EAP into the studies. For example, at the University of Coimbra, where the author is based, bachelor level students are less likely to be offered tuition in English as opposed to master's and doctorate levels. This creates a difficulty in rationalizing EAP as the branch of ELT taught on the English course primarily offered as obligatory on the Modern Languages programmes. On top of this, many bachelor level students, especially first-year students, are not certain about their future career plans and, hence, do not yet see the value of writing for publication or presenting at conferences held in English. Finally, mainstream EAP course books, such as Oxford EAP (De Chazal and Moore 2013) used on the said course, may contain the skills which are not necessarily relevant for this local context: for example, seminars in English which is not a widely used practice at this university, according to students. Thus, teachers are forced to supplement these ready-made materials and, generally, justify the need for Academic English to students for whom its value may not be immediately apparent. This example shows that not in all European contexts EAP may be seen by students (and teachers) as immediately relevant and important.

3. NATIVE-SPEAKERISM IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH

Regardless of the possible variety of EAP programmes in EU countries, the reality is that these EAP programmes are still likely to be largely designed to prepare students to enter Anglophone academia and, therefore, adhere to the native-speakerist academic

English norms. It is not entirely clear, however, whether "native speaker" (NS) norms are indeed used as a benchmark of academic writing across the board. Jenkins (2014), a proponent of English as a Lingua Franca Academic (ELFA), does believe in strong native-speakerist tendencies in EAP and criticizes the traditional genre approach to teaching EAP as native-speakerist and conformist. However, some researchers reject the idea that NS norms are somehow relevant to academia. Tribble (2017), whilst supporting some of Jenkins' claims, argues that there is no observable relevance of NS norms in contemporary academia, the evidence of this being the increasing percentage of visible non-Anglo-Saxon academic writers. While more research is needed in the perceived relevance of NS norms in academic writing, there is still overwhelming evidence in the literature (for example, Kumaravadivelu 2016) that ELT in general is plagued by native-speakerism despite decades of research exposing it, and learners (and it probably extends to EAP) perceive NS norms as relevant and required, which, again, exposes the unequal power relations they are subjected to. For example, Garska and O'Brien (2019) show in their study in Ireland that EAP learners do believe that the NS norms are what their academic writing skills are measured against. Another study conducted in Hungary (Forche 2012) with the participation of a variety of Erasmus students reveals that European students from different countries largely accept NS norms but show more acceptance of the emerging Euro-English. The discussion of Euro-English began before Brexit became a reality and intensified after the 2016 referendum. However, as Forche (2012) concludes, Euro-English may still not be seen as a legitimate variety even though the tide may be turning driven precisely by university students on the European mobility programs.

In the case of Portugal, the writing tradition in the local language has been found to be significantly different from the Anglophone model (Bennett 2011); the norms in Portuguese academic writing may influence learners' academic writing in English, posing a question about whose norms to adopt. Bennett (2010) in her extensive analysis of the Portuguese academic texts concluded that, even though scientific subjects tend to utilize the type of discourse characteristic of or very similar to the typical English discourse, there exists a distinct Portuguese academic writing style containing the features some of which are considered inappropriate in the Anglo-American academic writing: for example, emotive language, figures of speech and sentences sounding pompous and ornate. This has major implications for teaching EAP at a Portuguese university and raises certain dilemmas. How to facilitate Portuguese students' adoption of the Anglophone norms required for successful academic writing for publication? Is it ethical to require students to renounce the distinct Portuguese style of writing in favor of the Anglophone tradition? What do these students themselves perceive as the preferable way to write academically? Would adopting a form of a neutral ELFA be a compromise or would it still strip these students' writing of its unique identity? Finally, more broadly, is such a distinct identity even worth preserving if it does not allow for the necessary objectivity and logic aspired to in the international academia? All these questions are important areas for further research and discussion.

Also, in the higher education context of Portugal, academic writing training in general is said to have been facing continuous challenges, such as lack of writing support from tutors and the focus on knowledge reproduction rather than knowledge transformation (Barbeiro et al. 2015), the latter being an important feature of the Anglophone writing tradition. This trend is exacerbated by the fact that Portuguese high schools are reported to lack provision for instruction in general writing skills such as self-regulated writing (Simão et al. 2016) likely leading to the students' lack of writing skills at the start of their undergraduate degree. This combination of the increasing pressure to conform to the

Anglophone standards of academic writing in English and the systemic issues with writing provision poses a unique challenge for lecturers in English academic writing skills in this country and other non-English speaking contexts in the EU.

4. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES

The possible ways to address the issues identified in this discussion would potentially involve various approaches in the domain of critical pedagogy. These approaches may be relevant not only in the Portuguese higher education context but the EU at large and involve both attempts to localize EAP teaching practices and give students the voice and choice on how they wish to be taught.

With regards to the academic writing instruction, one of the prominent approaches is Academic Literacies which is also a move away from the deficit skills-based approach to teaching. Proposed by Lea and Street (1998), it is an attempt to frame academic writing as social and cultural practice rather than seeing it in the dichotomy of "good" versus "bad" writing. Lea and Street demonstrate examples of how differently tutors of various subjects interpret "good writing" in their disciplines (and sometimes within the same discipline), for example, the varying degree of importance placed on such aspects as clarity of expression, structure, and quality of argument; how students often do not know and struggle to fulfil the institutional requirements, and how tutor feedback can demonstrate power relations and authority rather than being truly dialogic. In terms of the feedback, Turner (2012) shows how language (in)accuracy is an area of power struggle where professors on degree courses serve as gatekeepers "tolerating" errors up to a point and then categorically pushing for the use of proofreading services by students as a condition to pass, which is based more on what happens in the UK context but could still be relevant to other educational settings.

Considering the above, academic literacies are viewed within this approach as ideologically shaped, culturally and socially situated, and shifting (Lillis and Tuck 2016). As summarized by Lillis and Tuck (2016), this approach views writing as a social practice and literacy as ideological, questions institutional requirements and supports negotiation of what is acceptable and appropriate. An example of an investigation of EAP students' views on the role power, identity and culture play in academic writing is the study in the Irish HE context by Garska and O'Brien (2019). It showed the dissatisfaction among the students with the restrictive and arbitrary rules in academic writing imposed on them by the institution. They displayed a wish for more freedom of expression of their own voice and identity in academia, denouncing the accepted objectivity of academic writing. This demonstrates how EAP students can be reflective and critical and denying them their agency by forcing them to adopt the dominant culture without questioning is morally wrong.

There are other examples of approaches characterized by critical treatment of the ideologically loaded processes of academic writing and reading. Contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan 1966), later renamed into Intercultural rhetoric (Connor 2018), is concerned with the study of the influence of language and culture on the production of academic texts which brings to the forefront the cultural and social context when analysing the meaning of a text. This is a more critical approach to texts than the traditional genre approach. Critical literacy is another critical approach to texts, proposed by Freire (1972), and entails critical reading by questioning the social and political context of the texts. These approaches all help foster a more democratic classroom because "[u]tilizing critical

approaches toward texts and discourses can enable EAP instructors and students to co-construct discourses that problematize identities of ideal citizens as consumers and commodities in the neoliberal world." (Chun 2009, 119).

With regards to broader issues with the EAP curriculum, a prominent approach is Critical EAP (CEAP) proposed by Benesch (2001) which aims to empower students to question the power relations in academia and beyond. Another noteworthy strategy is negotiated syllabus, proposed by Clarke (1991), which aims to promote equality by allowing students and teachers to co-construct the components of the syllabus which is an "opportunity for reducing the almost inevitable dichotomy between the cognitive and affective individuality of learners and the external, ends-focused syllabus with which they typically have to work." (26). Finally, Social Justice Pedagogy by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017, 350) is the pedagogy which deals with the "dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, recognizing that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratification along socially constructed group lines that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability". The core defining elements of all aforementioned practices remain very similar: the value of raising own and student awareness of the politics of education (Fischman and Haas 2008), helping decolonize ELT and promote more critical understanding of the historical legacies (Mortenson 2022) and the transformative value of socially conscious curricula on students and teachers (Jeyaraj and Harland 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper was an attempt to reflect on the complex reality of EAP provision in the EU HE context with the consideration of Portugal as an example. It can be concluded that the scope for further research is vast based on the lack of current and precise data on the approaches, methods, curriculum, materials, assessments, and student needs in the various higher education settings across the EU. Whilst seemingly enjoying a large amount of freedom, it may appear that the EAP teaching practices in the European universities are rather varied and it is hard to infer with any certainty as to the influence on them by the dominant Anglophone standards such as those stipulated by BALEAP in the UK. The native-speakerist tradition may still have encroached upon the local European practices through the use of EAP course books, as was seen in the example of the specific higher education setting in Portugal, and other EAP teaching materials perpetuating the supremacy of the typical academic English discourse. The fact of the gradual displacement of the local and unique academic discourses, with the example of Portugal, in favor of the standardized variety (the traditional Anglophone academic discourse) is perhaps the only clear trend in the context of this discussion.

In these circumstances it seems imperative that more EU-specific research is carried out to unveil the various situations in which EAP teaching exists in the European countries with the aim to help diversify EAP teaching practices and ultimately decolonize the international academia. Universities should also consider utilizing the various critical pedagogy approaches to foster EAP student voices with the same goal: to encourage critique and questioning of the dominant academic English discourse and ensure the future of the academia is not built upon the passive acceptance of the native-speakerist rules. It is hoped that this paper can stimulate further discussion of and research into this area.

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