

USING A CULTURALLY FAMILIAR GENRE TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC LITERACY

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Abstract. *Non-native speakers unfamiliar with the Western approach to argumentation are often at a disadvantage in reading English academic texts. This article reviews a strategy whereby the researcher built a bridge to academic argument in English through the use of a culturally familiar genre (the fable). Students analyzed a familiar fable in terms of form (linear, cause-effect connected sequential development) and content (essentially an argument for a particular moral quality or mode of behaviour), and were then presented with the same fable rewritten as though it were an academic text, using academic metadiscourse and structure. Students discussed similarities and differences between the two texts and then wrote 'academic fables' of their own. The strategy was applied in college courses for Hebrew and Arabic speakers at three colleges of education in Israel. Effects of the strategy were measured by student summaries of authentic academic texts written before and after the experimental manipulation, in comparison to those written by a control group. Findings reveal a complex picture of the place of intercultural rhetoric in the instruction of English for academic purposes, and support the use of a familiar genre in contributing to the accessibility of English academic texts.*

Key words: *academic literacy, culture, genre, argumentation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The dominance of English in the academic world has far reaching repercussions, not only for non-native speaker (NNS) students at universities or colleges in English speaking countries, but also for students in non-English speaking countries who are required to read most of their bibliographic sources in English. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses traditionally emphasize academic vocabulary (Nation, 1990; Xue & Nation, 1984) and academic writing (Swales & Feak, 1994), and screening tests such as the TOEFL purport to measure student readiness for studying in an English language academic environment. However, attaining academic literacy appears to be a process more complex than simply crossing a vocabulary threshold. Universities in many non-English speaking countries require students to read their bibliographic material in English, and although these students succeed in passing English exemption examinations or EAP courses, it appears that they nevertheless approach English academic texts as strange and uncharted territories (Schneider, 2001)¹. The result is a self-fulfilling, circular prophecy: Students feel incompetent and therefore do not set out to read, thus they never acquire academic literacy in English.

¹ As an EAP teacher in Israel, I have received numerous complaints from content course teachers who contend undergraduates avoid reading bibliographic material in English by acquiring quasi-reliable L1 summaries or translations.

While it has been the responsibility of EAP courses to equip students with the skills necessary to succeed academically in English, until recently, such EAP courses were based on a dominant-deficit model (Lea & Street, 2006), in which all knowledge rested with and was provided by the (native speaker) teacher to the student, who was considered to be lacking in any background knowledge about the structures, conventions and functions of English academic text. Courses focused on presenting rhetorical structures and functions were seen as unique to academia, and the student gained admission to the academic discourse community by becoming fluent in the terminology and conventions used by its members. Thus, the genres of academia developed as exclusionary tools, (Geisler, 1994), keeping out those who were not “in the know”; and the academic discourse community determined “who has access to resources, power, even to discourse itself, and it makes gatekeepers to make sure that the right people get in and all others are excluded” (Cooper, 1989, p. 205). Since, according to this model, academic literacy was dependent upon the acquisition of discreet, clearly defined skills (Rose, 1985) and “learning a community’s values and practices” (Tardy, 2005, p. 325), EAP courses focused on teaching students to identify patterns in English academic prose, providing structural models which students followed (Swales & Feak, 1994), and teaching lexical cues with which to identify salient rhetorical structures (Berman, Schneider & Yahav, 2004). The student’s own rhetorical culture was regarded not as a resource or point of departure, but as the antithesis of Western rhetoric, as evidenced by Kaplan’s famous squiggles (1966), showing the linearity of Western expository paragraphs as opposed to the circular structure of Oriental writing and the parallel structure of Semitic paragraphs.

Today, researchers in intercultural rhetoric caution us against falling into the trap of diminishing the view of rhetoric to a “binary image...i.e., English is linear, direct, and logical, whereas other languages are circular, digressive, or non-logical...” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 9). Lunsford and Ede (1996) also question this binary approach to discourse community, which “assumes that writers and readers have no option but to be either in - or out of - a particular rhetorical situation” (p. 174). EAP students are not blank slates; they enter the EAP course as literate individuals, who are familiar with a wide range of genres in their native languages, and, though perhaps they are unaware of their own background knowledge, are well versed in the communicative functions of many text types.

An alternative to the dominant-deficit approach adopts the stance that academic literacy must be founded on a dialogue between the cultural contexts of the community’s members (Zamel, 1997), both recognizing and utilizing students’ cultural backgrounds in order to integrate them into the academic community. Clark (1998) uses a metaphor which, instead of defining academia as a destination or territory, focuses on a “discursive collectivity that in no way resembles a fixed and bounded place,” aiming to develop what he terms “rhetorical interaction” (p. 12). This model of EAP reflects the infusion of the postmodern view of culture, which speaks of intermingling cultures rather than “distinct, separate societies, each with its own culture” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 279), and shows sensitivity to cultural and socio-linguistic influences at play in student transformation from native language to second language reader and writer (Atkinson, 2003; Francis & Ryan, 1998; Scollon, 1996; Zamel, 1997).

This paper offers a practical application of such an approach, by attempting to demystify the academic text for the EAP student by purposely blurring territorial boundaries between academic and non-academic discourse to encourage inclusivity. Whereas in the past academic arguments were presented as an isolated, clearly delineated genre, this approach raises student awareness that argumentation is not a foreign territory, but exists in culturally familiar genres.

More specifically, this research uses a universal genre, the fable, to build a bridge to the unfamiliar academic text by manipulating generic similarities and differences between fables and argumentative texts. I argue that making students comfortable in understanding academic conventions is a matter of making them aware of what they already know. Through presenting similarities and differences between the unfamiliar academic genre and genres students are familiar with, and by giving them tools which assist in traveling between the familiar and the unfamiliar, fluency and proficiency in navigating academic discourse can be facilitated. The next section compares and contrasts aspects of the fable and the academic argument, and is followed by a description of the study which explored ‘bridge building’ in action, as an attempt to enhance academic literacy.

2. THE FABLE AND THE ACADEMIC TEXT: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

A fable’s structure is linear and chronological, a series of steps linked by cause and effect. Events within narratives are combined according to temporal succession and causality (Toolan, 2001), and the structural analysis of narrative can be divided into two major categories, sequential and consequential (Trabasso & Sperry, 1985). Hence the reader processes narrative texts according to explanation-driven motives (Smith & Hancox, 2001), searching for reasons behind events as they unfold. The academic argument, as opposed to the narrative, is not governed by a chronological sequence. Whereas fables end with an argument, the product of a causal chain, a well-knitted academic argument opens with a contention or claim – a consensus which is questioned, a solution offered to a problem, or a case for a causal connection. The body of the text is a series of moves which support the central argument by presenting evidence in the form of specific examples or expert opinion. Finally, the writer reiterates the argument, pointing to the connection between supporting evidence and conclusion, often pointing out implications for broader contexts beyond the specific subject of the text. The fable is founded on shared cultural content schema, including fabular characters (such as stereotypical animals), which often possess similar traits across cultures (e.g. wily foxes, slow turtles). As these stereotypes are shared by writer and reader, additional information or explanation is unnecessary. The writer of an academic text, on the other hand, can take for granted only a limited amount of shared information, and is bound by generic conventions to define terms and cite authoritative sources. The need for explicitness in academic texts extends to the use of metadiscourse: signposts which point to conclusions, examples, sequence, arguments and counterarguments – a feature which is nonexistent in the fable. Table 1 illustrates the similarities and differences between the rhetorical structures and conventions of the two text types.

Table 1 Similarities and differences between the fable and the academic text

| Fable | Academic text |
|--|---|
| Chronological sequence of events | Not necessarily chronological |
| Ends with argument or lesson | Begins and ends with argument or lesson |
| Explanation-driven | Evidence-driven |
| Reader and writer share cultural content schema | Reader and writer do not necessarily share content schema |
| Does not define terms or cite outside sources | Defines terms and cites authoritative sources |
| Does not use metadiscourse, connections implicit | Uses metadiscourse to organize and comment on content, connections explicit |

By developing student awareness of different rhetorical conventions used in the two genres of fables and academic arguments, the strategy described in this study aims to demystify academic texts and make their form and content more accessible.

3. THE STUDY

In order to investigate the effects of using a familiar genre to ‘demystify’ academic texts, a study was carried out on EAP students in three colleges of education. Student summaries of texts were rated before and after their exposure to the demystification strategy.

3.1. Participants

In order to neutralize effects of teaching style, it was important that I teach all experimental lessons. Thus, in addition to using my own classes, I ‘hijacked’ classes in which I was not the primary instructor. The experimental group (N=48) and the control group (N=47) came from three different colleges of education and teacher training in Israel; my own secular (Hebrew-speaking) college, a religious (Hebrew-speaking) college, and an Arab (Arabic-speaking) college. The experimental group was comprised of two classes of Hebrew speakers (N=28) from the secular college in Jerusalem and one class of Arabic speaking students from the college in Galilee (N=20). The control group was comprised of one class of Hebrew speakers from the religious college in Jerusalem (N=33), and one class of Arabic speakers from the college in the Galilee (N=14). In order to obtain a relatively homogeneous group in terms of English proficiency, I chose only Advanced 2 EAP levels (students with an entrance level score equivalent to a 550 TOEFL (PBT) score).

3.2. Method

The objective of this research was not simply to evaluate whether consciousness-raising of academic genre through accessing students’ existing genre knowledge was effective, but to determine whether it offered a beneficial alternative to standard techniques which start with the features of the academic text and follow a dominant-deficit model. Thus, the control groups’ standard lessons focused on explaining and exemplifying aspects of academic texts, whereas in the experimental lessons, the fable was used as a bridge to understanding the academic genre, as described below. The experiment took place over four lessons, each of which was 90 minutes in length. Table 2 outlines the experimental procedure, which is described in detail further below.

Table 2 Experimental procedure

| Lesson | Control group | Experimental group |
|--------|--|---|
| 1 | Introduction to text summary skills Students write Summary 1 of academic text | |
| 2 | Students continue standard EAP course | Students discuss fables, read and analyze a fable, and read and analyze the same fable rewritten as an ‘academic fable’ |
| 3 | Students continue standard EAP course | Students write their own academic fable in groups. Products are discussed in class. |
| 4 | Students write Summary 2 of academic text | |

In the first session, I presented the following guidelines for summary writing (based on Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981; Garner, 1982; Kilborn, 1993; Kirkland & Saunders, 1991) to both the control and the experimental groups:

Writing an effective summary requires that you:

- read with the writer's purpose in mind
- underline with summarizing in mind
- write, revise, and edit to ensure the accuracy and correctness of your summary

Reading for Summarizing:

- Identify the controlling idea/argument and writer's purpose.
- As you read, group paragraphs into topics and identify topic sentences or compose your own.
- Identify information which supports the writer's argument.
- Identify important details/examples/information through which the writer fulfills his/her purpose.

Writing your Summary:

- Open your summary by stating the writer's purpose and/or the controlling idea or argument. "In his article, (title of article) the writer sets out to prove/show/argue that ..."
- Write important details which support the writer's argument in more general terms.
- It should be clear to the reader of your summary that this is a report of someone else's work.
- Try to keep the same emphasis as that of the author.

Students were then given an academic text to summarize. Summarization, rather than standardized reading comprehension exams, was used because the ability to summarize texts appears to provide an authentic measure of improvement in comprehension of academic texts (Armbruster, Anderston, & Ostertag, 1987). In order to quantify assessment of the summary task, I adopted the following rubric (Table 3), which evaluated salient points of summarization based on measures developed by Brown, Day, & Jones, 1983; Chou Hare & Borchardt, 1984; Glasswell, Parr, & Aikman, 2001; Johns & Mayes, 1990; and Sung, 2001.

Table 3 Summary Assessment Rubric

| Points of assessment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Identifying main argument and writer's purpose | | | | |
| Identifying supporting ideas | | | | |
| Relevance of supporting ideas | | | | |
| Showing understanding of argument structure | | | | |

1 = to a very limited extent, 2 = to a moderate extent 3 = to a satisfactory extent 4 = to a great extent

3.2.1 *The traditional fable*

The experimental group's second lesson opened with a discussion of the fabular genre. Students were asked to mention fables they knew and the stereotypical characters which appeared in these fables, revealing the common schemata they shared. They discussed fables they knew and their moral messages, and the discussion then focused on

the question of what a fable does, leading to the conclusion that the writer of a fable is arguing for a certain moral quality or change in behavior. Finally, the following fable was read aloud to the class.

The Fox and the Crow

A Fox once saw a Crow fly off with a piece of cheese in its beak and settle on a branch of a tree.
 “That’s for me, as I am a Fox,” said Master Reynard, and he walked up to the foot of the tree.
 “Good-day, Mistress Crow,” he cried. “How well you are looking today: how smooth your feathers; how bright your eyes. I feel sure your voice must surpass that of other birds, just as your figure does. Let me hear but one song from you, so I may greet you as the Queen of Birds.”
 The Crow lifted up her head and began to caw her best, but the moment she opened her mouth, the piece of cheese fell to the ground.
 Immediately, Master Fox snapped up the cheese. “That will do,” said he. “That was all I wanted. In exchange for your cheese, I will give you a piece of advice for the future. Do not trust flatterers.”

Following the reading, I traced the development of the argument in the fable through a series of moves and steps², showing how the writer of the fable first establishes a conflict or dilemma (as the fox makes his intentions clear), and triggers schema and expectations (as readers/listeners are familiar with the clever fox who will probably get what he wants). The fable then moves to a ‘resolution’ which is a series of chronological steps linked by cause and effect, then states an argument, ‘Do not trust flatterers.’

3.2.2 *The academic fable*

Following the discussion of the fable, students in the experimental group received the same fable, which I had rewritten as an academic text. As before, I guided the class through this text, examining the development of the writer’s argument. Students were shown how the argument they encountered in the original fable is presented in the academic fable using a different rhetorical structure.

The consequences of flattery: The cheese incident

In all levels of society and walks of life, flattery is a prevalent phenomenon; so prevalent, in fact, that we often ignore its dangers and consequences. We use flattery almost without thinking - in order to manipulate our peers or to obtain a favor from someone in a position of authority. In this article, I will attempt to illustrate the dangers of flattery in our society and to make suggestions for combating this destructive phenomenon.

² Swales (1990), in an analysis of introductions of research articles, proposes a model based on moves and steps in which the moves are dictated by purpose (establishing territory, establishing a niche, occupying the niche), and the steps by how these goals are accomplished (claiming centrality, indicating a gap, announcing present research, announcing findings, etc.).

We can cite the famous Crow-Fox Cheese Incident of 612 BCE (Aesop, 600) in which Fox, through a series of patently false compliments, manipulated Crow into an error of judgment which led her to surrender her cheese to Fox's appetites. This clear case of flattery's destructive powers is made even more powerful when we note the predictability of its outcome, given the research which has proven the crow's low IQ (Warren, 1967) and the fox's lack of moral scruples (Jones, 1994). Flattery is often the favored tool of the unscrupulous and immoral against the intellectually challenged.

As Aesop relates the incident, Fox flattered Crow on her appearance, complimenting her on the smoothness of her feathers and the brightness of her eyes. Similar types of flattery are often used by poets to praise their beloved, as in the following:

*Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,
O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head?*

A Pretty Woman by Robert Browning

But unlike Browning's words, Fox's flattery regarding Crow's beauty is merely a ploy to draw Crow into a trap. This contrast between the true love of a poet and Fox's devious flattery points to another of flattery's negative characteristics: its inherent insincerity.

Like other 'birds' before her, the Crow was taken in by flattery, and Fox's words lead to a serious error in judgment. Fox asks her to sing in order to demonstrate the 'fact' that the beauty of her voice equals her physical beauty. She does so and immediately suffers the consequences of her innocent, trusting nature, as the cheese fell into Fox's possession.

The literature contains numerous examples of ruthless men entrapping impressionable young women: Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) and the result is always the same: ruin, punishment, shame. In a recent interview, Crow revealed that the incident took not only her cheese, but her pride as well. Thus, flattery and its aftermath can have destructive results, seriously damaging the victim's self-esteem.

The implications of this case seem clear. Young females such as Crow deserve protection from professional flatterers and should be made aware of the dangers. A number of practical measures should be instituted in order to guard against flattery damage. Flattery Combatant Consciousness Raising workshops could prepare people to recognize and avoid falling into the flattery trap - an especially viable threat among the rapidly vanishing population of impressionable young maidens. One alternative to a focus on the victims of flattery would be to shift the emphasis to flattery's perpetrators: the 'foxes' of this world. Self-help seminars, aimed at raising the Fox's awareness of society's perception of his actions could lead to a reduction in the number of cases of flattery. In severe cases, chronic flatterers might even be sent to residential centers for detoxification and rehabilitation, in which reformed flatterers would help them build strategies for dealing with their problem.

We would like to conclude with the thought that an awareness of flattery's dangers is only the first step. Further research should include an analysis of other case studies of flattery in order to broaden our knowledge of this dangerous phenomenon and work toward its prevention.

In the discussion of the academic fable, students in the experimental group were shown how the fable opens with a statement of argument and its justification (Move 1),

then moving to supporting argument, evidence, research findings, and examples (Move 2). Move 3 includes a conclusion which involves restatement, expansion, implications, and recommendations.

Students were shown how the connectors and metadiscourse in the academic text move the argument forward by pointing to evidence, summarizing information, and emphasizing logical (rather than chronological or causal) connections. In this respect, for the reader who lacks content schemata, the 'academic' text is easier to read - it reduces inference to a minimum, and provides the necessary connections which make the implicit information more explicit.

3.2.3. *Students write academic fables*

As an awareness-raising exercise, students in the experimental group were asked to write their own academic fable in the third lesson. They were given the option of working in groups, which most took advantage of, working in pairs or threes. In examining the academic fables they wrote, it is useful to use Clark's metaphor of writing as travel (1998); these students are locating themselves on a continuum, somewhere between narrative and academic text. Whereas students transfer some of the characteristics of the academic text (structure and metadiscourse) as modeled in the academic fable to their own fables, they also integrate their cultural content and rhetorical preferences into their writing.

The following is an excerpt from an academic fable written by Hebrew speakers from a secular college. (Note that all student-writing has been retained in the original, except in cases where errors might interfere with comprehension.)

3.2.4. *Academic fable written by Hebrew speakers*

As we have seen, the lazy grasshopper lays in the sun the entire summer, while the hard working ant toils in the fields getting food for her colony for the winter. This article shows the consequences of selfishness. While sharing may save lives, selfishness will kill yourself inside.

The ant's work was mocked by the grasshopper, who complained that the hard work was unnecessary and pointless. Unfortunately for the grasshopper, winter arrived and he was starving, while the ant enjoyed the fruits of her toils.

The capitalist ('ant') who thought that working all your life will make you happy, worked and suffered his entire life. The 'grasshopper' - not a capitalist - enjoyed the beauty of life and living day by day.

The grasshopper died of hunger while the ant just looked at the starving grasshopper pleading for food and wouldn't share, just for spite. Because the grasshopper didn't share her approach, the ant would rather watch him die than help him by sharing her food with him. Contrary to what most people think, the message is that you should 'live your life'. All work and no fun make men unhappy and unwilling to be part of a working society.

The students used metadiscourse (As we have seen...and This article shows us...) to establish and emphasize common prior knowledge of the fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper*³. In addition, they have adopted the tactic found in many academic texts of

³ In the discussion of fables prior to reading *The Fox and the Crow*, students discussed fables they knew; this one, in which the industrious ant is mocked by a lazy grasshopper who later starves to death in the cold winter as a result of his sloth, was one of the most popular and well known.

strengthening their argument by presenting the message as a counterargument to popular opinion (Contrary to what most people think...), and internalized the demands of the academic genre for explicitness; whereas a 'genuine' fable would not interpret the metaphor but leave us to infer 'ant = capitalist', the students have spelled things out clearly. While the presentation of the fable makes use of some of the conventions of academic argument, it has been creatively adapted to express the local, secular youth culture, placing value on individual expression, using standard, formal register ('fruits of her toils') and youth vernacular ('live your life').

Another aspect of the exchange between different rhetorical cultures is revealed in academic fables where students used proverbs or stories as support for argument, a widely recognized tactic in traditional oral cultures (Conner, 2008; Fakhri, 2009), which consider such material hard and fast evidence.

The following academic fable was written by Arabic speakers, whose college is situated in a largely rural, traditional community.

3.2.5. *Academic fable written by Arabic speakers*

One summer day, there was a very happy grasshopper who was hopping and singing. An ant passed by carrying an ear of corn back to his nest. He told the grasshopper to do the same as him instead of playing and fooling around. The grasshopper didn't listen to him and a catastrophe happened. In this article, we will show how hard work and preparation lead to achievement.

The grasshopper ignored the ant's advice. "Why bother about winter?" he said. He continued fooling around until winter came and didn't find food. The grasshopper prefers living in the present instead of thinking about the future. In general no one knows what might happen to him, so that's why a person should prepare for the days to come.

A proverb says, 'A penny saved is a penny earned'. For example, a single man once spent all the money he earned and saved nothing. One day, he decided to get married, but the girl he loved married another man, because he had prepared himself financially to support and raise a family.

The conclusion is that each person has to be prepared in a way. While the ant was preparing himself for winter and working hard, the grasshopper didn't do anything but sing, so when winter came he died. You have to work hard to achieve your goal. For example, to win a competition, you have to work hard or else you'll never achieve your goal, i.e. win the 1st prize.

Whereas the students have adopted an explicit statement of argument, and thus showed an awareness of the communicative purpose of the text (*In this article, we will show how hard work and preparation lead to achievement*), they are just starting out on their journey toward academic rhetorical structure. The fable about the ant and grasshopper and its message is exemplified by a parable which illustrates the proverb 'a penny saved is a penny earned'. However, there is no formal, academic register, and the only metadiscourse used by the students is 'for example', to connect the proverbs to their accompanying story in a parallel (rather than a linear) structure. While the students employ rhetorical devices and conventions with which they are familiar, they have nevertheless moved toward giving explicit presentation and support of argument, one step in the journey between the two genres.

The fourth and final lesson required students in both the control and experimental groups to summarize a second academic text individually. These summaries were also assessed with

the assessment rubric in order to explore the extent to which the exercise in demystification impacted on student comprehension of an academic text. It is important to note that both summaries 1 and 2 were assessed by the researcher and a second reader.⁴ When disagreements arose, the two readers negotiated, and a third reader was approached if necessary.

3.3. Results

Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of scores for identifying the main argument before and after the experimental lesson. *Before* refers to the summary written during the lesson immediately *before* the lessons on the fable and academic fable, and *after* refers to the summary written *following* these lessons. Regarding the control group, before and after are simply chronological terms, referring to the two lessons which included basic summary skills and summarizing two academic texts (as previously outlined). Figure 1 below shows greater improvement in identifying the main argument in the experimental group than with the control group.⁵

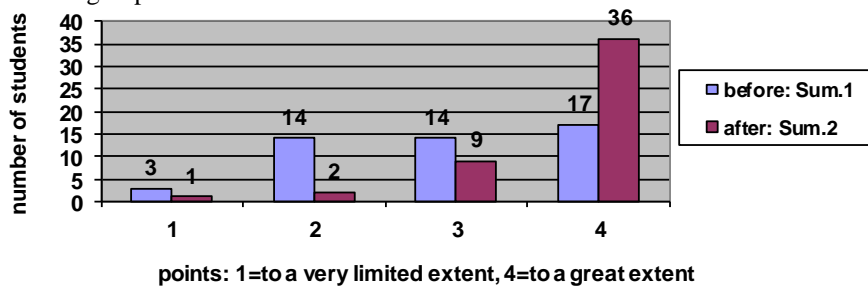


Fig. 1 Identifying the main argument: Experimental group scores (N=48)

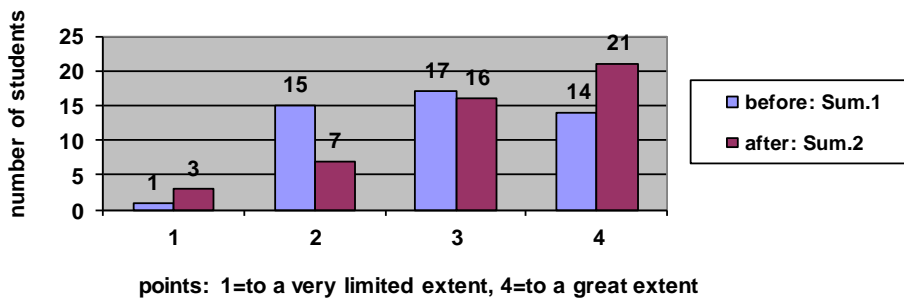


Fig. 2 Identifying the main argument: Control group scores (N=47)

In the experimental group (Figure 1), seventeen students (35%) received the highest mark (4) prior to the experiment; 36 (75%) received this mark on the second summary

⁴ All students were informed that they were taking part in an experiment and that their summaries would be assessed for experimental purposes only. They were not part of the assessment process, and did not receive feedback on the two summaries.

⁵ The fact that the control group also evidenced some improvement may possibly be attributed to the fact that the same type of exercise was repeated (albeit without instructor feedback in either the control or the experimental groups).

following the experiment. This is in contrast to the control group (Figure 2), where 14 (30%) received a mark of 4 on the first summary, and 21 (44%) on the second summary. The improvement in identifying the main idea in the group which went through the 'demystification' process was greater than that which did not; the claim for a possible connection between the demystification strategy and the improvement may be partially substantiated by a descriptive view of the opening sentences students used to express what they considered main arguments. Prior to the experimental lessons, most of the students in both the experimental and control groups opened with sentences which formulated one of the writer's subordinate ideas, rather than honing in on the main argument (in the experimental group 60%, and in the control group 65% of the students opened with subordinate statements). For example, in the first article they read (Murray, 2007), the writer argues that academic achievement is a function of innate intelligence and can only be improved within the limitations of static IQ. Most students opened with statements like the following, taken from original student work:

- The writer of this article distinguishes between education and intelligence.
- Our ability to improve the academic accomplishments of students is limited.
- The simple truth is: half of all children are below average in intelligence.
- Many people can't deal with the fact that half of all children are below average in intelligence.

The above statements support Murray's (2007) claim, rather than summarizing it (by showing the connection between low intelligence and achievement), as requested.

In the second article that students summarized (Vail, 2001), the writer argues society does not value intellect and complains that this is reflected in schools which value training and practicality above knowledge for its own sake. Like Murray's (2007) article, this article opens with a clear statement of stance, but is somewhat less clearly argumentative than the first, focusing on examples of anti-intellectualism and suggestions for combating it. Despite the increase in complexity of structure, students in the experimental group did a better job of expressing the main argument in their opening sentences (80% clearly focused on the main argument rather than supporting ideas), whereas the control group's opening sentences were somewhat less focused (only 60% successfully stated main argument in their opening sentence). The following are opening sentences taken from student summaries from the experimental group:

- Today in modern society schools are interested in practical knowledge only, students lose their ability to think about many subjects independently.
- The main idea of the article is to show how modern society today doesn't place a very high value on intellect.
- In the first paragraphs the writer talks about the importance of the intellect and its absence in American schools, then he put a comparison between native intelligence and intellect.

Note the difference between these and opening sentences taken from students in the control group, illustrated below, all of which relate to subordinate ideas from the text:

- The best way to make sure intellect can flower in a particular school is to start by taking a look at three areas: curriculum, teachers and school culture.
- The writer discusses the fact that schools only give students practical knowledge.
- Schools today aren't intellectual places, and they don't focus on literature, philosophy, etc.

The summaries written by the experimental group indicate heightened student awareness of academic texts presenting one main argument, evidenced by the clarity of representation of the writer's argument by the experimental group. Such an enhancement of the ability to follow argument structure and select relevant supporting ideas is suggested by the rise in the number of students who received higher scores (3 - 4) in both of these categories, in the experimental as compared to the control groups. These results are illustrated in the table below.

Table 1 Percentage of students receiving higher scores (3 - 4) for identifying supporting ideas and showing understanding of argument structure in the First and Second Summary

| Assessment category | Group | Summary 1 | Summary 2 |
|---|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Identifying supporting ideas | Experimental | 50% | 85% |
| | Control | 44% | 66% |
| Showing understanding of argument structure | Experimental | 34% | 72% |
| | Control | 30% | 47% |

In addition to effecting an improvement in the experimental group as indicated above, the demystification strategy appeared to have the strongest effect among the weaker students. In the first summary exercise, 60% of the control group received low grades (1 or 2) in the category of identifying supporting ideas, and only 30% of this group raised their grades to 3 or 4 in the second summary exercise, while in the experimental group, this figure doubled: of the 60% who received a grade of 1 or 2 in the first exercise in this category, 60% raised their grades to 3 or 4. However, these results, which indicate an improvement in the scores of the experimental group, must be accompanied by a caveat. Hebrew speakers in the experimental group improved, on average, by .82 of one point in their ability to identify argument structure; Arabic speakers by .40 of one point. It is possible that this difference may be attributed to factors which were not considered during the selection of the sample population. Hebrew speakers in the experimental group were from a largely secular and urban background, whereas Arabic speakers were from more traditional, religious and rural backgrounds. It was noted by both the researcher and the second reader that in summarizing, Arabic speakers tended to copy long blocks of text, rather than reconstructing the argument structure. Interestingly enough, the same tendency was noticeable in the Hebrew-speaking control group, which came from a Jewish religious college. Traditional cultures stress the importance of transmitting knowledge, not transforming it (or knowledge telling as opposed to knowledge transforming) (Fakhri, 2004), and a high value is placed on rote learning and repetition (Dudley-Evans & Swales, 1980). Thus, the summary may not present a completely accurate picture of these students' comprehension. The limitations of the methodological tools are discussed in the following section.

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Whereas both groups included Arabic and Hebrew speakers, the effect of variables such as 'religious' and 'secular' or 'rural' and 'urban' were not taken into account, and may have impacted upon the way in which students carried out the summarizing task. The fact that traditional, religious cultures view the written word as 'holy' and unchangeable may have made this task less appropriate for both Arabic and Hebrew speakers who came from such

backgrounds. Another factor which may have affected how Arabic speakers relate to differences in genre and register is the fact that they come from a diglossic society, with separate and distinct written and spoken languages.

In addition, the summary assessment rubric was the only quantifiable assessment tool used in this study, and a self-report questionnaire regarding the effect of the experimental lessons might have added an important perspective on the efficacy of the demystification strategy.

5. CONCLUSION: DEMYSTIFYING THE ARGUMENT FUNCTION

This study illustrates the benefits of using a familiar genre, the fable, to increase student awareness of a function for which they have the existing schema, the argument. The experimental lessons showed students that the function of the fable and the academic text were similar, and their writing of academic fables allowed them to integrate culturally familiar content within the target structure.

The exercise benefited the students in the experimental group on two levels. First, they discovered they were familiar with the purpose of presenting an argument in a genre which they knew well, and that recognizing an argument in an academic text was not as daunting as it may have seemed. Second, the participation in the academic fable exercise appeared to move students closer to their destination, academic discourse, by enabling them to use rhetorical features which characterize presentation of arguments in academic text, including presentation of main and supporting ideas through a series of moves and the use of metadiscourse.

5.1. Applications to EAP practice

In order to accomplish a successful change in approach to teaching EAP, first EAP teachers should reexamine the dominant-deficit model of instruction, where students are initiated into a world of which they are assumed to know nothing, thus distancing them and labeling them as outsiders. Legitimizing students' rhetorical heritage by including familiar genres within a course can promote students from observers to participants in the academic dialogue.

On a practical level, pursuing this process of legitimization can involve relating to students' points of departure in terms of rhetorical culture, rather than in terms of proficiency in second language. This can include asking questions about what types of texts they have read or heard and what type of texts they have written, which can be achieved through discussion or distribution of questionnaires prior to beginning a course of study. This information should be analyzed in relation to the target text, considering what similar function(s) or rhetorical structure(s) are shared by the target texts and texts familiar to students, and defining the structural differences between the two different types of text. As modeled in the experimental lessons, the fable served as a convenient point of entry, providing a platform for illustrating the peculiarities of the academic genre. Perhaps the most important aspect is that of teacher awareness. It is important that we, as teachers, be cognizant of the distance our EAP students must travel from their point of departure in their first language and first rhetorical culture, to their second language and academic rhetorical culture. In his call for a multicultural pedagogy of writing, Canagarajah (2006a) urges instructors: "... to treat the first language and culture

as a resource, not a problem. We will try to accommodate diverse literacy traditions - not keep them divided and separate. If we invoke differences in communities, this is not to discount their value, but to engage with them in order to find a strategic entry point to English.” (p. 603) This study has shown how the fable can be used as just such a strategic point of entry to the academic argument, while further research might investigate other text types that are familiar to students from different cultures in order to construct more accessible inroads to academic literacy.

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