

**BALEAP ResTes**  
**Knowledge and the EAP Practitioner: A Symposium**  
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***What knowledge do practitioners need to master to inform and direct not only their teaching but also, more broadly, their professional activities including understandings of academia in both its epistemological and sociological dimensions?***

- ***How do influential theories and research shape and/or constrain EAP praxis?***
- ***What are the limitations of established theories for practice?***
- ***What is gained and lost when theory is translated into pedagogy?***
- ***What else is needed?***

EAP is a discipline that is famously *needs-driven*, centrally focused on meeting the needs of students seeking to study or undertake research in English-medium university contexts. However, a significant lacuna in the theoretical and research literature of the field is a comprehensive understanding of *practitioner need*, specifically in relation to the knowledge base required both for EAP pedagogy and wider professional practice. In response to the questions posed for this symposium, this paper is a brief evaluation of the research streams that currently aim to inform the EAP practitioner knowledge base. My discussion is framed by a *social realist* theory of knowledge (Moore, 2013; Young, 2008, 2010). ‘Social realism’ distinguishes between knowledge and experience, theoretical and everyday knowledge, and it acknowledges that theoretical knowledge exists in particular domains or disciplines. As a basis for this brief review of the EAP practitioner knowledge base, I begin by defining the domain of EAP and proposing what I see as the overall goal of EAP courses.

As Champion (2016) notes, most definitions of EAP tend to be quite derivative, involving reformulations of earlier descriptions of the field and the range of knowledge that it was thought to include during different periods of its development. Probably the most widely-used definition is that of Flowerdew and Peacock (2001), which states that EAP is “the teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language” (p. 8). In this definition, EAP is described in terms of the end goals of its students. However, when trying to include the *process* of EAP teaching and learning as part of a contrastive definition (Ding & Bruce, forthcoming), I have proposed that EAP differs from the related field of TESOL in four respects; it involves:

- literacy rather than proficiency development;
- a central focus on discourse competence rather than on overall communicative competence;
- consideration of the academic rather than more general social uses of language; and,
- a commitment to the academy rather than to the wider society.

EAP, therefore, is concerned with language as it is embedded in the practices, discourses and texts of the academic world, a world that EAP students aspire to enter, or which they are already trying to navigate their way through. However, it needs to be emphasised that the focus of EAP is not just on language as the linguistic trace of a discourse process, but rather it is *the whole discourse process*, including the language, that is under consideration in EAP courses. This discourse process will include such influences on language use as context-related practices and expectations (including ideology), disciplinary epistemology and the forms of the conventionalized genres used for public communication, both through writing and speaking.

On the basis of this definition of the domain of EAP with its focus on both discourse process and outcome, I propose that the overall goal of EAP courses is students' development of *discourse competence* in order to communicate and participate in the previously-mentioned academic activities, such as study, teaching and research. Students may come to EAP with discourse competence in other domains along with knowledge of their subject discipline and its epistemology. However, their motivation for participating in EAP is to develop the necessary discourse competence to achieve particular academic goals, which may often include achieving a publication of some kind. The scale of this enterprise should not be underestimated when even a senior academic like Hyland (2016) states: "I am a relatively successful academic but do not feel I am privileged in publishing papers by speaking English as a first language, and certainly not when, as routinely happens, I spend 8 hours on a Sunday writing two paragraphs" (p. 10). Therefore, given the complexity and multi-faceted nature of this teaching and learning goal, it is important for EAP practitioners to have at their disposal a requisite knowledge base to support students in working towards this goal.

In order to operationalize discourse competence in a comprehensive way, I use Bhatia's (2004) concept of *discursive competence*, which he divides into the three areas of *social competence*, *generic competence* and *textual competence*. To facilitate the development of students' discursive competence, EAP practitioners draw upon different streams of theory and research, which contribute to the knowledge base for their practice. Here I use Bhatia's model as a framework to evaluate the current practitioner knowledge base for EAP in terms of what it includes and what it doesn't include.

The first area of Bhatia's model is social competence, which he says:

incorporates an ability to use language more widely to participate effectively in a variety of social and institutional contexts to give expression to one's social identity, *in the context of constraining social structures and social processes* [emphasis added] (2004, p. 144).

Several research streams are drawn upon by EAP writers and practitioners to inform understandings of social competence in relation to student needs. Here two – *Academic Literacies* and *Critical EAP* – are briefly considered in terms of what they contribute to the knowledge base of EAP, when considering the “constraining social processes and social structures” of academic contexts. Also while discussing this area of social competence, I would like to suggest areas of knowledge or enquiry that are currently largely absent from the current EAP literature.

Academic Literacies (Ac Lits) theorists and researchers emphasize the importance of “socially situated accounts of writing and text production. [They] also draw attention to the ways in which power and identity are inscribed in literacy practices” (Lillis, Harrington, Lea & Mitchell, 2016, p. 4). Studies have investigated ideology, power relations, and other constraints of the academic environments within which students are required to write (Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Stierer, 2000). Ac Lits theorists claim that the main focus is on the writer or interpreter of texts rather than the texts themselves and that its approach has a *transformative* rather than a *normative* orientation. Recently the Ac Lits notion of *transformative practice* has been explored in a collection of case studies edited by Lillis et al (2016), a collection that brings together a wide variety of pedagogical practices and views. Among the contributions, ‘transformative’ is interpreted broadly to include aspects of student engagement, the pedagogy employed by the teacher and advocacy for change to institutional practices and attitudes that relate to writing.

*Critical EAP* (CEAP), according to its leading proponent, Benesch (2001), asserts that EAP classes, as well as being based on needs analysis, should also take account of *rights analysis*, discovered by performing critical ethnographic investigations of students’ study contexts. Rights analysis, she suggests, provides a “framework for understanding and responding to the power relations” that students will encounter in academic courses (p. 108). Informed by the ‘rights analysis’ of an educational context, EAP teachers will assist students to develop the capacity to question and resist both the content and method of delivery of the disciplinary courses that they are taking. Following such an approach, the classroom is seen as a site of struggle where students are involved in shaping what takes place by their active participation and resistance.

In terms of how these theories inform the development of social competence, both encourage awareness of the micro-level institutional or disciplinary power relations that affect the work of students and researchers. Ac Lits focuses on power relations and practices surrounding the creation and reception of academic texts. Through ethnographic interviews, they aim to uncover attitudes, barriers and gatekeeping practices. CEAP, through critical ethnography, identifies and encourages student awareness of power relations that surround the constitution and delivery of students’ courses. Essentially both theories inform EAP practitioner knowledge of contextual issues, which may translate into the ways in which they support and guide students in their responses to the institutional structures and requirements, responses that may include resistance to, and even renegotiation of those requirements.

However, in relation to EAP praxis in this area of social competence, neither theory addresses the larger, macro-level, social and economic forces that shape universities and the work and study lives of EAP practitioners and their students.

These influences are not new, but have been largely ignored in the literature of EAP. They include neoliberal economics, new public management (NPM) systems applied to universities (see Rhodes, 1994), and the financialization of knowledge. They impose economic imperatives on universities and EAP units within universities, imperatives that directly influence EAP courses, their duration, practitioner employment conditions and their access to, and participation in scholarship and research that inform EAP. Such imperatives may result in the privatization of provision, the commodification of course offerings and the imposition of workload constraints that make it difficult for practitioners to carry out, or even connect with scholarship and research in their field. Thus, in relation to the domain of social competence, it seems that, while the knowledge base of EAP practitioners (drawing on Ac Lits and CEAP) focuses on student needs to navigate the processes and requirements that surround academic courses, it fails to address practitioner need in relation to developing awareness of their own identity and agency in the academic world by not providing any type of systematic focus on wider the contextual issues and processes (both political and economic) that frame and influence EAP as a field of academic study and their own practice in the field.

The second area in Bhatia's discursive competence model is that of generic competence, which:

means the ability to identify, construct, interpret and successfully exploit a specific repertoire of professional, disciplinary or workplace genres to participate in the daily activities and to achieve the goals of a specific professional community (2004, p. 145)

Genre theory refers to the different approaches that have been used to categorize and analyse conventionalized written texts and other language events. Two streams of genre research have contributed to EAP; these are the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach to genre, based on Swales work (1990, 1998, 2004) and the approach to genre influenced by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Martin, 1984; Martin & Rose, 2008). Of the two, it is the Swalesian approach to genre that is probably best known and has had the largest influence on EAP and classroom practitioner knowledge. Relevant genre studies have focused on the types of spoken and written text that EAP students are typically required to produce, such as lab reports, research articles, dissertations and oral presentations. However, an area of concern is how these approaches operationalize genre knowledge – what they include and, importantly, what they don't include. Traditionally, ESP genre analyses focus on the staging of the content of texts, such as through *move* structures (and sometimes through sub-moves, called *steps*), which are sometimes characterized in terms of their use of linguistic features. However, I have previously argued for a wider operationalization of genre knowledge, proposing that it include: the context within which a text occurs; the epistemology of the discipline of the text; addressivity and audience, such as the use of metadiscourse devices; content staging; and, use of text types (stretches of text that fulfil a general rhetorical purpose), such as argue, explain, recount (Bruce, 2011).

- **Context** – In relation to context, most genre studies tend to provide only general descriptions of the professional or academic backgrounds within which the target genres occur although more recent ESP studies provide

detailed ethnographic descriptions of context (e.g. Paltridge, 2004; Paltridge, Starfield & Ravelli, 2012 )

- **Epistemology** - The epistemology of the specific field within which genres occur rarely receives attention in these studies, apart from some of Bhatia's work on professional genres and some of the North American Rhetorical Genre Studies work, which usually fall outside of the interest of EAP.
- **Addressivity and audience** - as reflected in the metadiscourse use of language has not usually been included as part of genre knowledge. However, an upcoming conference on the use of metadiscourse in different genres has acknowledged this need.
- **Content staging** - An obligatory focus in most of the studies is content staging, such as a schematic structure or moves and steps. This element is salient in the characterization of smaller, more formulaic genres, but not for larger more extended categories of text, such as extended university essays (e.g. Bruce, 2010, 2016)
- **Text types (variously called rhetorical functions, elemental genres, cognitive genres)** – tend to be ignored in ESP approaches to genre. In SFL they are acknowledged and related to the use of linguistic elements.

For EAP practitioners, the gap in this area of the knowledge base that needs to be interrogated here is how conventional theories of genre operationalize genre knowledge as a basis for pedagogy, what they include and importantly what they do not include. While the notion of a genre-based approach to EAP is to equip students as discourse analysts with the tools to negotiate and deconstruct the genres of their discipline, it is important that the analytical tool kit that practitioners have at their disposal (to offer insights to students) has the potential to operationalize genre knowledge more broadly than has been the case in the past, especially in earlier studies. This may suggest that research that is based on genre theory needs to begin with broader frameworks that can account for a wider range of the knowledge types that may *potentially* be included in any operationalization of a genre.

The third area of discursive competence is textual competence.

[Textual competence] represents not only an ability to master the linguistic code, but also an ability to use textual, contextual and pragmatic knowledge to construct and interpret . . . texts (Bhatia, 2004, pp. 144-145).

In relation to textual competence, I would like to make some brief comments about corpus linguistics and systemic functional linguistics, both being important research streams that contribute to the EAP knowledge base.

Corpus linguistics is not a theory of language as such, but refers to analytical methods whereby large samples of naturally-occurring language (corpora) are subjected to computer-mediated analysis. An important contribution of corpus linguistics to EAP has been research that identifies the vocabulary necessary to function in academic contexts in the form of word lists, such as Coxhead's *Academic Wordlist* (2006), and Gardner and Davies' *Academic Vocabulary List* (2014). As well as vocabulary knowledge, corpus methods have proven a useful tool for EAP for providing empirical linguistic data, such as collocational knowledge.

In terms of its contribution to the knowledge base of EAP, studies that draw upon Systemic Functional linguistics provide fine-grained analyses that highlight the use of linguistic features in particular social or disciplinary contexts. An example of this type of analysis is Halliday's diachronic research on scientific texts (1990/2002, pp. 169-173), in which he found a predominance of nominalisations and causal relations. Particular lexico-grammatical features are related to contextual elements (through register theory) and may contribute to textual competence knowledge.

In relation to developing textual competence, corpus and SFL studies offer insights into the occurrence and structuring of linguistic features. However, the issue often for the EAP practitioner is applying the micro-level findings of some of these research studies back into specific contexts and the conventionalized genres that they are required to teach. As Bhatia's description of linguistic competence suggests, such findings need to be integrated with contextual and pragmatic knowledge. Studies that combine genre and corpus methods go some way in addressing this issue.

As was stated at the outset, EAP is a needs-driven activity; student need is described here in terms of the overall goal of the field of developing discursive competence in academic contexts. The corollary practitioner need, therefore, is for a knowledge base that is fit for purpose, given the multi-faceted nature of the overall educational goal. To date, through the extant accumulating and diverse knowledge base of EAP, much effort has been made (through research and documented pedagogical practice) to inform and support the student discursive competence goal. However, as has been emphasized here, it is important to continue to evaluate critically what the current EAP knowledge base does and does not include so that its gaps are identified and explored as a basis for new areas for scholarly activity and research. Also, in order that the knowledge base is not static and reified around a small number of key theories or research methods, it is important that this evaluative process is ongoing, and that it also involves identifying and resisting structural influences and behaviours that may lead to a sclerotization of the EAP knowledge base. Such issues may include: a lack of clarity around the fundamental constructs of the field, unresolved/unresolvable binary debates (e.g. Ac Lits vs EAP); an uncritical canonization of the ideas of luminaries/prominent figures, both from EAP and cognate disciplines, and a narrowing focus around the particular theoretical and research preferences of the editorial boards of key journals. EAP is now over 40 years old and it is important that its practitioner knowledge base continues to develop and that it remains relevant through an ongoing process of critique, renewal and the exploration of new ideas, with the widest possible community engagement in this process.

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