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Preface

Academic Communication in Today's World–Knowledge Production and Dissemination through Written Texts

As highlighted by the numerous changes mandated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the modern-day academic is something of a plate-spinner, feverishly juggling research, teaching, and administration with myriad other professional and personal tasks. The forced move to online teaching, the temporary closure of institutions across the world, and the ongoing need for social distancing have affected academia considerably in a short space of time. As such, it is clear that these changing modalities will have a long-lasting impact on academic communication for years to come.

In terms of spoken communication, travel restrictions have largely forced conferences and symposia to move online, principally in the form of e-conferences, where presenters share their research findings via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or other such platforms. In terms of written

communication, however, it is important to consider how the current COVID-19 related changes are impacting – and undoubtedly will continue to impact – academia as a whole. This links directly with many controversial aspects of the contemporary academic environment, including the famous "publish or perish" dictum, as well as the increased focus on individual and department rankings, institutional demands regarding scholarly productivity, and the importance of publishing in the "right" journals. Whereas in the past academics may have chosen to focus their activities on lecturing or administration, and therefore may have published comparatively few works in numerical terms (think of de Saussure, for example), the modern scholar is subject to appraisals and bibliometric analyses, as well as to the inherent precariousness of a career in contemporary academia. In this context, the concept of 'an ivory-tower scholar', an expression conventionally associated with an isolated academic, who enjoys freedoms in conducting and disseminating their research, has become a thing of the past. We agree with Duszak that these fundamental freedoms which were once considered an absolute right of science and involved "freedom of expression, freedom to choose ontological and epistemological models, freedom to choose the subject of research, freedom of communication and cooperation, and freedom of association (…) are now perceived as a handicap" (Duszak, 2015, p. 9).

The above mentioned constrains in the production and dissemination of academic knowledge, along with the fact that English has become an academic pre-requisite, are particularly problematic for scholars working outside the Anglophone world. They are under pressure to publish in English, which for many academics may be

a second, third, or even fourth language. This development has affected how universities and governments approach their roles in the global academic world, with many countries introducing legislation to strongly direct academics to publish in English, the most recent being the introduction of the reform of the science and higher education system in Poland (2017–2019) which declared that only publications from indexed databases would be considered in the career advancements of Polish scientists.

However, framing publication problems as a crude Native vs non-Native polarization would be a considerable oversimplification as "writing as an L1 English scholar does not guarantee a successful publishing career" (Hyland, 2016, p. 66). Undoubtedly, there are two things that need to be considered here; namely, linguistic proficiency in English and (2) off-network participation in global scholarship (Hyland, 2016, p. 66) Many first language English and English as an additional language (EAL) academics are often unaware of the most important conversations within their disciplines which means that their participation and research outputs do not resonate with current conversations or debates in the global academic communities in their specific fields. This dooms them to off-network participation, which effectively means that they operate outside their international disciplinary community where "academics craft their identities, cement relationships, achieve recognition and acquire the specialised discourse competencies to participate as members" (Hyland, 2019, p. 8).

This preamble highlights the central topic of the present issue; namely, what is the changing role of written academic communication in today's world? A key point shared by both the editors and the authors is

that academic disciplines are socio-cultural constructs in that there is an inextricable relation between doing and reporting research and the social, cultural and cognitive aspects of this endeavour. It is considered within the recent and major shifts in the contexts of the conception, production and diffusion of academic research, which mainly include the internationalisation of scholarly production and the role of English in international publications.

The idea for this theme originated in growing criticism of scholarly publications as ineffective in communicating disciplinary knowledge and beliefs, (e.g., Grey, & Sinclair, 2006; Kiriakos, & Tienari, 2018; Gilmore et al., 2019; Pullen, Helin, & Harding, 2020; Tourish, 2020); thus, negatively affecting the development and spread of relevant research and practice at the global level. Discussion on the ways scholarly writers present research, ideas and argumentation has been coherently captured in Grey and Sinclair's treatise entitled "Writing differently" (2006), in which they accentuate the lack of consideration of a global readership in academic publications. The dominant discourse of the neoliberal, Western university (Holliday, 2021) and the reader-excluding rhetorical style that scholarly writers tend to employ these days seems to be "driven by desires to demonstrate one's cleverness, or to accrue publications as ends in themselves" (Grey, & Sinclair, 2006, p. 443). They identify three areas writers need to reflect on and take into account in order to create a more outward-looking, reader-aware writing style which involves considering aesthetic, ethical and political factors.

The commonality between the work of Grey and Sinclair and the premise underlying the respective papers in this issue is the recognition that the rhetorical strategies we employ to communicate our scholarly

ideas and beliefs need to be audience-sensitive. On the one hand, this premise is in contrast with the currently prevailing Centre-Western discourses of prejudice "in which we in the West imagine that we need to teach people from the rest of the world to be individualist, critical and autonomous, denying any cultural ability that they bring with them" (Holliday, p. 26 in this issue; Holliday, 2019, pp. 128–129; Holliday, & Amadasi, 2020, pp. 17–20), and "the assumption that scientific discourse is universal and language- and culture-independent" (Vassileva, p. 66 in this issue; Vassileva, 1995; 2002). But on the other hand, it is supported by novel developments in digital communication which open "new avenues of dissemination of knowledge and communication with diversified audiences in the understanding that knowledge is a public good" (Lorés, p. 54 in this issue), as well as "the momentous changes we have seen in academic practices (which will hopefully) influence the ways knowledge is constructed and disseminated in the pages of academic research articles" (Hyland, p. 42 in this issue) (insert in brackets ours).

The ability to engage the reader both intellectually and emotionally is crucial to the effective dissemination of disciplinary knowledge. As Hyland and Lehman argue in the previous issue of *Discourses on Culture*, "the reader's perspective is a dominant element of the 'rhetorical situation'; it is critical not only in the affect it has on the way writers construct meaning and present their knowledge claims, but also in the perceived assessment of the text as a contribution to the scientific landscape of their shared academic discipline" (Hyland, & Lehman, 2020, p. 9). This relational aspect of written discourse has been also emphasised by Ahonen et al., who state that writing "begins as

a relationship between people and it ends as a relationship between people" (2020, p. 459).

By recognising that academic writers are actual people who write for actual people – their readers – the contributions to this issue combat the 'dysfunction in academia' (see also Habibie, 2019), the forms of which have been listed in a tongue-in-cheek manner by Antonakis and include "a rapacious appetite for statistically significant results ("significosis"), an incessant desire for novelty ("neophilia"), a zeal for new theory ("theorrhea"), a paucity of rigor in theory generation and testing ("arigorium") and a tendency to produce lots of trite, fragmented, and disjointed work ("disjunctivitis") (Antonakis, 2017, p. 2). And last but not least, the persistence of many academic authors in failing to change the rhetorical aspects of their writing is a serious impediment to the effective dissemination of new ideas and research.

In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of Discourses on Culture, this thematic issue brings together five eminent specialists in academic communication who each represent different research traditions and approaches. In presenting a series of research reports written in an accessible style, it is intended to provide a starting point for wider debate on the topic of written academic communication.

In his contribution, **Professor Adrian Holliday (Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom)** highlights his move away from projects based on traditional interview-based data towards more holistic approaches where the researcher plays a greater role. Building on his own concepts of essentialist "blocks" and hybridised "threads", his current research involves work using (auto)ethnographic perspectives on Centre-Western peripheries, which includes the relationship between

English and culture, as well as the use of Third Space methodology to explore his own experiences in Iran in the 1970s.

In recent times, **Professor Ken Hyland (University of East Anglia, United Kingdom)** has been exploring diachronic changes in academic writing, notably through comparing the rhetoric used in academic publications in the sciences and the humanities. In addition, he has also examined how issues such as multiple authorship, access to online journals, and fragmentation and specialisation within disciplines are impacting the rhetoric of academic communication, noting that a general trend is that there is less reader engagement, and that this change has arisen in the light of given contextual circumstances.

As noted above, the current academic context in many countries reflects the growing global pressure for scholars to publish in English. This is a particular research interest of **Professor Irena Vassileva (New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria)**, who focuses on the issues non-native speakers are confronted with when submitting manuscripts to English-language journals. Indeed, her findings illustrate that not only excellent language skills are required, but also in-depth knowledge of relevant rhetorical structures and of the Anglo-American academic tradition, aspects which may cause challenges to academics with other scholarly backgrounds. In addition, another area of her recent research – pertinent in these times of pandemic – relates to academic communication in the multimedia environment, which has illustrated how scholars use digital and other relevant media in new and different ways.

Indeed, the omnipresence of digital electronic devices and platforms forms a central part of recent research conducted by **Dr Rosa Lorés (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)**. Notably, she uses tools from

corpus linguistics to analyse the rhetorical structures and interpersonal markers used in online conference announcements. In exploring the multimodal and interactive nature of contemporary digital communication, she has observed how academics project their scholarly identities and interact with colleagues on digital platforms such as Linguist List, increasing the visibility of their research at the global level.

The final contribution to the main topic of this issue is by **Dr Simon Williams (University of Sussex, United Kingdom)**. In his review of a chapter by Gadomska and Szwed (2020), Williams appreciates the originality of their empirical study; however, he critiques their assertion that the effectiveness of a given translation can be linked to universal notions of style and lack of current developments in their discussion related to English and Polish writing styles.

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