Academic Writing Development as a Socialization Process: Implications for EAP Education in Japan

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Abstract

In spite of the increasing demand for courses that assist Japanese students to have successful academic experiences in their overseas studies, little is known about what is needed to ensure success in students' studies abroad and how to better prepare them for their future academic experiences overseas. Given the emphasis on writing placed in academia, this paper focuses on academic writing and views academic writing development as a socialization process into academic communities. In order to find what the academic literacy socialization process entails, previous studies on students' academic literacy socialization processes in North American university settings were reviewed, and important issues from those studies identified. Based on these issues, specific suggestions relevant to areas of EAP writing instruction in Japanese university settings are discussed.

Introduction

Despite the ever-increasing number of Japanese students pursuing their academic degrees in English-medium institutions overseas, little is known about how to assist students to succeed in

achieving their academic goals in their studies abroad. Among various areas of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) studies, writing is the one which needs the greatest attention because it is usually through writing that people's academic abilities are evaluated through publications such as books and journal articles.

Throughout students' academic lives, the ability to write well is essential to success. For example, in U.S. higher education, Leki and Carson (1994) refer to the great emphasis placed on writing stating that many university courses "evaluate students through some form of written text (e.g., essay exams, short-answer essays, research papers)" and that the "[a]bility to write well is necessary both to achieve academic success and to demonstrate that achievement" (p. 83). Thus, it is important that EAP teachers in Japan, Thailand, and elsewhere figure out ways to help students develop academic writing abilities in English to ensure success in their future overseas studies. In order to do so, it is critical for EAP teachers to decide on how to view academic writing abilities and their development.

Advanced academic literacy studies suggest that students' academic literacy development can be viewed as "socialization" into the academic communities to which they belong. According to Morita (2004), there are two lines of research on socialization in academic writing: one focuses on the "product," and the other on the "process." Studies focusing on the product connect written texts with the concept of academic discourse communities. A "discourse community" (see Swales, 1990, for a detailed definition), is conceptualized as a thought collective, or like-minded peers, sharing the same underlying assumptions, communicative purposes, and rhetorical conventions, and it is not necessarily constrained by physical boundaries. Concrete examples of discourse communities in academia, that is, academic discourse communities, include specific academic disciplines and subdisciplines. The popular area of EAP studies in this line of research is the genre-based approach (e.g., Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994, 2000), which identifies textual features of various genres of academic writing (e.g., abstracts, research papers) and connects them with social and communicative purposes within specific academic discourse communities. In this line of research,

academic socialization refers to students' mastery of rhetorical features specific to the expectations of their academic discourse communities.

The other line of research on socialization in academic writing attends to the process in which students are socialized. Those studies do refer to "communities," but their concept of communities is related to the framework of "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) in which members participate in social practice under and toward a joint enterprise. The communities of practice in which students participate include university classrooms, academic programs, and departments. Even disciplines and subdisciplines can constitute communities of practice, but it is students' participation in the practices of those communities (e.g., discussing discipline-specific issues with fellow students and professors in the discipline) that makes those communities real. The concept of community of practice is different from that of an academic discourse community, which implies that the abstract notion of the community is there, regardless of students' interaction with or involvement in it. In the process-oriented studies, academic writing is viewed as "situated social practice" (Casanave, 2002), an activity situated in various communities of practice. Authors in this line of research (e.g., Casanave, 2002; Prior, 1998; Spack, 1997) go beyond the investigation of the act of writing itself but extend their attention to what writers bring to their writing and what they do and think during their interaction in their writing contexts. For example, they attend to how writers' prior knowledge and experience affect their writing and how they interpret and deal with various social, cultural, and even political expectations of their local communities of practice and incorporate those expectations into their writing. They also investigate how writers interact with people in their communities of practice (e.g., peers, professors, tutors) and how their interaction with those people affect and shape their writing.

Studies with the process-oriented approach contribute greatly to the field of EAP; they give us clues to understand why students do not demonstrate uniform success in their academic writing development and what contributes to success and difficulty in their academic socialization. They help us realize that it is not

enough to view academic socialization simply as "a one-way assimilation into a relatively stable academic community with fixed rules and conventions" (Morita, 2004, p. 574), which is implied by the product-oriented approach. We need to add a view of academic socialization as a dynamic and highly complex process involving individual writers' engagement in their communities of practice.

Although the product-oriented approach is probably easier to understand and put into practice, it is the process-oriented approach of academic socialization, which has been lacking in Japanese EAP contexts and thus needs much more attention. The purpose of this study is to suggest areas where EAP writing instruction in Japan may better assist students in making a smooth transition into their overseas studies. In the next section, a review of relevant literature on the process-oriented approach is presented. Based on the literature review, specific suggestions are made in regard to EAP writing instruction in Japan which may also be relevant elsewhere.

Review of relevant literature

In order to find out what is expected of Japanese students in their academic socialization processes in their future overseas studies, the review of literature presented in this section focuses on students' academic literacy experiences in undergraduate and graduate courses in English-medium institutions, mainly in North American universities. The studies presented here all employed a naturalistic qualitative inquiry methodology which involved in-depth and interpretive analyses of students' academic socialization processes situated in their local contexts of writing. A case-study approach was used where only one or a small number of participants were investigated over an extended period of time, ranging from one semester to three years depending on the purpose and goal of the study. In order to enhance "triangulation," (Merriam, 1988) that is, complementing the strengths and weaknesses of different methods, data were collected from multiple sources in these case studies. The data sources included interviews with students and the professors for whose courses the students were writing, class observations, and written documents such as the course syllabus and handouts on guidelines of specific writing

assignments provided by the professors, students' reading notes, drafts and final submissions of their written assignments, and their professors' written comments on the final submissions.

As noted by Casanave (2002), case studies provide rich details of individual students' experiences through academic writing, but due to their detail and complexity, they do not offer an unambiguous answer to the larger issues of students' academic socialization. For example, we cannot expect that the findings of these case studies will apply to all Japanese students and that the recommendations made will lead to more effective EAP writing instruction which would be appropriate for the entire Japanese student population. Instead of discussing "generalizability" as we might in quantitative studies, we need to treat the findings from these case studies in terms of "transferability" (Lincoln & Guba, 2002), that is, leave the reader to decide whether particular findings are relevant and applicable to their situations. In order to find links between the findings in these case studies and EAP writing instruction in the Japanese context, a review of the case studies is presented according to important issues based around the studies' findings. Those issues are categorized under the following three topics: (A) students' engagement in their local communities of practice; (B) students' use and development of strategies; and (C) students' views and analyses of their linguistic and cultural background. Subtopics are included under each topic in order to further clarify the focus of the findings in each category.

A. Students' engagement in their local communities of practice: Shared experiences by native and nonnative English speakers

One of the major points coming out of studies on students' academic socialization processes is diversity: diversity in the contexts in which students are engaged in academic writing tasks; diversity in the kinds of writing tasks they deal with; and diversity in individual students' approaches to specific writing tasks. Moreover, this diversity is not unique to nonnative English-speaking (NNES) students. In fact, studies introduced in this section investigated the experiences of both native English-speaking and

NNES students who were in the same courses and graduate programs.

Prior (1998) highlighted the diversity to be found in the academic literacy practices in several graduate seminars (e.g., Geography, American Studies, Language Research) at a U.S. university, where students were engaged in multiple writing tasks. Each of the seminars was shaped by different objectives and activities reflecting different professors' styles and course goals. Based on the need for historical, contextual, local, and situated analyses of academic reading and writing practices, Prior thoroughly documented how students' written texts were created and shaped by their interaction with all the particularities involved in the specific tasks, including the students' perceived goals for particular tasks and professors' specific responses to emerging texts.

Prior's (1998) documentations are detailed, extensive, and thorough, and thus it is not easy to summarize his entire study in one paragraph or two. Still, some of the findings and issues from his study which are pertinent to students' academic literacy socialization include the following. Even in the same graduate seminar, students can demonstrate quite different modes of participation. For example, in the cases of two NNES students in one graduate seminar, one student, who preferred to remain silent and worked in isolation, handled the task of writing a research proposal simply as an assignment for the seminar. Her master's thesis which developed from this assignment lacked adequate synthesis and integration of her sources. In addition, there was a serious problem of extensive textual borrowing (quotation). She did not solicit help and guidance from her thesis committee members in her research process. The other student, in contrast, treated the task in the seminar as research, actively seeking guidance from both inside and outside the seminar. Her master's thesis developed from this seminar assignment and she received assistance from a wide range of people including her committee members. As a result, the content and organization of her thesis could be described as "reaching toward that of a dissertation" (Prior, 1998, p. 132). Prior attributed these differences between the two students not solely to the differences in their competencies or personalities, but more

importantly, to the differences in the extent to which they sought interactions with others and solicited help from them; that is, their relationships with others in "relevant communities of practices" (Prior, 1998, p. 133). Based on an analysis of data about another graduate seminar, Prior also noted that students constructed task representations differently; they interpreted the particular tasks they were engaged in and made representations of them not only by reading and understanding the guidelines for assignments given in the course syllabus but also by attending to the professor's expectations, which students implicitly learned through interaction with the professor during the course of the seminar.

Casanave (1995) also investigated graduate students' academic socialization processes by closely examining how students were actually engaged in academic writing practices for the courses they took at a U.S. university. Casanave worked closely for 18 months with three first-year doctoral students in sociology, who were an American, an English-Spanish bilingual Puerto Rican, and a Chinese student. She found that students' academic socialization was embedded in their daily academic writing practices and also connected to learning about the wider community within the sociology discipline. In their daily academic practices, since different professors had different beliefs about and orientations towards sociology, they learned to write differently for different professors as a "survival strategy." As part of their survival strategies, students constructed their own contexts of writing; more specifically, their perceptions of individual professors' personal qualities affected how they approached the particular writing assignments, such as feeling distant and impersonal toward the writing tasks designed by the professors they perceived as arrogant and elitist while feeling less threatened by statistics writing assignments provided by the professors who were warm, supportive and approachable in their views. Moreover, students discussed extensively with their first-year cohort group peers from whom they also sought help with course assignments and writing tasks. They also consulted a teaching assistant and upper-year colleagues who helped them with their writing assignments. Casanave (1995) claims that it was students' interaction with these people with

whom they had regular contact that shaped their academic socialization.

Casanave (2002) reports on another case study of five female master's level students, two Japanese, two Americans, and one Armenian, in a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program at a U.S. university. The findings revealed that students were engaged in a wide variety of academic writing tasks ranging from lesson plans, reading response journals, position papers to research proposals and research papers. Writing played a central role in ensuring success in this graduate program. Moreover, students adjusted to individual professors, who gave different amounts of explicit guidance in laying out their expectations for individual writing assignments. The professors also gave different amounts of feedback on students' writing with some providing detailed comments about the content and others only making surface-level corrections (typos, grammar). The year-long study also revealed that the literacy-related practices in which students were engaged in the program all contributed to students' change of identity: from the identity of students to that of second language teachers who were members of the TESOL professional community.

The studies introduced so far closely investigated what students actually did in their engagement in academic writing practices for their courses and programs. They reveal that students' engagement in daily academic practices are characterized by various particularities (individual courses, professors, specific assignments, and students' views of each assignment and professor) and interactions with other people (e.g., peers, professors, teaching assistants), all of which shaped their academic socialization process. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the findings from these studies are not limited to NNES students. What those studies imply is how and to what extent individual students, whether they are from the target academic setting or not, are involved in the practices of the communities they belong to and how important this is to their academic socialization.

B. Students' use and development of strategies: Experiences of NNES students

While students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds were not highlighted in association with academic socialization in the studies in the previous section, studies introduced here focus on NNES students' experiences and categorize their conscious endeavors in dealing with daily academic writing tasks in light of "strategies," which refer to specific actions that students consciously and deliberately utilize in order to effectively perform specific academic literacy tasks.

Leki (1995) identified "coping strategies" which five NNES undergraduate and graduate students (two Chinese, one Taiwanese, one French, and one Finnish) developed in their first semester at a U.S. university to deal with the work load in their courses. Leki's findings show that students came to the U.S. equipped with resources they could utilize to help them cope with their new academic experiences in the U.S.; they utilized strategies of "Relying on past writing experiences," "Taking advantage of first language/culture," and "Using current and past ESL writing training" (p. 240). Moreover, students showed attentiveness to their new environment and creativity and flexibility in responding to the new demands of academic writing tasks. The names of specific strategies they employed and the examples of each strategy are as follows: "Clarifying strategies" (e.g., talking with professors and other students to understand the assignments better); "Looking for models" (e.g., finding published sources to imitate the format and organization styles of the writing in which they were engaged); "Accommodating teachers' demands" (e.g., meeting the requirements imposed by the professors); "Resisting teachers' demands" (e.g., noncompliance to the requirements by the professors due to students' desire to pursue their own best interests); and "Managing competing demands" (e.g., pacing their work load, balancing high and low investment in specific assignments) (The names of each strategy were taken from Leki, 1995, p. 240). Students also demonstrated that they varied the strategies they employed according to the specifics of various situations.

While Leki's study applied the concept of strategies to students' wide range of academic experience related to writing, other studies focus more narrowly on the strategies students employ in their specific act of reading and writing. Riazi (1997), for example, investigated "composing strategies" employed by four Iranian doctoral students at a Canadian university and identified "cognitive," "metacognitive," "social," and "search" strategies. Cognitive strategies involved students' mental or physical manipulation of the materials to be used in writing, such as the acts of taking notes of reading sources and connecting new information with prior knowledge. Metacognitive strategies concerned planning (e.g., making outlines), monitoring, and evaluating in executing writing processes. Social strategies involved interaction with other people to facilitate performing the task, such as receiving feedback from professors and peers. Search strategies covered finding supporting sources in preparing for writing assignments, including utilizing library resources (books, journals, electronic sources) and looking at other people's writing (e.g., peers' writing).

Fujioka (1999), as part of a large study, also identified cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies employed by Japanese students while preparing and writing research papers for graduate courses in the U.S. Going beyond identifying strategies, Fujioka (2002) further discussed how students actually developed strategies, focusing on two participants who demonstrated highly analytical approaches to their strategy development from the 1999 study. These two students showed that they were highly attentive to specific experiences in their daily academic practices, including professors' guidance on how to approach specific class assignments and consultations with their peers and writing tutors. They actively utilized those experiences to develop specific strategies which they needed.

While the studies above focus on academic experiences of NNES students from various cultural backgrounds, there are studies which address issues unique to Japanese students' experiences in dealing with academic writing tasks in English.

C. Students' views and analyses of their linguistic and cultural background: Experiences of Japanese students

Fujioka (2000) found that students' perceptions of English and Japanese writing influenced their approaches to specific writing tasks in a semester-long study of seven Japanese graduate students' experiences at a U.S. university. The students struggled to conform to the expected structures of research papers in English due to differences in the rhetorical conventions of written English and Japanese. They characterized English rhetorical conventions as deductive and having tight connections between the introduction and the conclusion, and Japanese rhetorical patterns as inductive and having a gradual development of ideas toward the conclusion. Although these observations coincide with the characterization of the two languages' preferred general rhetorical patterns made by previous researchers (e.g., Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1996), students confused different genres of academic discourse (research papers) in English and non-academic discourse (general writing) in Japanese, due to their lack of exposure to and engagement in Japanese academic discourse. Some of the students also found initial difficulty understanding the reader's needs when writing in English due to culturally loaded assumptions, that is, a high degree of shared understanding between the writer and the reader in Japanese texts and readers' responsibility to understand the text in Japanese writing. Along with these difficulties associated with Japanese linguistic and cultural background, students encountered difficulty in effectively organizing information from reading sources due to their lack of previous training in academic literacy practices in Japan. Despite these difficulties in learning to write research papers in English, the study found that the students learned to cope by being resourceful (e.g., making outlines in order to conform to the expected discourse patterns of English, using index cards to organize information from reading sources) and utilizing feedback on their writing (e.g., identifying readers' needs based on their professors' and writing tutors' comments on their writing), a finding that concurs with the findings of strategy studies.

Spack (1997) traced the academic socialization process of a Japanese undergraduate student at a U.S. college over three years, focusing on her reading and writing experiences dealing with

specific assignments in mainly social science courses. Along with the student's development of effective reading strategies, this longitudinal study also revealed that the student's educational background and cross-cultural perspectives on writing drawn from Japan/ Japanese and U.S./English contributed to the shaping of the student's learning experiences with regard to academic writing in addition to her experiences in the literacy practices of her disciplinary courses. Based on her experience up till high school in Japan, the student, Yuko, initially perceived that Japanese writing was simply a repetition of ideas from sources while U.S. writing emphasized creativity and originality on the part of the writer. As she experienced the tasks of presenting information from sources in academic writing practices in the U.S., she changed her perception that U.S. writing depended more on the writer's opinions and less on sources. During that learning process, she first encountered difficulty transforming the ideas from her reading sources into her writing, a problem that most students confront, in Spack's view. Although she resorted to heavy reliance on quotation at first, Yuko gradually learned to move away from simply repeating the authors' words by simply summarizing reading sources and became able to express others' ideas in her own words, as she was engaged in guided reading and writing practices through her course assignments.

In summary, the case studies on students' academic socialization in North American university settings suggest that socialization was embedded in students' daily academic literacy practices characterized by particularities and localities. This experience was shared by all students regardless of their cultural background. While responding to all the particularities involved in their daily academic literacy practices, Japanese students at the same time brought their own views and analyses of their linguistic and cultural background and prior literacy experiences into their processes to deal with specific writing tasks. When encountering difficulties, Japanese students, like other international students, generated ways to overcome difficulties by developing strategies based on their interaction with various resources including other people in their communities. It is this process of engagement in the

communities of practice that shape students' academic socialization.

Pedagogical implications for EAP writing instruction in Japan

Although previous studies suggest that students' academic socialization is embedded in their actual engagement in academic literacy practices in their communities, this does not mean that EAP teachers in Japan can simply leave the fate of students' overseas studies to their experiences after they are enrolled in their study programs abroad. There are areas of training in EAP writing that students can benefit from in order to make smooth transitions from their studies in Japan into their overseas studies.

First, students can participate in a community of practice provided by an EAP course which simulates the situations they will encounter in their overseas studies. An EAP classroom community of practice involves authentic reading and writing tasks which students will be expected to encounter in their overseas studies as well as their active participation in academic literacy practices in the course including extensive interaction with their peers and the teacher. Casanave (2002) provides good examples of two EAP communities of practice offered by two teachers in a Japanese university setting. Under the different sections of the same course, one class emphasized students' engagement in writing a library research paper with references and proper citation formats, while the other aimed to help students experience field work through observations and interviews and write an essay based on their experiences. In addition to these main writing activities, students in both sections had opportunities to be actively involved in discussions about the course readings and their own writing with their peers as well as their teachers.

Through engagement in authentic literacy practices in EAP courses, students can also develop flexibility in responding to the particularities of various situations, which they will need in their overseas studies. As previous studies indicate, students are expected to be engaged in diverse writing tasks and are at the same time expected to adjust to the different expectations of various professors and even different goals of different assignments from

the same professor. Thus, in EAP writing courses, students can be provided with diverse writing tasks with different purposes and goals and learn to respond differently to those diverse assignments. Students may find initial difficulty responding appropriately to the different demands and expectations incorporated into different assignments. However, they can be encouraged to utilize teachers and peers as resources to help overcome their difficulties; they can be advised to consult their teachers to clarify the assignment and talk with their classmates to exchange information about the teacher's academic expectations. Furthermore, students can be advised to act on the teacher's or other students' feedback on their own writing as well in order to gain knowledge about the teacher's specific expectations and raise their awareness of areas of writing they need to improve on in their subsequent writing tasks.

Second, students can be provided with opportunities to increase their awareness of specific strategies to use and develop in dealing with various demands in their daily academic experience. Previous studies indicate that students are equipped with a wide range of strategies to cope with the work load in their overseas academic experience and that they are also resourceful in developing and utilizing effective strategies to deal with specific academic literacy tasks in their overseas studies. However, not all students may know how to be resourceful and discover effective strategies on their own. Moreover, strategy development starts when learners become conscious of their own learning experience. Thus, in addition to being engaged in academic literacy tasks, students in EAP courses can be provided with opportunities to make observations of their own learning processes objectively. As I suggested in my previous study (Fujioka, 2002), asking students to keep a log might be a useful way of achieving this. They can keep a journal in which they write difficulties they encounter in facing specific assignments (e.g., not understanding the purpose of the assignment, finding reading sources for the assignment) and specific actions they take in order to overcome the difficulties (e.g., talking with the teacher and receiving specific advice, conducting Internet searches on their own) and reflect on the degree of success of those actions, possible causes of unsuccessful results, and alternative ways to resolve the problems (e.g., finding too much

information on the Internet searches about the topic of the assignment, the need for a narrower focus on the topic). In addition, students can be encouraged to share their observations of and reflections on their learning experiences with their peers so that they can learn effective strategies from each other. By raising their consciousness of their own learning experiences and learning from their peers' experiences, students can transfer knowledge and skills they have acquired and observations made in those experiences to experiences in their new environment studying abroad.

Third, students can benefit from training in finding common rhetorical structures and academic practices associated with the same genres between English and Japanese writing. As previous studies show, Japanese students made analyses of the characteristics of English and Japanese rhetorical patterns, but their analyses were based on different genres of research papers in English and general non-academic writing in Japanese. As I suggested in my previous study (Fujioka, 2000), if written English and Japanese samples from the same genre in the same disciplines and subdisciplines (e.g., research proposals, articles in academic journals) are compared, students can probably find similarities in the rhetorical structures of the two languages. They should also be able to find common academic practices in English and Japanese writing, including presenting information from sources, listing those sources, and following specific rules for citations and quotations. By noticing the similarities in the expected rhetorical structures in the same genre of English and Japanese and academic practices which are common to both languages, students may be able to develop a sophisticated sense of cross-cultural writing and find it easier to handle specific academic writing tasks in English for which they know the same practice exists in their native language. In addition, students need to receive training in paraphrasing the words from original texts, a problem demonstrated in one previous study. Since the same practice exists in Japanese academic writing as well, students might benefit from starting training on paraphrasing in Japanese writing. Before the paraphrasing exercise, students may need assistance in understanding the importance of the academic practice they are learning; they need to understand the concept of plagiarism and its consequences.

In order to assist Japanese students in making smooth transitions into their overseas studies, studies on students' academic socialization process have been reviewed in this paper and important issues from those studies were identified in regard to specific areas of instruction that need to be addressed in EAP writing instruction in Japan. Those areas include the need to involve students in a community of practice through participation in authentic academic literacy practices through which they will learn to respond to different demands and expectations associated with different writing tasks with interaction with their peers and teachers. In addition, students' development of strategies to deal with academic literacy tasks and their cross-cultural awareness of rhetorical patterns and important academic practices which are the same on similar in English and Japanese can be included as specific areas of instruction. Through engagement in the various activities suggested in this study, it is hoped that students will be able to understand that academic writing development does not merely involve the act of text-production per se but a range of practices centering around the writing act, including reading sources, teachers' guidelines and comments, advice and guidance from peers as well as teachers, and their own reflections on and observations of their learning experiences. If they grasp this, they will be able to make the first important and major step in the long process of academic socialization.

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