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Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics

Special Issue of the 16th World Congress of Applied Linguistics

Call for Papers

***Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* (CJAL) plans to publish a special issue of the 16th World Congress of Applied Linguistics. You are welcome to contribute your paper to CJAL.**

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CJAL is the only journal in China that publishes papers on theories and practice in foreign language education and other areas of applied linguistics written in English. It was first launched in 1978 as *ELT Newsletter*, and was later known as *Teaching English in China*. It was re-named *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* in 2010.

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1. Review Papers: 8,000-10,000 words with over 50 references. The papers should reflect the most recent research achievements in related disciplines and should focus on discussion and evaluation.
2. Empirical Papers: 6,000-8,000 with over 20 references. The papers should engage qualitative or quantitative analysis based on experiments or data.
3. Teaching-Practice Papers: 4,000-6,000 with over 20 references. The authors should bring about new teaching methods/methodologies and compare them with present ones on the similarities and differences.
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Contents

中国应用语言学

第34卷　第3期　2011年7月

目　录

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Contents

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目　录

Message from the Guest Editor

This special issue brings us a collection of seven invited articles on classroom research (including a review by David Nunan) for the 16th AILA World Congress in Beijing, China. Our original purpose was to make proper contributions to this international forum by sharing some local classroom research in China. This idea was warmly received by many teachers from both K-12 schools and higher educational institutions. Over a dozen teachers signed up to document their classroom practice for this special issue.

However, just as typical of a lot of classroom research, or characteristic of many practitioners, it is found that many of our teachers' creative pedagogical ideas and research inspirations are submerged under the vast ocean of everyday teachings.

These bright ideas are like beautiful shells on the beach, showing up from time to time when the tides recede, but most of the time, they are under water. It is often the case that teachers find it very hard to organize them into publishable papers. So, it was sad for us to have lost many authors and contributions during the process of preparation. The remaining six articles (not including the review) were largely a result of negations between the author, peer reviewers, and the editor.

All of them were set in the context of institutions of higher education although many teachers in the K-12 environment have also brilliant ideas and workable strategies. So these studies should not be mistaken as the entirety of Chinese teachers of English in our classroom research.

Even though these articles are rather narrow in their context, it may still require some knowledge of social cultural information to understand or interpret them. To help international readers understand these papers better, here is a list of general contextual clues.

First, English is almost *the* foreign language taught in China, which means whatever subject one takes as a college major, one must learn English in order to graduate. This makes it possible to make best of this system by conducting university-wide research. For example, the study *A New Model in English Language Teaching in China: The Case of Shantou University*, by Liu Jun and Xiao Liangrong, is not only based on a large pool of student population, but also as long as 8 years.

The second point concerns the debate on educational goals for English majors in Chinese tertiary institutions. In the current system of higher education, our English teaching falls into two broad categories, with separate national curriculums: the teaching of those majoring in English and that of those not majoring in it. The debate mainly concerns the first category, the teaching of English majors.

Our current goal for teaching English majors is largely a legacy of the past when a majority of them were adult beginners (or false beginners at the best) when they entered a tertiary institution, circa 1949 till the turn of the century. So it was reasonable that the focus of the teaching was on linguistic knowledge. However, this goal is now felt to be too low because new students today have much higher English proficiency due to the large-scale improvement in China's K-12 teaching. So questions rose up for the debate: Can we add something more valuable to the education of our English majors and hence better prepare

them for their future jobs or academic study? Some propose to add "a knowledge module" to the language program such as Content Based Instruction so that we can *teach two for one* (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) and others try to tap students' potential in developing their advanced academic ability. The paper *A Study of the Effect of CBI for English Majors in the Chinese Context*, by Chang Junyue and Xia Yang, is an example for the first proposal, and the paper *Developing Chinese Undergraduate English-Majors' Research Article Writing Competence*, by Xiong Shuhui and Zou Weicheng, is an example for the second.

The third important point I would like to make is about our time-honored tradition of *teacher-front teaching style*. In spite of the *learner-centered ideas* which are well known today, teaching is still persistently believed by many in China to mean a teacher who does most of the talking in front of the class. Not until as recently as ten years ago, did the desks and chairs in a majority of the classrooms of the university where I work become moveable. Before that, they were all fixed onto the cement floor. The layout fit the teacher-front teaching style. But the issue is not just a matter of classroom layout. It reflects our educational philosophy and our knowledge of how learning takes place inside the classroom. Three groups of teachers, albeit having been educated out of this tradition, have recognized the importance of studying the dynamics of a classroom and contributed to this collection three articles that can help us gain insights into classroom opportunities for the development of learners' critical thinking ability, co-construction of teaching, and teacher-learner interactions. These articles, *Promoting Student Participation in Seminar Courses: A Case Study*, by Zhang Chao and Jin Limin, *The Concept of "Object" in Activity Theory and Its Application in Classroom Research: A Case Study of Phonetics Course*, by Cheng Xiao, and *Scaffolding in Teacher-Student Interaction: A Case Study in Two Oral English Classes in China*, by Li Hong, Yang Wei, Wang Guanghua, and Chen Wanxia, reflect the changes in teachers' educational ideology.

This collection is our humble try-out to be engaged in academic communication at the international level. We are aware of its strengths, no matter how small they are, and their weaknesses. In order to guard against misleading readers, we invited Dr. David Nunan to write a review for us, which is printed after the six articles. It is our belief that his comments would help both the authors and readers at large, but particularly the authors.

Finally, I'd like to thank the following individuals for their guidance and assistance: to Professor Wen Qiufang for her original idea of inviting me to edit this special issue for the conference; to Professors Wu Yi'an, Shu Baimei, Wu Xudong, Zhang Shaolin, and Mei Deming for their recommending authors, commenting on papers, suggesting revisions; and finally to all the authors whose articles either appear or don't appear in this issue for their enthusiasm in creating this special issue. All remaining problems are mine.

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Developing Chinese Undergraduate English-Majors' Research Article Writing Competence

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Abstract

This paper describes a course designed to help Chinese undergraduate English-majors acquire competence in English research article (RA) writing. Such competence comprises three components: 1) discourse structure of an RA; 2) scientific thinking and reasoning; and 3) academic language. Participants were from one intact class of 28 senior English majors at a university in Shanghai. This course was experimental and designed to develop a scheme for teaching RA writing to the senior students in China. Students' RA writings throughout the semester were collected as the main data. Findings show that *discourse knowledge*, *scientific thinking*, and *linguistic structure* can be learned and transferred using these mediating tools: 1) the exemplars of sample RAs; 2) teacher's demonstration and feedback through mini-training sessions; and 3) analysis of genre and norms of RAs. The process-centered, theme-oriented and inquiry-based pedagogy adopted in the course may shed some light on English RA writing teaching practices to Chinese EFL learners.

Key words: writing; research article; Activity Theory

1. Background

Competence in English research article (RA) writing is essential to Chinese EFL learners' successful handling of academic writing tasks encountered in a higher education setting (e.g., course paper, BA thesis) and is also a prerequisite for their entry into the academic discourse community if they decide to pursue scholarship beyond an undergraduate education (Flowerdew, 2000). The development of such competence, however, can be a very difficult undertaking. Some research (e.g., Bartels, 2003) suggests that even people

with extensive academic preparation may have little understanding of the discourse practice that prevails in their field of study. Even highly successful non-native speaker (NNS) scholars admit that writing RAs in English is difficult (Buckingham, 2008). The difficulty of acquiring RA writing competence in a second language (L2) is even greater because L2 writers have to grapple with a wider range of issues, including a lack of sophistication in their use of language. Therefore, EFL students need systematic guidance and well-designed instruction to acquire research article writing competence.

English RA writing courses aimed at preparing students for BA thesis writing have been set up for Chinese senior undergraduate English-majors in most universities. It is commonly believed that the obstacles for students of RA writing concern the rhetorical, organizational and linguistic characteristics of an RA. The textbooks of RA writing for undergraduate English-majors mainly explain the linguistic features and discourse structure of an RA (e.g., Cheng & Qi, 2005; Huang, Ge & Zhang, 2006). In traditional RA writing classroom teaching, teachers always put emphasis on such conventions of RA writing as reference skills and the layout of a thesis. However, research shows that when writing theses for their BA degree, a considerable number of English-majors have difficulty in understanding thesis requirements, finding references, and expressing complex ideas in formal written English, and they do not find the writing process rewarding (Sun, 2004).

The skills required for successful RA writing go beyond linguistic forms. RA writing is a type of writing that is concerned with academic research in one way or another. Nunan (1992) defined research as a systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements or components: 1) a question, problem or hypothesis; 2) data; and 3) analysis and interpretation of the data. In other words, research is a systematic study which can be conducted in order to obtain evidence, data and other information to support one's approach or suggest solution to a difficulty. Therefore, how to think in a scientific way and display knowledge appropriately by using the required linguistic forms flexibly are the essence of RA writing. Thus, English RA writing competence comprises three major components: 1) the discourse structure of an RA (the discourse level of an RA), 2) scientific thinking and reasoning, and 3) academic language (the linguistic features of an RA). This study attempts to explore the development of these three aspects of RA writing competence of Chinese English-major undergraduates in a classroom instruction environment.

RA writing is difficult even for senior students with high proficiency. The reason is that in their previous two or three years' English writing classes, they have been taught to handle simple functional and expressive writing tasks, such as describing a place, narrating a personal experience, drafting an argumentative essay, and using expository writing. The purpose of those writing tasks is to develop students' basic writing skills, and these tasks only require personal experiences, thoughts and common sense, without reading related literatures, using rigorous research methods and writing norms (Zhu, 2003). RA writing requires students not only to tap their own opinions but also to integrate those opinions with external sources of information and argument. When encountering RA tasks, advanced EFL learners such as senior English majors may still have problems with the knowledge of RAs and research skills.

This study explores Chinese undergraduate English-majors' RA writing competence development in the classroom context, and in particular, probes three research questions:

1) What aspects of the competence of English RA writing can students learn from classroom instruction?

2) If the competence of RA writing can be gained from classroom instruction, what aspects of such competence can be transferred from one RA writing task to another?

3) If English RA writing competence can be learned from classroom instruction and be transferred, what contributes to the learning and transferring?

2. English RA Writing Competence

The relationship between discourse structure of an RA, academic language and scientific thinking and reasoning is the relationship between language form and communicative purposes. An RA is displayed in appropriate language form and discourse structure to perform various reasoning functions. These three aspects of RA writing competence are explained as follows.

1) Discourse structure of an RA

Research articles typically have a standard structure to facilitate communication, which is known as IMRAD (introduction, method, results and discussion), in spite of variations on this basic format. IMRAD is a formula for writing an RA, and it is a method for demonstrating the logic of a scientific enterprise. Each part of a research paper is characterized by particular content and organization, which can be realized by "moves" (Swales & Feak, 2004). Moves are the communicative functions or steps of which a text consists. Based on Hartley's (2008) classifications, the discourse structure of an RA can be divided into moves, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Moves in IMRAD (introduction, method, results and discussion) (based on Hartley, 2008)

Introduction	Move 1: Establishing a research territory	(a) by showing that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic or relevant in some way (optional)
		(b) by introducing and reviewing items of previous research in the area (obligatory)
	Move 2: Establishing a niche	(a) by indicating a gap in the previous research, raising a question about it or extending previous knowledge (obligatory)
	Move 3: Occupying the niche	(a) by outlining the purposes or stating the nature of the present research (obligatory)
		(b) by listing research questions or hypotheses to be tested (optional)
		(c) by announcing the principal findings (optional)
Method	1. Participants	
	2. Measures	
	3. Procedures	

Results	Move 1: Reporting the results derived from the data in relation to the research questions and hypothesis
	Move 2: Reporting other results derived from the data, but relevant to the major results, research questions, and hypothesis
Discussion	Move 1: Explaining the results in relation to the research questions (obligatory)
	Move 2: Evaluating how the results fit in with the previous findings—do they contradict, qualify, agree or go beyond them?
	Move 3: Listing potential limitations of the study
	Move 4: Offering an interpretation/explanation of these results and warding off counter-claims.
	Move 5: Stating the implications and recommending further research

2) Scientific thinking and reasoning

Scientific thinking and reasoning form the common core of academic skills across content areas. These are the mental processes used when reasoning about the content of science, engaged in scientific activities or specific types of reasoning that are frequently used in science. Scientific thinking involves many general-purpose cognitive operations that human beings apply in nonscientific domains such as induction and deduction (Holyoak & Morrison, 2005). The major aspects of scientific thinking that have been frequently used in social sciences are key term definition, problem formulation and solution, theory conceptualization, hypothesis testing, statistical reasoning, causal reasoning, inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and synthetic reasoning (partly based on Holyoak & Morrison, 2005). The representation of scientific thinking and reasoning in RA writing is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Representation of Scientific Thinking and Reasoning in Research Article Writing

Scientific Thinking and Reasoning		The Representation of Scientific Thinking and Reasoning in RA Writing
Defining Key Concepts		Defining key terms
Problem Formulation & Solution	Constructing a Representation	Understanding the research topic, finding the problem space; Formulating research questions
	Solution Generating	Deciding on the research method
		Deciding on the target subjects
		Designing the instrument for investigation
Theory Conceptualization		Literature review
		Theoretical guidelines
Hypothesis Testing		Testing a theory or hypothesis
Statistical Reasoning		Statistic analysis
Causal Reasoning		Analyzing the causal relationships among variables
Inductive Reasoning		From the observed to the unobserved
Deductive Reasoning		From the general to the specific
Synthetic Reasoning		Addressing the research questions with evidence garnered from the statistics or other evidence of the data

3) Academic language

Based on Snow and Uccelli (2009), features of academic language are listed in Table 3 (For details, see Snow & Uccelli, 2009: 112-133). They assume that language can be more or less academic, which means that language can be furnished with fewer or more of the traits that are typical of academic language.

The typical *interpersonal stance* expected in academic language is *detached* and *authoritative*. Academic language requires a non-dialogical and distant construction of opinion. The author should present himself as a knowledgeable expert providing objective information. The *information load* in academic discourse is characterized by *conciseness* and *density*. Academic discourse is expected to be short and to the point, conveying information without unjustified repetitions. Besides, academic language packs a lot of information into a few words. This informational density is evident in the high proportion of content words, usually achieved through nominalizations and expanded noun phrases. In *organization of information*, embedding is the feature of *constituency* and *subordination*. Embedded clauses are constitutive of clauses. *Explicit awareness of organized discourse* is indexed via discourse and meta-discourse markers. Additionally, information in academic language needs to be organized according to a *stepwise logical argument structure* that makes sophisticated use of *autonomous endophoric reference* strategies instead of relying on situational context or underspecified references. At the *lexical level*, a *diverse*, *precise*, and *formal* repertoire that includes appropriate cross-discipline and discipline-specific terms is desirable. *Representational congruence* means the correspondence between language and reality it represents. When grammatical categories are extended beyond their prototypes (e.g., when nouns refer to processes like *evaporation*), a grammatical metaphor, which Halliday (1994) calls a *compact and incongruent* form is created. He argued that experience is reconstructed when nominalized forms are used; those nominalized terms may have the semantic features both of processes and of things. Another incongruent move of academic language involves using *abstract concepts as agents*.

Table 3. Linguistic Features of Academic Language (adopted from Snow & Uccelli, 2009)

1. Interpersonal stance	• Detached/distanced stance
	• Authoritative stance
2. Information load	• Conciseness
	• Density (*high proportion of content words per total words*)
3. Organization of information	• Constituency/Subordination (*embedding, one element is a structural part of another*)
	• Explicit awareness of organized discourse (*central role of textual meta-discourse markers*)
	• Autonomous text (*endophoric reference*)
	• Stepwise logical argumentation/unfolding, tightly constructed
4. Lexical choices	• High lexical diversity
	• Formal/prestigious expressions
	• Precision (*lexical choices and connectives*)
	• Abstract/technical concepts

5. Representational congruence	• Complex/congruent grammar (*complex sentences*) • Compact/incongruent grammar (*clause embedding and nominalization*) • Abstract concepts as agents

3. Introduction to the Course

The *Integrated Skills of English Course* chosen to be observed in the present study followed an innovative teaching model, which is different from other teaching methods adopted by RA writing teachers elsewhere in China. This teaching design was originally created and taught by a professor with over 30 years of experience in foreign language teaching and research, who was the chief editor of a textbook series called *Integrated Skills of English*, which students used in that course. This course itself was an experiment conducted in order to develop a scheme for teaching RA writing to senior English majors in China under a national-level course development project. Built into a normal teaching schedule, this course was one-semester long, with a total of 76 teaching hours (4 hrs x 19 wks = 76 hrs).

Participants were from one intact class of 28 senior English majors at a university in Shanghai in the autumn semester of the 2009-2010 academic year. They were regarded as advanced English learners in terms of language proficiency. However, based on their course projects and interviews with them, it was found that during their past years at college, they had little experience or almost no systematic instruction in English RA writing before they attended this course. In their previous English writing classes, they had learned to write description, narration and argumentation, with an aim of developing basic writing skills. They were not trained in RA writing skills such as reviewing related literature or describing an instrument design for scientific investigations.

The goal of this course was to help these students develop a general competence in writing RAs in English. In view of their previous writing experience and future writing needs (e.g., BA theses), a number of specific instructional objectives were proposed to be integral to the overriding curricula goal:

- drafting a viable working plan, through which learners were trained to think about appropriate research procedures and principles in social science studies
- expressing purpose, objective, and theorization of hypothesis in social studies
- designing and describing research instruments
- expressing the aim/purpose of the research
- explaining the framework of analysis
- formulating research questions
- reporting data
- describing statistics
- addressing the research questions based on the evidence obtained from the statistics or other results of the data analysis

These skills for RA writing include research skills, language functions, and language structures.

The course curriculum emphasized research-based writing. The goals for this

writing centered on engaging students with key elements of academic practice including understanding relevant background knowledge, asking researchable questions, designing questionnaires and interviews, eliciting data and making observations relevant to the question posed, interpreting data to support a theory or model, presenting an argument, and evaluating relevant previous research work.

The students were required to conduct research related to the four subjects from the textbooks they were studying: *Family Matters*, *Fashion and Popular Culture*, *Growing up and Learning* and *Work, Play and Leisure*. The participants wrote working plans and questionnaires individually for Project 1 but did so in groups (n=6) for Project 2. In Projects 3 and 4, they were divided into seven groups to write the reports. They wrote guided reflections on completing Projects 3 and 4 (Table 4), in which they were instructed to report what they had learned from the project, the roles they had played, and the remaining problems.

Table 4 describes the RA writing tasks of the four research projects, and Table 5 shows the data collection and analysis.

Table 4. Writing Tasks of the Four Research Projects

	working plan	questionnaire	outline of the research report	research report	reflection
Project 1 (individual work) *Good Families and Their Characteristics*	√	√			
Project 2 (group work) *What determines your taste in fashion?*	√	√			
Project 3 (group work) *What's the problem with the current educational system?*	√	√	√	√	√
Project 4 (group work) *What does teachers' job satisfaction derive from?*	√	√		√	√

Table 5. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Types of Data	Data collected	Methods of collection	Methods of analysis
Main data	RA writings of Project 1: 1) working plans 2) questionnaires RA writings of Project 2: 1) working plans 2) questionnaires RA writings of Project 3: 1) working plans 2) questionnaires 3) outlines of research reports 4) research reports	Submitted by participants as their assignments	Participants' writings are analyzed from three aspects: 1) discourse structure of an RA, 2) scientific thinking and reasoning, 3) academic language. The purpose was to see their development in the three aspects, especially the changes across the four projects.

Types of Data	Data collected	Methods of collection	Methods of analysis
Main data	RA writings of Project 4 : 1) working plans 2) questionnaires 3) research reports		
Supporting evidence	Participants' reflections on Project 3	Submitted by participants after completing Project 3	What aspects of the competence of RA writing can students learn from classroom instruction? Evidence from participants' reflections on Project 3
	Participants' reflections on Project 4	Submitted by participants after completing Project 4	What aspects of the competence of RA writing can be transferred from one RA writing task to the next? Evidence from participants' reflections on Project 4

4. Pedagogical Principles

This course adopted a process-centered, theme-oriented and inquiry-based pedagogy.

The course was process-centered in several senses. First, the teacher adopted a multiple-drafting approach; the students revised their writings several times based on the feedback to each draft. Multiple-drafting is a means to make the RA writing task more accessible to the learners: it is moving through successive "zones of proximal development (ZPD)" (Vygotsky, 1978). Second, the students developed RA writing competence gradually, starting from writing working plans, questionnaires, outlines of the report, to the final reports. The process was dialogic by nature in that there was abundant interaction and negotiation in the accomplishment of these writing tasks between the teacher and students and among students themselves. That was a scaffolding strategy that guides students to move from simple, manageable tasks to the final complex and demanding tasks.

The theme-oriented pedagogy was reflected in the writing tasks around readings dealing with particular themes. The themes were about aspects of life and education in which college students are interested (e.g., fashion, job satisfaction).

This course was inquiry-based because the research project played a central role in various writing activities such as group discussion, designing questionnaires, selecting respondents, writing working plans, interviewing, eliciting and analyzing data, completing the research reports, and writing reflections. These activities could support the course goals such as raising an awareness of audience, drawing attention to textual and language features, and practicing useful composing strategies.

In this course students acquired RA writing competence by studying the research done by several scholars on particular themes, and conducting research in groups. The procedures of the teaching design are described in Table 6 (take Unit 5 of the textbook as an example):

Table 6. The Roles of Teacher and Students in the Teaching Procedures

Activities and Tasks for Students	Teacher's Strategies and Responses
• reading and discussing the articles and relevant excerpts on the selected theme in the textbook: ▪ Clothes and Culture; ▪ Views by Scholars; ▪ Research Article: Clothes and Identity;	• introducing the basic knowledge about social science research • teaching the concepts of fashion, gender and identity, related social, cultural, and historical aspects, changing norms • discussing the method through which knowledge about social/ cultural norms of fashion was created in the articles for study
• A mini-research task: *How do college students select and purchase clothes?*	• teaching necessary vocabulary, phrases for talking about cultural studies of fashion
• writing working plans (on the group basis) for an investigation into the social, cultural, and economical constraints on the norms of fashion among college students	• feedback to the student's design, framework, and feasibility • making suggestions for revision • helping students select appropriate theories for guiding their investigations • providing exemplars and mini-training sessions for discourse patterns and syntactic structures, and necessary vocabulary
• designing instruments (on the basis of group work of semi-structured interviews in the pilot studies carried out by the students)	• feedback on the student's design and their pilot studies, coverage, and consideration of the quantity and types of data needed to answer their research questions • making suggestions about revision • providing exemplars and mini-training sessions for pragmatic features, discourse patterns, and linguistic features needed for a questionnaire
• using the instrument of the students' design for investigations	• feedback to the preliminary findings based on the use of the instruments
• writing research proposals based on the data collected	• making suggestions for revision or encouraging students to carry out the investigation again based on the revised design • explaining academic norms and conventions • providing exemplars and mini-training sessions in academic conventions, discourse patterns, and frequently used sentence patterns and vocabulary
• data collection and analysis	• feedback on student's findings based on their analysis, and data presentations • teaching conventions for reporting data, and presenting discussion • providing exemplars and mini-training sessions for reporting data (such as statistics data) and presenting interpretations of data through discussion
• writing research reports	• feedback to the whole paper about structures, focus, and the cohesion and coherence • making suggestions for revision or redrafting • providing necessary suggestions for restructuring, and syntactic patterns and vocabulary