



Book Review

Breeze, R. (2012). *Rethinking Academic Writing Pedagogy for the European University*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 180 pages. ISBN 9789042035201



The book “Rethinking Academic Writing Pedagogy for the European University” captures the importance of being able to write well in English and the relative difficulty of teaching people to do so. For university students in 21st century Europe, the author says, “learning to write well in English is a necessity rather than merely a useful ancillary skill” (Breeze, 2012: 3). English is used by most professions as the lingua franca for training, meetings, publications and written correspondence. Aware of the globalization of professional practices, European universities have tried to change with the times and increase the role accorded to English. One of the consequences of increasing the role of L2 education has been the emergence of English as a language of higher education in countries that have never been part of the “inner circle” of English speaking-countries. In addition, challenges have arisen when pressures from the job market have forced universities to update their curricula and devote more resources to language learning. Consequently, differences in institutional responses have changed the English-learning map

and more than often European students have been provided with distinct L2 teaching approaches.

This book provides a sound revision of how the teaching of writing has often been subsumed into the teaching of (general) English even to the point to be partially neglected into communicative classroom practices. Interesting for its practical, explanatory understanding of what writing instruction should be in the classroom practice, Breeze's book discusses the problematic consequences that pedagogic heterogeneity has caused. It also provides useful insights into the "many creative ways in which teachers of academic writing had responded to the challenges of the new situation and the innovative approaches to teaching writing that were being developed in universities across the world" (Breeze, 2012: 2).

From an organizational point of view, the book consists of an introduction and ten chapters primarily devoted to stimulate discussion about two important issues: the first being creative new ventures that exploit the latest technological advances and the second being recent advances from empirical research on the way real writers face the challenge of composing text in a second language.

Chapter 1 (Writing in English across Europe) opens debate exploring the current situation in European universities with a view toward students, their needs and the demands placed on them. It critically evaluates the support that is being provided and discusses the strengths and witnesses of European students as L2 writers. Chapter 2 (Academic writing in Europe: texts, contexts, cultures) sets out to define the role of academic writing in English in the context of universities across Europe. For Breeze, contextualizing the L2 teaching and learning process is critical as models of writing in US, British or Australian universities may not be necessarily transferrable to their European counterparts. Language issues and cultural factors have an effect on the way writing is being taught, making it discipline-specific and subject to divergent education and academic cultures. Chapter 3 (Classic approaches to teaching writing), in conjunction with chapter 4, explains the current mainstream writing pedagogy which informs the way students are taught to write in L2 classes. It not only focuses on identifying existing methodological approaches in second language instruction but also analyses the way in which teachers scaffold the learning experience and discusses the role of (effective) feedback in this particular type of instruction. Following this train of thought, chapter 4 (Classic pedagogy in second language contexts) devotes effort to examine the way in which L2 instruction has changed with the times. L2 writing teaching has come to reflect the process model of L1 up to a point that L2 instruction has been dependent on L1 research and pedagogy for a long time. It has not been until L2 began to focus on L2 students' writing skills that an enormous expansion of interest in strategies for language learning occurred. Central for Breeze is the assumption that "some authors have applied the notion of writing strategies either as a diagnostic tool to investigate L2 writers' process, or as, a pedagogical aid to teach L2 writers how to develop such a process" (Breeze, 2012: 58). She discusses that the assumption that L2 writing is basically a matter of applying strategies is questionable, although Oxford (1990) and others (Cohen, 1998; Hsao & Oxford, 2002) have produced some useful lists of strategies, mostly generated by interviews, think-aloud data and report

questionnaires like Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). In addition to strategic approaches, Breeze convincingly argues that genre theory and the genre-based approach to pedagogy have extended the field on the basis of four genre's advantages:

First a genre-based syllabus offers a principled way and identifying and focusing on different types of English texts, providing a framework for learning features of grammar and discourse together. Second, such a syllabus gives students a sense of the generic models that are regularly revisited in an English-speaking culture. Third, this type of programme offers the capacity for initiating students into the ways of making and meaning that are valued in the English-speaking communities. Finally a genre-centred curriculum also opens a potential space for reflecting on the ways in which knowledge and information are constructed and organised in an English-speaking culture and therefore permits a further pedagogical dimension for students and teachers to develop their own critique (Breeze, 2012: 67)

Having these ideas in mind, chapter 5 (Critiques and challenges) discusses recent developments in L1 writing theory from a strategy-based and genre-based perspective. The chapter draws attention to the challenges to process-writing paradigms and the emergence of new critical approaches to writing. Highly interesting is the discussion on the conceptualization of "critical" writing education. After considering the theoretical background in recent theories of academic literacy, chapter 6 (New directions: academic literacies) looks at recent approaches that focus on the acquisition of different forms of academic literacy in university settings. Breeze promotes the integration of writing with the acquisition of other skills as she believes writing is a powerful means to socialize younger members into disciplinary communities and equip them "with a profound understanding of the nature of communication in academic circles" (Breeze, 2012: 95). She opts for integrating reading and writing skills, writing for university exams, introducing academic simulations in the classroom practice, collaborating with subject specialists and encouraging students to work collaboratively as well as develop student's metacognitive awareness and self-monitoring skills. Chapter 7 (New directions: corpus tools and web writing) examines recent approaches to teaching academic writing that exploit developments in information technology to add new dimensions to the students' writing experience. The use of corpora, blogs, online simulations emphasise the interactive and collaborative nature of writing, not to mention that the possibility to recreate the dynamics of the real-world writing experience. Chapter 8 (New directions: addressing writers' needs) examines the process by which students write for publication or other professional uses. Examining evidence from published studies, the chapter suggests that L2 writing teachers largely relies on appropriating the conceptual organization and rhetorical structuring of particular genre moves before finding a voice. The process of gaining experience, that is "finding a voice", is understood as "internalising the professional discourse of the speciality" (Breeze, 2012: 129) through a kind of academic apprenticeship which constitutes a form of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1999; Parks, 2000). Chapter 9 (Feedback and assessment) turns to the after-writing process and how L2 writing teachers can give effective feedback and assessment to students. Breeze argues that both teachers and students should be aware of institutionalised forms of

reward and punishment and teaching should be geared towards helping the student to improve by providing encouragement as well as by constructive correction or guidance in the case of feedback and by focusing on the quality of the written product as in assessment.

Chapter 10 (Academic writing in Europe) does not draw definitive conclusions in regards to academic writing pedagogy for the European university, but it satisfactorily pulls some of the different strands explored in previous chapters.

As one reads this book, two aspects draw our attention: the down-to-earth vision of writing instruction and the enlightening clarity of discussion. This book has not only been written, but lived and experienced page to page, word by word. As a result, there is nothing but thorough understanding of L2 writing instruction, practical common sense and critical observation of the development of academic writing pedagogy in the last thirty years. I have found these characteristics fascinating and, above all, highly edifying. Breeze's book is not only useful and attractive but I would dare to say that this work offers us a valuable, well-founded rethinking of the L2 writing teaching process.

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