Adapt

Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat?
Achieving Proficiency in Academic Writing

WILLIAM BROMWICH[*]

1. Introduction

A substantial body of research into the processes shaping academic writing in specific disciplinary domains has been carried out in recent years ([1]). Studies of particular interest in connection with the present paper include the work of Berkenkotter and Huckin ([2]) and Fortanet ([3]) who have examined double-blind peer review as a genre of academic writing in which the identity of the author and the peer reviewer are concealed from each other. This genre is defined by Swales as "occluded" as these texts do not normally see the light of day but are a kind of private correspondence, albeit behind the veil of anonymity ([4]).

Double-blind peer review is still the norm in most fields, as it is considered to be the best way to ensure objectivity and impartiality in the appraisal of manuscripts submitted for publication. Fortanet has noted that "'Blind' and 'anonymous' reviews are the types considered by many editors, readers and authors to provide the best guarantee of quality, since referees may feel

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([1]) See e.g. C. BAZERMAN, *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988; J. SWALES, *Genre Analysis. English in Academic and Research Settings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990; J. SWALES, 'Occluded Genres in the Academy', in E. VENTOLA and A. MAURANEN (eds.) *Academic Writing*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1996, pp. 45-58; J. SWALES, *Research Genres*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004; V. BHATIA, *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings,* London, Longman, 1993; V. BHATIA, 'Generic View of Academic Discourse', in J. FLOWERDEW (ed.) *Academic Discourse*, London, Pearson Education, 2002, pp. 21-39; V. BHATIA, *Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View*, London, Continuum, 2004; V. BHATIA and M. GOTTI (eds.) *Explorations in Specialized Genres*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2006; C. CANDLIN, V. BHATIA and C. JENSEN, 'Must the Worlds Collide? Professional and Academic Discourses in the Study and Practice of Law', in G. CORTESE and P. RILEY (eds.), *Domain-Specific English: Textual Practices Across Communities and Classrooms*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 101-114; K. HYLAND, *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*, Harlow, Pearson Education, 2000; K. HYLAND, 'Authority and Invisibility: Authorial Identity in Academic Writing', *Journal of Pragmatics* 34/8, 2002, pp. 1091-1112; K. HYLAND, 'Stance and Engagement: A Model of Interaction in Academic Discourse', *Discourse Studies* 7/2, 2005, pp. 173-192.
([2]) C. BERKENKOTTER and T. HUCKIN, *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition Culture Power*, Hillsdale N.J., Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995.
([3]) I. FORTANET, 'Evaluative Language in Peer Review Reports', *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7/1, 2008, pp.27-37. I am indebted to Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli of the Faculty of Economics, University of Florence, for bringing my attention to this study.
([4]) J. SWALES, 1996, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 1.

freer to criticise the articles" ([5]). This view was supported by 85 per cent of the respondents in a recent survey of 3,000 senior authors, reviewers and editors ([6]). However, double-blind review is by no means a universal practice, and is in fact controversial. In the medical field, for example, there has been a move away from anonymity towards transparency, mainly for ethical reasons. The editor of the *British Medical Journal* criticises anonymous peer review on ethical grounds: "The primary argument against closed peer review is that it seems wrong for somebody making an important judgment on the work of others to do so in secret" ([7]). In the same vein, the deputy editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* claims that identifying the reviewer links "privilege and duty, by reminding the reviewer that with power comes responsibility: that the scientist invested with the mantle of the judge cannot be arbitrary in his or her judgment and must be a constructive critic" ([8]). A further point is that in spite of the highly specialised nature of the knowledge required to carry out double-blind peer review, reviewers do not receive academic credit for their contribution to the final article. However, a countervailing factor is that "a few reviewers have said that they don't want to review if they will be identified" ([9]). An open peer review trial carried out by *Nature* revealed a lack of enthusiasm for signed reviews: "Despite enthusiasm for the concept, open peer review was not widely

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([5]) I. FORTANET, 2008, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 3, p. 7.

([6]) "The Publishing Research Consortium publishes a study this month (January 2008) in which more than 3,000 senior authors, reviewers and editors were asked about the peer-review system. The conclusions are that researchers want to 'improve, not change, the system of peer review for journal articles'. […] more than 93 per cent of respondents believe that peer review is necessary, and more than 85 per cent say that it helps to improve scientific communications and increases the overall quality of published papers. Although many respondents pointed out the operational difficulties in double-blind peer review, two-thirds of respondents felt that it is the most objectively fair system, compared with single-blind". M. CLARKE, 'Researchers like the peer-review system', *http://blogs.nature.com/peer-to-peer/2008/01/* (30 August 2008).

([7]) *BMJ* 1999; 318: 4-5 (2 January) *http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/318/ 7175/4* (30 August 2008). Although this decision dates back to 1999, it is still BMJ policy to ask reviewers to sign their reports: "Open peer review: the BMJ asks all reviewers to sign their reports, saying briefly who they are and where they work. We also ask reviewers to declare to the editors any competing interests that might relate to articles we have asked them to review. Open peer review does not mean, however, that authors should feel able to contact reviewers directly to discuss their reports; all queries should still be directed through the editorial office" *http://resources.bmj.com/bmj/authors/article-submission* (30 August 2008).

([8]) Quoted in *BMJ*, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 4.

([9]) *BMJ*, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 4.

popular, either among authors or by scientists invited to comment" ([10]).

The willingness of reviewers, generally world-class scholars who are the leading authority in their field, to dedicate their time and energy without reward is essential for the review process. It may be seen as a "gift relationship", to borrow the title of a study in the field of medical and social policy by Richard Titmuss ([11]). Arguably, without the altruism and generosity of peer reviewers, who examine the work of scholars they may never meet in person, the process of academic writing would lack one of its defining characteristics.

2. Methodology

The present study is based on a data set consisting of a specialised corpus of 40 referee reports in the field of comparative labour law and industrial relations, collated between 2004 and 2008. As a result, the analysis is limited to academic discourse in this particular field. The authors of the reports were from a number of countries, including countries where English is the official language, and others where it is not, but all belonging to the same transnational discourse community ([12]).

The statistical profile of the corpus was as follows:
• total number of words: 20,040;
• mean length of the referee reports: 501 words;
• range: 111 to 1,009 words.

To contextualise this corpus of referee reports, further material was gathered in Question and Answer sessions held with journal editors and peer reviewers in order to gain insight into the processes taking place within the discourse community. In the following discussion, these sessions will be identified by the notation [Q&A] whereas the referee reports will be identified by the notation [RR] followed by the number of the report.

In keeping with the double-blind policy adopted by the editors, neither the aspiring authors nor the peer reviewers will be identified: no reference will be made to the age or gender of those involved, nor to their country of origin, place of residence, academic status or affiliation. In certain cases the reviewers make conjectures about the possible identity of the author(s) whose work they are reviewing: these conjectures will be neither confirmed nor refuted. This is in order to prevent any

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([10]) P. CAMPBELL *et al.*, 'Peer-to-peer: for peer reviewers and about the peer review process', *http://blogs.nature.com/peer-to-peer/2006/12/report_of_natures_peer_review_trial.html* (30 August 2008).
([11]) R. TITMUSS, *The Gift Relationship. From Human Blood to Social Policy*, London, New Press, 1970. Reissued in 1997 with new chapters edited by J. Ashton, John and Ann Oakley, London, LSE Books.
([12]) In the sense discussed by J. SWALES, 1990, *op. cit. supra*, p.65.

breach of confidentiality, which would clearly be unethical ([13]). Moreover, it should be underlined that the aim of the present study is to cast light on the principles of academic writing that emerge from the referee reports that are likely to be of pedagogic significance ([14]).

Based on an in-depth examination of the referee reports, the present study proposes a taxonomy of the principles of academic writing that the reviewers seek to sustain in their reports. This taxonomy was not conceived *a priori* but was constructed by a process of inductive reasoning, based on the criticisms of the manuscripts submitted to the peer reviewers. The referee reports in the corpus were coded in a consistent manner, with repeat comments in the same report counting once only. For example, one reviewer observes at the beginning of the referee report: "The subject is interesting, however the paper cannot be published as such, without being totally rewritten, by an English-speaking author", and then a paragraph later notes that "Part of the problem might be an insufficient mastery of English". [RR18]

In this case, the comment was classified under the heading Linguistic Refinement, but it was counted as one comment, not two.

3. Ten Key Principles of Academic Writing

Following an examination of the referee reports with a view to identifying the key principles of academic writing in this domain, the number of occurrences for each of them was calculated (Table 1, *Annex*). Although there is a degree of overlap in conceptual terms between some of the categories (e.g., between appropriate methodology and data quality, or quality of argumentation and linguistic refinement), most of the comments by the referees were assigned to one or other category without too much ambiguity ([15]).

([13]) In this connection see the "Statement of Good Practice" of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia available at *http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ alaa/goodprac.html* (last accessed 30 August 2008), which highlights the role of applied linguistics as "an interdisciplinary area of study focused on language and communication, in which linguistics is combined with issues, methods and perspectives drawn from other disciplines" and underlines the right to "privacy and secrecy with respect to a person's names [and] confidential information". The confidential materials used in this study remain on file with the author.

([14]) For this reason it will clearly not be possible to acknowledge the authors of the referee reports by name, though I am greatly indebted to the peer reviewers and the journal editors for making available the material on which the present study is based.

([15]) The question of categorisation is clearly problematic, not only in relation to the topic under discussion: for an in-depth study, see G. LAKOFF, *Women, Fire*

In order to cast light on the way the reviewers applied the above principles, examples of each one will now be considered. Although readers of the *Journal* may consider these principles to be fairly self-evident, it is worth examining them in some detail since the authors of the manuscripts submitted for publication evidently failed to give due consideration to the principles, otherwise the peer reviewers would not have had to spend time explaining them and pointing out the perceived shortcomings.

3.1. The disciplinary domain principle

A text should fall within the confines of a given disciplinary domain.

In an academic discipline such as comparative labour law and industrial relations, located at the intersection of several disciplines, each competing to establish a clearly defined identity and research domain, the question of where the confines of the discipline are to be drawn is continually renegotiated. How much space should be dedicated to collective labour law, and how much to individual employment law, including discrimination issues? What is the right balance between single-country reports and comparative studies? ([16]) To what extent should human resources management be considered to be within the field? The (re)definition of disciplinary boundaries is an ongoing process, and one of the sites of engagement is the referee report, as shown in the first two examples:

(1)   All this said, the question is if the text should be published in our Journal? […] The text has nothing to do with labour law and/or industrial relations *per se* […] Most of our readers would, I fear, wonder why the text is published in our journal rather than in a journal for learning and pedagogies or a journal within the field of political science. [RR 1]

(2)   Reading the text I find myself asking why the authors sent the text to our journal. The text simply does not fit into the ambit of our journal. The text should be published in a journal for labour economics or – preferably – as part of a university research series. [RR 4]

In connection with disciplinary boundaries, Swales speaks of "establishing a territory" ([17]) and this appears to be the process taking place here.

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and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

([16]) In a Question and Answer session with journal editors in the field, one editor stated that "We only take single-country studies as part of a symposium. The main reason why we reject papers is that they are single-country studies" [Q&A IIRA, Berlin, 8 September 2003].

([17]) J. SWALES, 1990, *op. cit. supra*, note 1, p.141.

3.2. The analytical framework principle

A text should provide analytical insights within a clear analytical framework, not merely a descriptive account. Closely related to the concept of the disciplinary domain is that of the analytical framework. In most of the referee reports in which they occur, the terms "descriptive" and "not very analytical" take on a negative connotation, since the underlying principle is that research should be analytical, putting forward an argument within a clearly defined theoretical perspective, rather than engaging in present tense or "bald past tense narrative" ([18]).(3)

The *analytical framework* needs to be better developed. [Emphasis added here and subsequently unless otherwise stated.] [RR 11](4) While the present submission does refer to what Malaysia might learn from the UK, it does not in any way attempt to put that comparison into a *theoretical perspective.* [RR 15]

(5) The article is certainly good, indeed perhaps even a glittering piece of technical legal scholarship of a comparative nature. […] The article does not advance the art of comparative legal research. Nor does it offer any intriguing questions in this respect. The article does not much try to answer the two fundamental Why-questions that are the most interesting in comparative legal research, i.e. (1) Why are things the way they are in the countries studied and (2) Why do things differ between the countries studied? In other words, *the article is not very analytical, mostly limiting itself to what is after all description* (though brilliantly done). [RR 8]

(6) *What is the analytical framework that the author wants to use*? At one point s/he suggests using an ILO convention, but then does nothing with that (including not explaining why it would be useful) but then immediately afterward the author moves to *a different analytical framework*. As I just suggested, the comparative law framework could also be used for analysis. *It doesn't really matter which one, but the author needs to make a choice and make it clear to the reader*. [RR 28]

(7) Thank you for the opportunity to review this article, which contains much of interest. With further work I expect it would make a valuable contribution, but in its present form I do not recommend that it be published. […] The principal reason for the recommendation is that the article lacks a clearly articulated purpose or thesis. As its title suggests, the analysis offered is introductory, but to my mind it is *largely descriptive*, and appears to be mostly derivative of other secondary sources. [RR 31]

In addition to the terms *analytical framework* and *theoretical perspective*, one reviewer adopted the concept of *political*

([18]) To borrow a term from J. SWALES, 1990, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 1.

or normative perspective to highlight the contrast with a mainly descriptive narrative account:

(8) My point in offering these different ways of constructing the narrative is not to say that any one of them is right, nor is it to suggest that other approaches are impossible. It is to say that there has to be *some* political or normative perspective established at the outset of the paper, in order to make sense of the legal developments described by the author. [RR 34] [emphasis in the original]

A reference to *details* may take on a negative connotation when it denotes a descriptive rather than an analytical approach, particularly when the details do not go beyond the narrow confines of a particular national system:

(9) If the piece is intended to inform the reader about something other than *the details of Danish law*, then it is somewhat disappointing. The difficulty is that *the author never really defines her/his intellectual objectives or perspectives*. [RR 34]

The tendency on the part of journals in the field not to publish articles that are *largely descriptive* was also highlighted in the Question and Answer session with journal editors: "An article that is purely descriptive and lacking in a thesis or point or argument is not normally accepted for publication. It does not have to be classis hypothesis-testing as in the social sciences, but it must be more than simply a news report" ([19]).

3.3. The appropriate methodology principle

*A text should adopt a recognised methodological approach within a given disciplinary domain.*The peer reviewers dedicate considerable space to methodological issues when they feel that the author has not provided an adequate account of how the data collection was carried out. In the following excerpt, the gatekeeping function of the peer review appears to be of secondary importance, with the reviewer dedicating a great deal of time to giving advice that would normally be provided at the tutorial stage:

(10) My first major concern is *the validity of the data due to the methodological bias and limitation*. Firstly, a survey of multiple industries and sectors is a better choice in order to generalize the findings. A study focused on the electronics and telecommunications industry is too narrow to answer the question of whether IR in China is convergent or divergent from Western practices. Secondly, there is no explanation for why the firms in Table 2 have been chosen […] Thirdly, the profile of interviewees is unknown: who are these people and why

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([19]) [Q&A IIRA, Berlin, 8 September, 2003].

have they been chosen? Fourthly, the interview questions are unknown: what did the authors ask during interviews and how were these questions derived? Were they designed in Chinese? Who translated? Fifthly, how the interviews were conducted is unknown: how long did each interview take? Were they recorded in some way, if not, why? How was the data transcribed? Were the interviews conducted in Chinese? Sixthly, how the data was analyzed is unknown: have case study reports been written and verified by the interviewees? What is the data analysis method? Finally, how many interviews have been conducted is unknown. *My first major concern is the validity of the data due to the methodological bias and limitation*. [RR 37]

Original research data does not appear to be a fundamental requirement, since in this disciplinary domain *secondary processing of published sources* may serve as a suitable basis for analysis, provided this is stated by the author and the sources are properly cited:

(11) Its seems […] that this is a primary publication of an original research made by a research team based on interviews with actors in tripartite bargaining. This somehow fades away in the paper itself, that rather appears to be a *"secondary processing" of published sources that is not at all a problem (we, lawyers, mostly work that way)*, and the paper displays an impressive "apparatus" of literature, showing thorough research work. [RR 26]

3.4. The data quality principle

A text should provide the reader with adequate research data.

The quality of the data used to support the argumentation is of central importance and although information gathered from interviews may provide useful insights, there is a strong preference for data derived from *rigorous research*:

(12) [It] appears that *much of the relevant information (I hesitate to call it 'data')* is derived from websites run by the unions. [RR 11]

(13) There are several particular, major problems. First, the author does not set out the material in a logical way. The reader needs to be informed at the outset about the nature of the institution and its jurisdiction and history, before being thrown into detail. (In any event, *the first section detail appears to come largely from interviews, rather than from rigorous research*). [RR 15]

On a par with interview material, newspaper reports may be cited, but in themselves are not considered to provide a basis for *proper research*:

(14) Much of the material is based on interviews and on newspaper reports: there is not *a proper research basis* for the argument and analysis that is presented. [RR 15]

In the following excerpt the reviewer deploys a structural metaphor ([20]), with the research compared to a building, and the evidence seen as the (somewhat shaky) foundations:

(15) *I am doubtful whether the evidence provided,* and the way it is provided, *can carry the weight placed on it.* [RR 16]

This underlines the importance of maintaining the right balance between the data presented and the conclusions drawn.

3.5. The relevance principle

A text should make a significant contribution to topics of current interest.

The judgment as to whether a manuscript addresses a topic of current interest requires insight into reader expectations, and here the members of the editorial board, in their initial screening of the manuscripts, and the peer reviewers, play a key role:

(16) The author addresses *a topic that may be of interest and use to the readership of the Journal,* and in that sense is to be encouraged.

(17) Is it justified to publish it in our Journal? Yes, I very much think so. *The topic, as we all know, is one of the "hottest" in Europe at the present time.* France plays a crucial role in the ongoing debate. Our Journal assures its central place in the middle of this debate by continuing to publish texts on the issue. [RR 3]

The comment in excerpt (17) suggests that when a publication is well received, it is not simply a significant achievement for the individual, but for the discourse community as a whole, underlining once again the collaborative aspect of academic writing.

3.6. The textual integrity principle

A text should provide the reader with a study that is complete in itself. This would appear to be a self-evident proposition but evidence from the referee reports shows that this is not the case:

(18) I would expect the claims of the author to stand or fall on the basis of the findings presented in the paper itself, whereas it becomes evident in the Conclusions that the strength of the author's claims can only be verified by referring back to *an earlier work* by the same author. [RR 9]

(19) [There] are *several references* to matters having been discussed in *previous chapters* of something larger; I presume

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([20]) See G. LAKOFF and M. JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

either a report or a thesis. In either case it is natural and appropriate for authors to seek publication. However, it is incumbent upon the author to make the necessary effort to ensure that what is submitted as a single piece to a journal is complete on its face; the author(s) of the present work have not done this. [RR 15]

The manuscript in excerpt (19) appears to have been submitted by a junior researcher, who had completed a thesis or dissertation and was hoping to publish part of it. However, the researcher had failed to comply with the norms of generic integrity, in the sense that a paper published in the journal in question is expected to have a clear argumentative structure and to be complete in itself. The submission of a chapter from a dissertation without taking account of these norms and without reflecting on reader expectations was taken to be a serious shortcoming, showing that the researcher had not yet achieved the level of awareness of the academic writing genres used by members of the discourse community. The journal editors reported that this was a common error on the part of new researchers: "We rarely reject manuscripts out of hand. What might cause us to do that is a very thick manuscript based on a Ph.D. thesis, 50 pages long with single line spacing, or sometimes a shorter text with too much data stacked at the end" ([21]).

The transition from the dissertation to publication in a peer-reviewed journal is evidently a problematic one, and junior researchers need to develop an awareness of the distinctive features of the two genres. In some academic institutions the award of a Ph.D. is conditional on submission or acceptance of a paper in a peer-reviewed journal, as in the following case: "The student is expected to submit at least one paper based on the dissertation work for publication in an appropriate peer-reviewed scientific journal" ([22]). However, in some academic disciplines there now appears to be a reversal of the process by which a dissertation is reworked as a paper: rather, the researcher publishes a series of papers first and then assembles this material for the final dissertation, so that the academic work is subject to peer review and undergoes continuous assessment throughout the programme, not just in the final phase, as in the following case: "The thesis includes an introduction, 12 peer-reviewed papers and a concluding chapter" ([23]).

([21]) [Q&A IIRA, Berlin, 8 September 2003].

([22]) Ph.D. Program in Medical Physics, University of Texas Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Houston, *http://www.uth.tmc.edu/gsbs/programs/ medphys/degrephd.htm* (last accessed 30 June 2008).

([23]) From the CV of Prof. Dr. Stefan Uhlenbrook, *http://www.unesco-ihe.org/ Users/node_965/CV-general* (last accessed 30 June 2008).

3.7. The logical order principle

A text should present information in the order required to fulfil its pragmatic objectives. The comments made by the peer reviewers were aimed at making the papers submitted *more effective* in argumentative terms, even if this entailed changing the order of the information:

(20) I just wondered if the author would consider reviewing section 5 which, I think, is the conclusion. I believe that *the first paragraph would be a good conclusion* but the rest of the section follows more section 4 developments and could be integrated in the core of the paper. You could perhaps put this to the author as I think that the paper would be more effective. [RR 13]

(21) Table 2 should be moved to the methodology section rather than placed in the findings part. [RR 37]

(22) There are several particular, major problems. First, the author does not set out the material in a logical way […] A related issue is that much of the material seems to be presented *according to the order in which it was sourced, rather than according to a coherent set of issues*. [RR 15]

There is evidently a close connection between the logical order principle and the quality of argumentation principle, since a paper should have a clear structure, with the evidence presented in such as way as to construct an argument that is not merely descriptive but *convincing*.

3.8. The quality of argumentation principle

A text should achieve its stated ends.

The intentions of the paper as outlined in the abstract and in the introduction should be followed up with adequate argumentation and supporting evidence.

(23) Content and argument: when one reads the abstract, it looks very promising. However, I feel that *the author(s) do not establish or prove the last sentence of the abstract*. [RR 19]

(24) *The author(s) fail to support or give evidence for their statements or arguments on numerous occasions*. For example, when the legislation is explained, one would expect references to the relevant provisions of the Act. [RR 19]

(25) At this point, *the paper is not convincing at all*. [RR 24]

(26) I am somewhat troubled by the author's conclusions (or lack thereof). […] With few theoretical references and no empirical evidence, the author concludes that […].
But that in itself is not a very interesting finding. [RR 2]

In some cases, however, the quality of argumentation principle was mentioned by the reviewer in order to commend the

author, in the case of a manuscript that was found to meet the standard required for publication, as in the following example:

(27) I found this to be an excellent overview of the field with some useful suggestions made for a research and political/legal strategy for the future. It is *authoritatively argued* and takes up the major issues very well. [RR 21]

3.9. The relevant literature principle

*A text should take adequate account of the existing literature relevant to the topic, and relevant cases should be cited.*In this connection the referee reports contain suggestions that are highly specific to the disciplinary domain, with recommendations relating not just to books and articles, but also to primary sources such as legislation, case law, and codes of practice. In one case reference is made to a recent doctoral thesis, with the suggestion that contact be made with the author, thus promoting the informal exchange of ideas within the discourse community. The generosity and personal involvement of the reviewers in the tutorial function of the peer review process may be clearly seen also in this case:

(28) The author(s) is/are advised to read several articles by Clyde W Summers (apart from the article referred to in note 40) and the book *The Employment Contract in Transforming Labour Relations*, Lamy Betten, editor (Kluwer, 1995, ISBN 90-411-0149-7). The author should make himself/herself familiar with the international literature on codes of conduct. [RR 14]

(29) Some of the statements about French Law are overly generalizing: […] and *the sources few and old* (1988). [RR 18]

(30) Page 11 raises the question of the transplantability of laws from one system to another. The author(s) is plainly aware of the difficulties here, but maybe should at least refer to *the extensive debate going on around these sorts of issues in comparative labour law literature*. This issue is a key part of Anthony Forsyth's doctoral thesis (at the University of Melbourne). The author(s) could contact Anthony for relevant information. [RR 21]

(31) When it comes to the power of the employee to object to the transfer, reference could be made to the *Katsikas* case of the ECJ (C-132, 138 and 139/91). [RR 40]

(32) Finally, relating to the problem of outsourcing one could mention the cases *Oy Liikenne Ab v Liskojärvi and Juntunen* [2001] and *Carlito Abler v Sodexho MM Catering Gesellschaft mbH* [2004]. [RR 40]

3.10. The linguistic refinement principle

The language in the text needs to be both scholarly and idiomatic, of native speaker or near-native speaker quality,

with due regard to the use of appropriate genre conventions and specialised terminology.

The failure to pay due attention to the quality of the writing was a recurrent problem in the papers examined by the peer reviewers, as shown in the following examples:

(33) *Language: poor*. Much work needed. Because of *linguistic deficiencies* it is often difficult – or indeed impossible – to understand what the author means. [RR 14]

(34) The subject is interesting, however the paper cannot be published as such, without being totally rewritten, by an English speaking author, with very deep changes and conceptual revision. [RR 18]

(35) Part of the problem might be an insufficient mastery of English. The paper should be rewritten. Terms should be clarified, the meaning of the concepts clearly presented, economic or statistic evidence presented in support of the thesis. *The mastery of written English by the writer is insufficient to convey clearly the ideas*, which might be interesting. I am not speaking only of the written English, but of the knowledge of the meaning in English of *the basic concepts used in labor law and industrial relations*. Besides, or because of that, the concepts used are fuzzy. There should be a discussion of the extent and content of the "atypical work". It is a much discussed point. [RR 18]

(36) The article need *extensive language editing* and, in its current form, is not suitable for publication. [RR 20]

(37) In view of the above, there is, therefore, a need to refine the article from a substantive (contents) and *linguistic/grammatical* point of view. [RR 30]

(38) I have the feeling that *the article requires considerable rewriting* as far as the use of the English language is concerned. The manner in which some arguments have made or explanations and descriptions are structured, do not always appear clear, particularly not for readers who are unfamiliar with the Dutch system. [RR 32]

(39) The narrative itself is also flawed by a number of errors of *syntax and grammar* which would normally be caught and corrected during the editorial process. I will not address these. [RR 34]

However, it would be a mistaken to assume that linguistic refinement was a matter of concern only in the case of non-native speakers. On the one hand, some of the papers submitted by non-native speakers of English had been carefully revised by the authors, working either with or without a translator, and required only very minor changes during the editorial process, whereas on the other hand, a number of authors who were evidently native speakers of English submitted manuscripts pre-

senting language deficiencies of various kinds, including not only spelling and grammatical mistakes, but also an indiscriminate use of acronyms and abbreviations:

(40) There are also many *spelling and grammatical mistakes*. Also, *abbreviations* used are not always clarified – see, for example, the reference to the IAP and the NIC in the quotation on p 8. In short, the article is in need of *serious grammatical and linguistic editing* before it can be considered with a view to publication. [RR 29]

(41) Certain abbreviations should be explained because *non-British readers* might not be familiar with them (e.g. BCI, CAC, CLC, DTI, EWCA Civ and possibly also TUC). [RR 27]

In other cases the poor quality of the writing was not due to the fact that the author was a non-native speaker with an inadequate mastery of English, but due to the failure to adopt a formal register, so that the text was *childish*, *informal and casual*, or *chatty* and *journalistic* as in the following excerpts:

(42) Why is the text not publishable at present? Here are some answers!1/ The text lacks in stringency. 2/ The text repeats itself too often. 3/ *The text is "childish".*4/ The text smacks too much of a student graduation paper.5/ The text is too categorical. [RR 36]

(43) *The writing and formulation style often does not portray the picture of a neat, well-written and scientifically soundly formulated text.* *The language used is often too informal and casual*, and is plainly not acceptable for purposes of publication in a highly valued scientific journal […] There are several examples where the meaning of phrases and terminology used is unclear and at times ostensibly inconsistent. [RR 25]

(44) The text is *somewhat chatty*. It is also somewhat undisciplined. Furthermore, the text is partly informal in the sense of being written in a day-to-day manner (*journalistic*, one could say) rather than in a scholarly manner. [RR 36]

(45) One of the most serious shortcomings relates to the poor grammar and formulation. There is *little evidence of linguistic refinement. The language is loose, with many examples of unscientific "slang"*. [RR 29]

The specificity of language used in the discourse community emerges from the numerous references to domain-specific concepts ([24]). Certain practices and concepts in national systems may not have a counterpart in other national systems, and where they do, there is a need to find terminology or a transla-

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([24]) See G. CORTESE and P. RILEY (eds.), *Domain-Specific English: Textual Practices Across Communities and Classrooms*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2002.

tion equivalent ([25]) that expresses the practice or concept in a way that is clear to the transnational discourse community, as in the following excerpt:

(46) The translation of *Einigungsstelle* with "agreement authority" is misleading. The *Einigungsstelle* is no state authority. I would suggest […] the term "arbitration committee". [RR 21]

However, not all authors are successful in their attempt to translate concepts from one national system into another language ([26]):

(47) Some of the Hungarian notions (e.g, support) are not clearly understandable, at least as they are presented. [RR 18]

In this connection, there is a need to bear in mind Marco Biagi's observation that: "linguistic standardisation due to universal use of English is not always matched by a similarity of structures and functions" ([27]).

In some cases the authors relied too heavily on a translator whose knowledge of the disciplinary norms and domain-specific terminology was totally inadequate:

(48) This paper is *absolutely impossible to publish* […] [emphasis in the original] It would make a laughing stock of the Journal. It is all the more the pity because it has a worthy intention: to mix neo-institutional economics and labour law, in the US tradition of law and economics, which is much needed in France. However the result is a disaster. It is due to several reasons. First the command of English is very poor. And to use "very poor" is being kind. [RR 5]

The ability to convey *technical meanings* in the target language was particularly problematic when the translator had a background in literary English but lacked any knowledge of legal concepts. The result was that the sense could only be guessed at by trying to work out what expressions had been used in the source language, in an attempt to decipher the *literal but meaningless translations*:

(49) Either the paper has been written directly in English, and the author does not know the technical meaning in English of many of the terms that he/she uses, which leads to misunder-

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([25]) M. FREDDI, 'Argumentative Connectives in an English Translation of Galileo', in M. BONDI (ed.), *Forms of Argumentative Discourse. Per un'analisi linguistica dell'argomentare*, Bologna, Clueb, 1998, p.155.

([26]) For concepts relating to the EU, an essential starting point is the IATE database, Inter-Active Terminology for Europe, recently updated to include the languages of the new Member States: *http://iate.europa.eu/* (last visited 18 October 2008).

([27]) M. BIAGI, 'Forms of Employee Representational Participation', in R. BLANPAIN, C. ENGELS and G. BAMBER (eds.), *Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations in Industrialized Market Economies*, The Hague, Kluwer, 7th edition, 2001, p. 483.

standings and apparent contradictions […] It is […] possible that the paper was written soundly in French and translated ineptly, by somebody with some knowledge of literary English but a full ignorance of legal and economic concepts. In any case, the final result is that the paper makes no sense. I managed to go through it only because (a) I can guess at the French meaning of the English words used as substitutes for the correct technical ones, or as *literal but meaningless translations*; (b) I have a working knowledge of the concepts of neo-institutional economics used by the author (but not correctly described nor explained); and (c) I am somewhat familiar with the complexities and intricacies of French Labour Law. [RR 5]

The manuscripts that were abject failures were inadequate on a number of counts, and those that were highly commended by the reviewers were characterised by attention to all the key principles, particularly quality of argumentation and linguistic refinement:

(50) What do I have to say this time? Only good things! This is *top class scholarly work*. Top class in all relevant respects: *topic, presentation, argumentation, comparison, analysis and – last but not least – language*. Given all these characteristics it can come as no surprise when I say that it is a great pleasure to read the text. Contributing to the pleasure is the fact that the text is written in beautiful English! Of course I do not know the identity of the author. However, it is no wild guess that the author is active at one of the top universities […] *The text is of such splendid quality* that there can be no doubt whatsoever that it merits publication. [RR 27]

4. Discussion

On the basis of this overview of the principles of academic writing in the domain under consideration, it would greatly simplify matters from a pedagogic point of view if a strong correlation could be identified between one particular principle (or a particular sub-set of principles) and either acceptance or rejection, but no such correlation emerged from the data. Both acceptance and rejection appeared to depend on a multiplicity of factors, and the pedagogic implication is that each of the ten principles should be given due weight. The referee reports did not divide neatly into either acceptances or rejections. Rather, they were far more nuanced, requiring a more complex understanding. Instead of a simple positive-negative polarity, the final recommendations in the referee reports may be placed on a scale consisting of seven different types of response (Table 2, *Annex*).

These findings concur with the remarks of the journal editors: "It is very rare to get a straight acceptance, a minor revi-

sion is rare, a major revision is typical, even with established professors, not just with new researchers" ([28]). From Table 2, it is clear that commendations of the kind in excerpt (50) above are rare indeed, and most manuscripts require extensive revision that takes into account the comments of the peer reviewers.

This survey of referee reports has attempted to make the 'unwritten rules' ([29]) of academic discourse in the domain more explicit, and to highlight the collaborative aspects of academic writing, as an interactive process consisting of many critical stages. The collaborative and recursive nature of the writing process was also emphasised by the editors, who warned against believing in an *Immaculate Conception*: "The articles in a journal are anything from the fifth to the fifteenth rewrite of the paper. You don't just print it out and send it off. You need other people to look at it before sending it in. It almost never happens that there is an *Immaculate Conception*. Papers have been worked on for a long time. You might say, 'I can't write like that' but the truth is that most of the people who publish can't write like that either. It's a long process of writing, rewriting, getting feedback from colleagues, sending it in and then doing more rewriting" ([30]).

The complex nature of this process is highlighted in Figure 1 (*Annex*), which is not intended as an exhaustive account. It shows one possible sequence but not the only possible sequence: e.g. in some cases the manuscript has to be submitted prior to or even during the Conference. In addition it does not take account of the translation process, where required, nor does it consider cases in which authors make initial contact with the journal editors for a preliminary opinion, mindful of the fact that once they have submitted the manuscript, due to the all-important "no multiple submission" rule, they will need to await the outcome of the peer review before submitting it elsewhere ([31]).

([28]) [Q&A IIRA, Berlin, 8 September 2003].
([29]) "[At my college] professors never discussed publishing", K. BROWN, 'What Professors Want from Editors and Peer Reviewers', *http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/10/02/brown* (2 October 2008).
([30]) [Q&A IIRA, Berlin, 8 September 2003].
([31]) A general policy, also in the medical field: "*The New England Journal of Medicine* has had a policy for many years ('the Ingelfinger Rule') of considering a manuscript for publication only if its content has not been submitted or reported elsewhere". Editorial, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1991: 325: 1371-1373. Also in the natural sciences: "Nature journals' policy on duplicate publication: Material submitted to a Nature journal must be original and not published or submitted for publication elsewhere. This rule applies to material submitted elsewhere while the Nature journal contribution is under consideration" *http://www.nature.com/authors/editorial_policies/duplicate.html* (last accessed 18 October 2008).

In the implementation of this process, journal editors and peer reviewers play a key role in the reshaping and the accreditation of knowledge. As Bhatia has noted, "One can generally see two kinds of mechanisms in place to ensure generic integrity: the peer review process and the editorial intervention" ([32]). For the avoidance of doubt, the term 'generic integrity' is used here to refer to the requirements of a given genre. "Both these mechanisms, though operating at different levels, are actively invoked to ensure that all accounts of new knowledge conform to the standards of institutionalized behaviour that is expected by a community of established peers in a specific discipline" ([33]).

In addition to raising awareness for pedagogic purposes of the collaborative and recursive nature of academic writing, there is a need to take account of domain-specific aspects. Hyland in his critique of the attempt by Johns ([34]) to elaborate common principles of general expository academic prose, derived from composition theory, summarises these principles as "explicitness, intertextuality, objectivity, emotional neutrality, correct social relations, appropriate genre requirements, use of metadiscourse and hedging, and the display of a disciplinary vision" ([35]). Hyman takes issue with this account of academic discourse as it risks giving a misleading impression of uniformity. He argues that: "The discourses of the academy do not form an undifferentiated, unitary mass but a variety of subject-specific literacies. Disciplines have different views of knowledge, different research practices, and different ways of seeing the world, and as a result, investigating the practices of those disciplines will inevitably take us to greater specificity" ([36]). In other words, the differences between disciplines go far beyond terminology, and reflect the conventions, purposes, values and cultural norms of specific discourse communities, so there is a need to avoid adopting too narrow a definition of proficiency in academic writing, which grows out of an awareness of all these dimensions ([37]). The acquisition of proficiency should therefore not be a matter of "Blood, toil, tears and sweat" but of gaining awareness of research practices and values within the discourse community.

([32]) V. BHATIA, 2004, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 1, p. 189.
([33]) V. BHATIA, 2004, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 1, p. 189.
([34]) A.M. JOHNS, *Text, Role and Context: Developing Academic Literacies*, Applied Linguistics Series, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
([35]) K. HYLAND, 'Putting specificity into specific purposes: How far should we go', 1999, no page numbering. Available at: *http://sunzi1.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/view/10/1000221.pdf* (last accessed 30 August 2008).
([36]) K. HYLAND, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 28.
([37]) V. BHATIA, 2004, *op.cit. supra* note 1, p. 205.

In conclusion, there is a need to bear in mind Hyland's characterisation of academic writing and discourse: "Scholarly discourse is not uniform and monolithic, differentiated merely by specialist topics and vocabularies. It has to be seen as an outcome of a multitude of practices and strategies, where argument and engagement are crafted within specific communities that have different ideas about what is worth communicating, how it can be communicated, what readers are likely to know, how they might be persuaded, and so on" [38]. The acquisition of disciplinary proficiency entails learning how to produce discourse that readers will find both effective and convincing. It is to be hoped that the findings presented above, casting light on the specific discourse practices of the domain under consideration, will provide useful insights above all for new researchers working towards this objective.

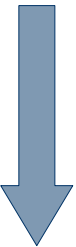[38] K. HYLAND, *op. cit.*, *supra*, note 28.

Annex

Table 1 – Ten key principles of academic writing in the referee reports in the corpus.

	Principle of academic writing	Number of occurrences
1	Disciplinary domain	6
2	Analytical framework	7
3	Appropriate methodology	2
4	Data quality	14
5	Relevance of topic	15
6	Textual integrity	4
7	Logical order	11
8	Quality of argumentation	27
9	Relevant literature	15
10	Linguistic refinement	18

Table 2 – Peer review recommendations in the corpus of referee reports.

	Recommendation	Number of occurrences
1	Highly commended and recommended for publication	2
2	Recommended for publication	0
3	Recommended for publication with minor changes	7
4	Recommended for submission elsewhere	3
5	Recommended for resubmission after extensive changes	21
6	Not recommended for publication	5
7	Not recommended for publication due to major shortcomings	2

Figure 1 – Academic writing as a recursive and collaborative process.

	PRODUCT	PROCESS	PARTICIPANTS
	Abstract	Proposal in response to Call for Papers	Conference organisers Author / co-authors
	PPT Presentation	Outline of research objectives, methodology and findings	Author / co-authors Conference participants
	First draft	Draft taking account of feedback from Conference discussion	Author / co-authors
	Second draft	Revision based on critique of first draft or "think-piece" (*) for limited circulation	Close colleagues Author / co-authors
	Manuscript	Submission for appraisal by journal	Journal editors Peer reviewers

Referee report	Double-blind peer review: recommendations	Peer reviewers Journal editors
Revised version	Peer-review recommendations worked into the text	Author / co-authors
Edited version	Editorial changes to improve quality of argu-mentation, style, clarity and textual cohesion	Journal editors
Proofs	Proofreading	Journal editors Author / co-authors
Publication	Distribution to readers of the journal	Publisher Journal readers

(*) I am grateful to Matt Finkin for this concept. See also 'Review of the EU Think-Piece on the Cancun Ministerial', *http://www.networkideas.org/feathm/oct2003/ft31_EU_Think_Piece.htm* (30 June 2008)