



Credibility and Accountability in Academic Discourse: Increasing the Awareness of Ghanaian Graduate Students

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Abstract: *Drawing from a social constructionist perspective to written scholarly communication, this paper argues that training in academic writing for students in higher education especially in second language contexts should go beyond emphasis on grammatical correctness and paragraphing strategies, and also focus on the rhetorical character of academic discourse together with the mastery of its communicative protocols. Using the University of Ghana as a reference point, the paper reviews a selection of Ghanaian graduate students' awareness of the protocols that govern academic discourses in scholarly writing, and in consideration of their unique educational and socio-cultural circumstances, the paper proposes strategies, from the pedagogical and institutional standpoints, aimed at increasing students' awareness of the relevant communicative practices that engender credibility and accountability.*

Keywords: scholarly writing, discourse community, literature review, research niche, plagiarism, reporting verbs

Introduction

Credibility and accountability in academic discourse can be achieved by fulfilling what Hyland (2004) describes as conditions of *adequacy* and *acceptability*. *Adequacy conditions* refer to the requirement that a statement has to occupy some persuasive and reasonable position within the discipline's knowledge corpus, expressed using the specialized vocabularies recognized by that discourse community. This is accomplished by adopting a particular conceptual slant towards a given body of data or a textual subject matter, giving our work authority and credibility. *Acceptability conditions* refer to the requirement that statements should be crafted in a manner that is responsive to the

“affective expectations” (Hyland, 2004:13) of the prototypical voices representing the discipline; this is accomplished by making linguistic choices that portray a professional attitude, and by providing proper and complete acknowledgement of our sources, giving our work accountability. In scholarly writing, new understanding and insights emerge inter-textually as authors explore the diversity of prior knowledge, mapping out the thematic landscape in terms of histories of ideas and schools of thought, and dealing with the vast literature which typically invites interpretative challenges depending upon one’s ideological viewpoint.

In this regard, we gain credibility and relevance by how thoroughly we contextualize our work through the rhetoric of literature review and ample demonstration of our work’s relation to specific specimens of prior knowledge in the discipline. While analyzing, interrogating, and synthesizing prior knowledge, we demonstrate accountability by observing proper citation protocols; these conventions are the way we signal our relative dependence upon and respect for other members of the knowledge-building community in which we thereby demonstrate our right to belong. Indeed, the competence we exhibit in handling these linguistic and rhetorical choices is decisive in whether we facilitate or obstruct our access to privileges in the scholarly community. Fluency in these conventions will confirm or deny our validation as members of this community.

Despite the growing relevance of this aspect of academic discourse, in Ghana research has tended to focus on grammatical lapses and paragraph writing infelicities (Asante, 2012; Quagie & Bag, 2013; Hyde, 2014; Klu, 2014; Mireku-Gyimah, 2014; Asante, 2015). Additionally, the initiation of Ghanaian students into disciplinary communicative norms has not been vigorously debated within clear epistemological and pedagogical paradigms. Conceivably, this is because expertise in the area of academic writing in Ghana is in its developmental stages; granted that currently, there are few researchers spearheading inquiries into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) especially from a genre analytical perspective and contrastive rhetoric (Afful, 2005, 2007; Adika, 2012; Lamptey & Atta-Obeng, 2013; Arhin, 2014; Musa, 2014). Indeed, research on student writing in higher education has largely focused on analyzing sentence and paragraph level errors, and neglected social constructionist perspectives, which I believe address fundamental questions related to how our students locate and model themselves in the academic discourse community. Using the University of Ghana as a reference point, I review a selection of Ghanaian graduate students’ awareness of the protocols that govern academic discourses. I also explain the core of linguistic skills and rhetorical strategies that are particularly useful for Ghanaian students in the light of their unique educational and socio-cultural circumstances, in order to demonstrate credibility and accountability in their academic discourse.

Educational and socio-cultural setting

When students enter university we want to introduce them to a range of literacies that will help them to negotiate their space in the competitive world of work; that is one ultimate objective. At the same time we want to be able to equip them with the communication skills and strategies that will enable them to gain membership into the academic community and subsequently to master its norms and protocols further so they have the capacity to negotiate and consolidate or to expand their space within that community. Therefore, universities in Ghana (like most universities elsewhere) have introduced language and study skills or communication courses designed for this purpose. The contents of these syllabi are fairly uniform across universities. They tend to address paragraph writing difficulties, lapses in grammar, study skills (reading and note-taking techniques), as well as basic issues in referencing skills. Due to cuts in staffing and increasing student numbers, these classes tend to be large, up to two hundred students.¹ Naturally, such large classes do not allow for regular instructor feedback on class assignments; this negatively affects students' academic writing development. Compounding the problem further is the fact that many of our university students do not take such courses seriously. They only begin to see the value retrospectively when in their final year they have to write long essays which require observing the right academic discourse protocols. Most students swiftly shelve the knowledge so gained and never actually develop the skills they urgently need.

Those who are able to enter graduate school appear lost, and those with sufficient tenacity ask countless albeit naïve questions about referencing conventions and plagiarism: why should I acknowledge a source if I have summarized the information? Why do I need to cite the author of an idea when it occurred to me before I read the source? Some questions also border on the distinction between common knowledge and interpretation, or between fact and opinion.

Do graduate programmes in Ghana's universities incorporate academic writing as a course into their curricula? The answer is negative. Most of these programmes rely on the obligatory course in research methods to provide graduate students with a general understanding of essential communication skills, academic protocol and discourse strategies as well. Indeed, graduate programmes in the Universities of Ghana all have strong research methods courses. But the written communication aspect of research, analysis and theorizing is largely taken for granted. The assumption is that students should know their discipline's writing conventions and be able to communicate comfortably without coaching. Graduate level text composing skills are therefore dependent on what students have already learnt at the undergraduate level. But as already pointed out, that is where students are unlikely to get adequate training in the nature of academic discourse.

¹ For decades the University of Ghana run average class sizes of 60-80 students; however, for the past 4 years it has been able to reduce its class sizes to 45-50 for its academic writing courses.

Furthermore, even beyond the foundational course in academic writing, the model of classroom interaction that students have internalized is that of the lecturer as a dominant figure endowed with all required knowledge, a figure disseminating unassailable information, to be revered as sacrosanct. The unquestioning and wholly submissive attitude is the mark of a good student; this view is held by some lecturers themselves. The student who dares to ask questions in class is often regarded as a disruptive element. I recall a case in my own undergraduate days when a lecturer in an introductory course on literature walked out of the class because a student had apparently obstructed his flow of thought by asking a question. With the lecturer gone, we all trooped out of the class in disappointment. While acknowledging that this interactive model may not be entirely responsible for the lapses in our students' grasp of the normative protocols for academic discourse, I contend that such incidents erode our graduate students' sense of intellectual conviction and self-confidence. Several of these students shuttle between one supervisor and another with stereotypical perspectives about the writing process and what participation in knowledge construction entails. For example, graduate students have periodically walked into my office merely to bemoan their inability to construct their research proposals. In some cases they ask about the meaning and requirements for an assignment that they have been given. They do not present their own perspectives on how the work could be approached but rather come to seek the senior authority's instructions. This attitude is consistent with the perception that the lecturer or the supervisor is the unassailable custodian of knowledge, a semi-god to be placated and assuaged with submissive deference, a creature who favours those who come for benefaction with an unquestioning heart and open mind. In other words, those who seek proximity by consulting the lecturer *by that very action* are approaching the truth.

Certain lecturing styles also discourage students from assuming the role of participants in the learning process, ignoring or suppressing the student's job as one who interrogates and challenges the received approach to issues as presented by the lecturer, the one who presents an antithetical, alternative, or untutored perspective, as one who brings a fresh and unstudied perspective. Rather, many lecturers impose their own standpoint upon students sometimes unwittingly, through a unidirectional lecturing style, unaccommodating of students' reactions to the knowledge or information that is being transmitted.

The university's own structure and modeling exacerbates this problem of acculturating students as participants in the knowledge construction process. For undergraduates, apart from academic writing or communication skills courses at the first-year level (with the exception of the University of Ghana where it extends to the second year), there is no substantial effort at the disciplinary level to impart mastery of discipline-specific communicative practices (Adika & Owusu-Sekyere, 1997).

Theoretical and conceptual considerations

In presenting the theoretical underpinning for this paper, the works of Ken Hyland on social interactions in academic writing feature large. I have also been influenced by the works of John Swales, whom I met as a graduate student at the University of Cambridge several years ago, when Swales' landmark *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* had just been published by Cambridge University Press; from the start it was and remains widely acclaimed in Applied Linguistics circles.

Academic discourse communities

Swales (1990) offers an enlightening definition of *discourse community* by contrasting it with *speech community*: “A *speech community typically inherits its membership by birth, accident or adoption; a discourse community [my emphasis] recruits its members by persuasion, training or relevant qualification*” (Swales, 1990:24). As Swales points out, gaining membership is not accidental; membership is earned through training and qualification. Academic discourse communities are composed of individuals with diverse experiences, expertise, commitments and influences. Establishing yourself in a competitive disciplinary terrain requires the capacity to communicate your use of prior knowledge, and the relevance of your new contribution. There are also groups in competition clustering around accepted or contested ideas, with peripheral and dominant contributors (Hyland, 2004). For example, a PhD in Linguistics qualifies you as a member of the community of linguists, and with this membership come two things: firstly, you bring along with you your distinctive expertise as well as ideological leanings, which may then engender an alignment with others of similar persuasion. Secondly, you may produce research that becomes generally accepted or that challenges conventional thinking in one or another sub-disciplinary area. The thread that binds these two traits is your mastery of the normative rhetorical practices that govern written communication in your discipline.

How scholars write, therefore, reflects their competence in negotiating research spaces for themselves. The point is that the writer and the reader of academic texts usually belong to shared or cognate discourse communities, with shared beliefs and shared assumptions about knowledge construction and argument structures in their disciplines. Within and between cognate disciplines there are community accepted ways of presenting ideas and negotiating meaning. For example, while writing in linguistics is largely data-driven, in the field of philosophy it is largely through critical analysis of a specified issue most often already marked out by previously established literature; further content is developed and contributed through argumentation and counter-argumentation.

The published writing of scholars reflects their competence in handling discipline-specific communicative practices. As Hyland (2004:11) puts it, “[t]hese practices are not simply a matter of personal stylistic preference, but community-recognized ways of adopting a position and expressing a

stance.” That is the turf where Ghanaian graduate students and, indeed students and young scholars elsewhere, have to negotiate their space and validate their individual voices. For this purpose Swales (1990:202) views the usefulness of the concept of discourse community, in that it “*can be invoked in order to help students... become better amateur ethnographers of their own communities*”.

Establishing a research niche in academic discourse

The rhetoric of literature reviews

As part of the background research for this paper, I reviewed the most recent (2012/2013 academic year) assessors’ reports for graduate theses submitted to the University of Ghana School of Graduate Studies (UGSGS). In all, I examined thirty-five reports comprising nine from the Sciences and twenty-six from the Humanities. The breakdown was as follows: Sciences – three PhD and six Masters reports; Humanities – seven PhD and nineteen Masters reports.

The Pitfalls

Some of the predominant negative comments (categorized as Comments a-g) that I came across are discussed below:

Comment (a). ...However, in several parts of the chapter (i.e., literature review chapter), the author fails to provide the relevant sources of the review to allow the independent assessor to have full confidence in establishing the quality of the review.

The import of comment (a) is that the candidate does not provide the relevant sources; the effect is that the independent assessor does not have full confidence to establish the quality of the candidate’s literature review in terms of dates of the sources, reputation of the sources, and verifiability of the sources. In short, the required inter-textual warrants lack credibility.

Comment (b). The researcher was not able to cite properly the source of the NDHS 2008 whose data he analyzed in his project.

Comment (b) signals a violation of the accountability requirement. Verifiable sources express to the reader that neither our claims nor our sources are fictitious.

Comment (c). The dissertation has a section with the title “Literature Review”. However, it is not clear why the literature cited is being reviewed. It is not obvious how the information provided in the literature review is linked to the research objective and hypothesis. I suggest that the author refers to the following paper which provides some direction on the purpose and how to prepare a literature review. Andrew Armitage, Dianne Keeble-Allen and Aglia Ruskin

“Undertaking a structured literature review or structuring a literature review: tales from the field”. Another useful reference is “Writing a literature review” prepared by the Academic Writing Help Centre, Graduate Student Writing of the University of Ottawa. They can both be downloaded from the net.

Comment (d). ...One unfortunate point though, is candidate’s inability to relate the literature being reviewed to his work. A cardinal principle in the writing of such dissertations is to show the relevance of literature being reviewed to the work.

Comment (e). ... Showing the relevance of work being reviewed to the dissertation is imperative, not an option.

The candidates’ failure to establish credibility emerges from comments (c), (d), and (e). First, in some theses the motivation for the literature review is ambiguous; second, when a candidate is unable to situate current research within the disciplinary body of prior knowledge, there is a violation of adequacy conditions which require that a reasonable relationship be shown between the thesis and the discipline’s prior knowledge framework.

With respect to comment (f) below, apart from obvious problems with citation protocols, the assessor’s concerns also have to do with the structuring of content as well as the handling of authorial voice. The import is that negotiating our research space when reviewing prior knowledge precludes unwarranted personal narratives. Our expository posture should be driven by counter claiming, indicating a gap, or question raising as we align the network of prior literature.

Comment (f). Candidate needs to recast the literature review. The format chosen is completely at variance with the norm. Some of the literature seems quite irrelevant. Also, the reader is kept in suspense as to which literature is being reviewed, as candidate veers into narratives of her own.

Regarding comment (g) below, the assessor’s comments indicate violations related to both adequacy and acceptability conditions. The point at issue is that the candidate has not demonstrated an awareness of the important references, defined here as works produced by academics as opposed to activists. In other words, the candidate has focused on the perceived peripheral members of the disciplinary community to seek validation for his or her research. The evaluation of the candidate’s communicative style as pedestrian, that is commonplace or dull, implies that the assessor assumes a preferred rhetorical style for engaging prior knowledge. The expectation is that the style should be reflective rather than impassive, analytical rather than non-discursive, dialectic rather than acquiescent. The verdict then is that the candidate’s credibility is doubtful; and his accountability profile has been considerably discredited.

Comment (g). The candidate demonstrates limited knowledge of the literature pertaining to political science, international politics and

international political economy, from which concepts such as global governance and participatory governance can be derived. Much of the very thin assembly of literature reviewed is lightweight: consultancy reports, un-refereed and other publications of dubious scholarly provenance. Indeed, quite a number of them were written by activists as opposed to scholars. ... The literature review is equally pedestrian. It attempts to summarize pieces of literature without analyzing how they relate to each other – in terms of the similarities they share or the differences between them. For example, the difference or similarity between the contentions of Author X and those of Author Y is not specified, even though the summary of the latter in the next paragraph begins with the phrase “on the other hand”.

An Analysis of a Sample Literature Review Section

In this section, I analyze the literature review section (Extract 1 below) of a Master of Philosophy dissertation. The piece demonstrates the inability of some Ghanaian graduate students to adopt a critical and analytical perspective when reviewing items of previous literature. Indeed, the review of literature below is generally organized on a geographical or regional basis: from Ghana to Zimbabwe, then to New York and finally London. The macro structuring of the content is not on the basis of the issues but in terms of “home and abroad”. Within the “home and abroad” framework, items of previous research are considered or listed not according to any principle of selection, but apparently on the basis of how they occur to the writer or the student as the text is composed. This arbitrariness is not a sporadic flaw but is quite pervasive in the writing of our graduate students as available examiners’ reports have demonstrated.

Extract 1: Sample Literature Review (M.Phil. Thesis)

Ghana. Agor (2003) did analyses of how teacher training college students of Ghana apply the principles and the rules of concord in their writings. He did his work in three training colleges, Presby Teacher Training College, Akropong, Accra Teacher Training College, and Mampong Teacher Training. He found out that students in the training colleges lack the explicit knowledge of concord.

Dako (1997), examined scripts of Literature of part 11 final year students of department of English in University of Ghana, Legon. She examined the scripts with regard to the sentence level problems that the students faced. Her findings show that the students did not adhere to the rules of reference. Tandoh’s (1987) work was based on standard of undergraduate students written English in the University of Ghana. She looked at error types and established twelve types of error, among which are noun phrase, verb phrase, concord, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation.

Odamten et al. (1994) also did error analysis at the sentence level in the areas of concord and spelling. Gyimah and Tay-Agbozo (2005) looked at paragraph development in a Senior High School and basic school respectively. The two of them concluded that the approach normally used to teach the students was not helping them to grasp the skills of paragraph development.

They therefore recommended process approach to be used to teach at those levels.

Anyidoho (1997) analyzed essays of final year students who offered Phonology. She based her analysis on grammar; spelling and mechanical inaccuracies. Her work revealed that students failed to master the rudiments of grammar and therefore suggested that revision and editing skills should be taught pupils at the basic level. Adika (1999) did analysis of essays of first year students of university of Ghana. His analysis was based on sentence level concerns with particular reference to thematic progression and underdeveloped rheme as well as ambiguous co-reference.

Zimbabwe. Gonye et al (2012) looked at academic writing challenges in the Great Zimbabwe University. They did analysis of students' essays which was based on sentence level weaknesses. Their findings revealed so many sentence level errors among which are, pronoun references, concord, punctuation and wrong use of homophones.

New York. Raimes (1985) works on writing; she suggests that grammar should be well taught in schools, because writing helps students to display what they know about grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary.

London. Matthew et al. (1985) worked on essay writing, their focus was on punctuation. They conclude that writing has to be well punctuated and more cohesive if it is to achieve its purpose.

Now, eight out of the ten works looked at so far at both home and abroad, show that the researchers did error analysis at sentence level. They focused on errors like concord, spelling, punctuation, phrases, complex sentences and other sentence level errors. The remaining two Gyimah and Tay-Agbozo (2005) looked at paragraph development problems at Junior high and Senior high schools respectively. The rest of the researches were done at the university level. And most of them were also done in the 20th century except Agor (2003), Gyimah and Tay-Agbozo (2005) and Gonye et al (2012).

Now, this research intends to look at the paragraph development problems students face at the training college level in that the trainees are required to have sound knowledge of principles of paragraph development so that they will be able to impart the right way of developing ideas in writing into the pupils they will be going to teach upon the completion of their course. Secondly, the two works on paragraph development were silent on the thesis statement which is the main idea of any write up. And finally, their works were done at the M.A level not MPhil level.

Another intriguing feature of Extract 1 is the writer's use of reporting verbs (Thompson & Ye, 1991; Thomas & Hawes, 1994; Hyland, 2002, 2004) in an integral environment. This predictably gives greater prominence to the cited authors. Arguably, this style may be a derivative from Ghanaian students' respect for authority, especially scholarly authority; granted though that it is also in line with Hyland's (2002:124) assertion that the soft disciplines (humanities) "are more inclined to explicitly recognize the role of human agency in constructing knowledge." Nonetheless, in the case of this student, the framing of the reporting context lacks analysis and synthesis. Prior knowledge is represented as isolated events rather than an inter-related community-driven enterprise.

The reporting verbs used derive mainly from Research Acts, which describe the author's findings or comment on research procedures. Within the Findings sub-category of Research Acts, the student has acknowledged his acceptance of the author's results or conclusions with factive verbs such as "establish", "show", and "reveal". The student also deploys verbs

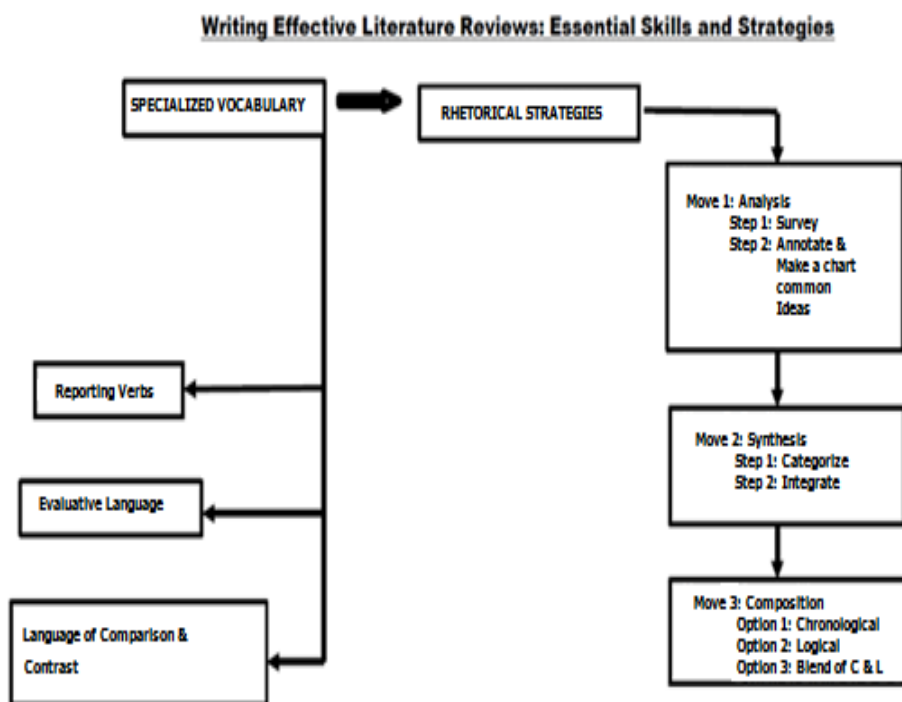
from the non-factive sub-category which signal no clear attitudinal posture as to the reliability or otherwise of the information (e.g., find out). There are also verbs which refer to the procedural aspects of the student's investigation (analyze, do, examine, work, and look at). We do not find clear instances of Discourse Act verbs which convey an evaluation of the cited material, and allow the writers to take responsibility for their interpretation, convey their uncertainty or assurance of the claims reported, or attribute a qualification to the author (Hyland, 2002). The only instance (the last paragraph), and it is where the student formalizes and attempts to establish a research niche in terms of Swales' CARS model (Move 2)² that we encounter an explicit evaluative statement regarding the prior research being reported: "Secondly, the two works on paragraph development *were silent* on the thesis statement which is the main idea of any write up. And finally, their works were done at the M.A level *not* MPhil level."

In sum, the sample analysis above combined with examining assessors' reports show that teaching, assignment design, and assessment methods should incorporate elements for building the capacity of graduate students in the use of the specialized vocabulary and rhetorical skills required for demonstrating credibility and accountability in their academic writing. My strong conviction is that these skills and rhetorical strategies can be acquired and perfected through systematic study, with the support of faculty and the relevant institutional writing units within Ghanaian universities. That, indeed, is the motivation for a schema I have proposed for handling literature reviews.

A schema for writing effective literature reviews

The schema I have proposed is a practical way of introducing students to the essential skills and strategies for writing effective literature reviews. As part of an academic writing course, students can be taken through these communicative protocols and shown how the protocols contribute to fostering credibility in academic discourse. The schema has two core parts. These are Specialized Vocabulary on one part and the Rhetorical strategies on the other. The Specialized Vocabulary comprises three aspects; namely, Reporting Verbs, Evaluative language, and the Language of Comparison and Contrast.

² Swales' CARS model proposes a move structure for research article introductions motivated by the rhetorical need to establish the relevance of the current research. There are three moves; namely, Move 1: Establishing a Territory (by providing background information that previews the main issue) Move 2: Establish a Niche (by identifying the main issue or problem that will be discussed) Move 3: Occupying the Niche (by indicating the contents, structure and/or aims of the paper).



Specialized vocabulary

Use of reporting verbs

Reporting verbs signal our attitude as writers towards the status of an author's ideas, theories or research; or our evaluation of the evidential status of the sources we are reviewing. The verbs are an effective way for writers to refute or respond critically to prior research and establish a niche for their own alternative position; and as demonstrated in the analysis of Extract 1, our students need training in the use of these verbs. Complex categorizations of reporting verbs exist (for example Thompson & Ye, 1991; Hyland, 1999); however, for our purposes the simple categorization offered by Monash University's language learning support centre would suffice. Thus, reporting verbs may be categorized into 5:

Category 1: Author makes a point to develop or justify his/her argument. Examples: account for, claim, contend, establish, find, hold the view, maintain etc.

Category 2: Author draws attention to a particular point. Examples: emphasize, focus on, insist, note, observe, draw attention to, reiterate etc.

Category 3: Author positions him/herself against other authors. Example: dispute, challenge, reject, support etc.

Category 4: Signals author's omissions. Example: assume, take for granted.

Category 5: Signals author's admissions; that is, the author concedes a point of potential weakness. Example: Acknowledge, recognize.

Evaluative language

Evaluative language is the kind of language that expresses the value, importance, weakness or limitation of the object of the discourse. It also demonstrates the posture or attitude of the writer towards the evidential status of a proposition. It is a very broad category involving the use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Examples: sanctioned, doubtful, rudimental, unprecedented, overworked, flawed etc. An awareness of the language of evaluation would enable the students to demonstrate their critical perspectives on what others have done and equip them to establish a basis for negotiating their own research space. However, how much of evaluative language do Ghanaian graduate students deploy? A close examination of their academic writing shows a limited use of these evaluative words or phrases. The underlying reasons are not far-fetched. One of these is the do-not-question authority syndrome.

As I have explained in a recent paper on this topic (Adika, 2012), over the years, education in Ghana has been fed mainly by printed material produced overseas by Euro-American scholarship. Our school system has clung uncritically to the use of these materials in moulding the minds of students. Textbooks, and for that matter the printed word, have assumed the status of authority. The attitude of teachers, and the nature and quality of class exercises and activities arm students to imbibe printed information, and to demonstrate their capacity to recall – sometimes at the merciless hands of cane-wielding teachers. For most of our students then the printed word cannot be questioned; their task as readers is to memorize the information in print and regurgitate it when the occasion demands. At university level, published material is perceived as an embodiment of authority, therefore infallible and unquestionable. Information from textbooks is thereby uncritically incorporated into essays (Adika, 2012:1496).

The exercise of evaluative language also derives from students' capacity to draw from their personal repertoire of vocabulary. Weak evaluative language, in terms of range and felicity of usage, limits our students' capacity to find and use refreshing or creative ways to engage or interrogate printed material or to comment on the evidential status of a proposition. Worse still, within the set-up of our universities the opportunities for extended writing and therefore the exercise of evaluative judgment is limited; large classes have constrained the nature of assignments that lecturers can give to students. Assignment types therefore mainly consist of short notes or answers requiring short notes.

Language of comparison and contrast

In order to properly align our sources in terms of similarity and contrast, we ought to be able to deploy the linguistic resources that signal such alignments. Examples of such expressions are – “similarly”, “likewise”, “in the same fashion”, “as in X, in Y”, and “the same”. To show contrast we have words and phrases such as – “in contrast”, “unlike X, Y”, “in contrast to”, “on the other hand”, “however”, “but”, “whereas”, and “while”. Incorporating the language of comparison into our communication of prior literature enables our readers to see explicit and vivid linkages among sources. Within the context of the writing class or in lecturer response to students’ writing, students can be made aware of the multiplicity of pieces of language for expressing similarity and contrast despite the fact that the language of comparison is a recurrent feature of everyday communication. However, as part of academic discourse, it is reflective of students’ intellectual and analytical engagement with the reading material. That is why it is important to increase the linguistic awareness of our students in this respect and help them to shore up their repertoire accordingly. Writing tasks could be structured around key terms or words signaling relationships of similarity or contrast between and/or among sources. Some of my graduate students have expressed genuine surprise at the range of words available.

So far we have been examining the first part of the schema, which is Specialized Vocabulary, now we can shift our attention to the second part – Rhetorical Strategies.

Rhetorical strategies

The rhetorical strategies outlined in the schema have been inspired by Swales’ conception of move-structure in the rhetoric of research article (RA) introductions. I propose a three-move composing strategy for the literature review segment which constitutes the turf where scholars build their credibility through a demonstration of their understanding of the “dialectics” of knowledge construction in the research area.

Move 1 involves analyzing sources in order to chart or plot the common ideas in the plethora of materials that have been gathered. Move 1 has two steps; step 1 involves surveying the materials that have been assembled, and deploying the applicable skimming and scanning techniques. The overall purpose is to familiarize ourselves with the material in order to transit smoothly into step 2 which involves annotating the sources and making a chart of common ideas. A simple numbering system could be employed to plot threads between one source and another or among sources.

Move 2 involves synthesis, which also comprises two steps. Step 1 involves categorizing the maze of ideas plotted or charted. Categorization then goes with integration. Sources can be grouped on the basis of the thematic and sub-thematic categories identified and specified.

Move 3 signals that the text is constructed on the basis of thematic relationships and tensions rather than on a bland summary of what various authors have said in their research papers. Depending on our

purposes, the overall macro-structuring of the content may be either chronological, logical or a combination of the two. The essential point here is that we have allowed ourselves to go through a process that allows us to interrogate and align our sources in relation to a debate or a central concern or in a way that allows us to see gaps in the state of knowledge in the area. The research niche so forged would then have been given credibility by the fact that it would have been embedded in the analysis of the relevant network of references or prior knowledge.

Establishing accountability through proper citation practices

Citation protocols and plagiarism

Citation protocols, referencing skills, or documentation methods enable scholars not only to share their findings while making it clear who had done the original research but also provide proof that their sources of information are not fictitious. Referencing is therefore a fundamental and critical aspect of scholarship. It is a way in which members of the academe acknowledge the contributions of others to knowledge creation and dissemination, and signal the extent of their use of such contributions and their own original input (Adika, 2014). Graduate students, as burgeoning members of the scholarly community, need to understand the value of such textual practices and commit to them (Ibid). Referencing evokes an explicit “inter-textual framework” (Hyland, 2004:21) for the construction of new knowledge; the violations of which could create credibility problems for writers, especially researchers striving to consolidate their membership of the scholarly or scientific community.

It is important for our students to understand citation protocols and the whole area of referencing and making attributions. The citation protocols we observe constitute an integral part or aspect of the accountability requirement. As scholars we have to indicate our reliance on prior knowledge, and how in negotiating our research spaces we have drawn from existing knowledge. Often, at the undergraduate level issues related to referencing and making proper attributions are taken for granted. Even in terms of assignment design many lecturers neglect this aspect of the preparation and orientation of our students. The result is that they grow up in their academic career with the wrong intellectual orientation, especially with respect to plagiarism.

Graduate students' knowledge of plagiarism

I conducted a study recently (Adika, 2014) to determine whether graduate students in the University of Ghana have sufficient background preparation in the use of documentation styles; and the extent of their knowledge as regards referencing styles. The major issue that emerged was that while our graduate students do substantial writing and depend a lot on the Internet for source materials, most of them do not have extensive practical background training in the use of referencing formats. They are consequently unable to identify the types of documentation formats let alone apply the formatting skills related to a specific referencing style. I argue that assignment design and the expectations of lecturers, especially at the undergraduate level, indirectly encourage purloining or stealing from source material, and that issues related to methods of documentation are only highlighted to students who decide to write long essays or embark upon a project work that involves extended writing in the final year of their undergraduate studies. Invariably, the whole process becomes a one-time experience for the few students who decide to or are selected to write long essays. Their personal narratives of the “toil and sweat” involved in incorporating and acknowledging source texts into their writing abound. This one-time experience is only re-activated when these students decide to enroll into graduate school.

In the study, I emphasized that there appears to be a gap between what students are introduced to in their academic skills courses and the assignment design along with lecturer expectations in students' discipline-specific areas. Therefore, by the time students get to the final year it is most likely that they would have forgotten about referencing skills leading thus to violations of citation norms when they proceed to do regular extended writing requiring the use of multiple sources at graduate school.

Dealing with referencing challenges and ensuring accountability in the academic writing of Ghanaian students require individual and institutional commitment. At the individual level, each student should take personal responsibility for developing or sharpening their reading and note-taking skills; and at the institutional level, the university should create and implement policies that would ensure that pedagogical approaches sufficiently address referencing and plagiarism matters as well as provide the appropriate intellectual climate for orientating students to their commitments to the academe.

Conclusion

This paper comprised a theoretical overview and some technical skill building in the art of academic self-determination. As a starting point, I explained the notions of credibility and accountability in academic discourse, and elucidated the concept of an academic discourse community; I then provided a brief overview of the educational and socio-cultural context of Ghanaian university student academic life; and thereafter, I examined the link between establishing credibility and the rhetoric of literature reviews. Finally, I demonstrated how accountability

can be achieved through proper citation practices; and in this connection considered the nature and causes of plagiarism, discussing strategies for dealing with the phenomenon at the individual and institutional levels.

In academic discourse, we are essentially negotiating research spaces and establishing our “authorial self” through a network of linguistic and rhetorical choices (Hyland, 2004). In this paper, I have tried to explain the specialized vocabulary, the essential skills, and the rhetorical strategies we need to gain mastery of, so that as members of the academic discourse community we do not violate the adequacy and acceptability conditions that govern the construction of knowledge in our discourse communities. This is particularly relevant to Ghanaian graduate students considering their peculiar educational and socio-cultural circumstances, as well as graduates in other English as second language contexts. As up-and-coming members of the scholarly community they need to familiarize themselves with citation protocols and adhere to them in a rigorous manner. That is a definite way of guaranteeing the integrity of their scholarship and making themselves more accountable to the affective expectations of members of their disciplinary community.

In the Universities of Ghana, institutional processes for initiating students into the academic discourse communities are still evolving. There is recognition of the effect of small class sizes on the academic writing development of students but issues of cost still stifle initiatives for reduction in class sizes. Plagiarism policies are being crafted and reviewed to respond more effectively to the electronic availability of information and to students’ lack of experience using protocols of respect for intellectual property. As African universities develop and acquire the technology to explore new pedagogical styles, issues of plagiarism would, I believe, be tackled in a much more systematic and scientific way. Like their counterparts in western or Anglocentric universities there would be greater awareness of the fundamental violations of referencing protocols.

Additionally, the teaching of research report writing requires greater emphasis especially within disciplinary contexts, and senior academics ought to take greater interest in helping graduate students and young academics to master this aspect of scholarly communication. The practice, especially in North American universities, is to institute writing centres as support units. Indeed, the University of Ghana, under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation, has established a writing centre with the goal of providing editorial assistance to students as well as young scholars. While acknowledging the usefulness of a writing centre, I contend that by and large, it is the entire university especially the senior academics of the community who can ensure that the process of acculturation properly takes place. Indeed, all the things that we require our students to do or that we do ourselves in university – give lectures, seminars, write assignments, term papers, dissertations, and long essays – require essential communicative practices that should be taught in practical ways to equip the student with strategies appropriate for each rhetorical situation.

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