Risk in Academic Writing

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Series Editor: Professor Viv Edwards, *University of Reading, Reading, Great Britain*

Two decades of research and development in language and literacy education have yielded a broad, multidisciplinary focus. Yet education systems face constant economic and technological change, with attendant issues of identity and power, community and culture. This series will feature critical and interpretive, disciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives on teaching and learning, language and literacy in new times.

Full details of all the books in this series and of all our other publications can be found on http://www.multilingual-matters.com, or by writing to Multilingual Matters, St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.

Risk in Academic Writing

Postgraduate Students, Their Teachers and the Making of Knowledge

Edited by
Lucia Thesen and Linda Cooper

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS
Bristol • Buffalo • Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Risk in Academic Writing: Postgraduate Students, their Teachers and the Making of Knowledge/Edited by Lucia Thesen and Linda Cooper.
New Perspectives on Language and Education: 34
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Academic writing. 2. English language—Rhetoric. 3. Risk-taking (Psychology) I. Thesen, Lucia, editor of compilation. II. Cooper, Linda, 1953- editor of compilation. III. Series: New perspectives on language and education: 34.
PE1408.R5674 2013
808.02–dc23 2013032421

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-78309-105-8 (hbk)
ISBN-13: 978-1-78309-104-1 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters
UK: St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.
USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.
Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

The policy of Multilingual Matters/Channel View Publications is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products, made from wood grown in sustainable forests. In the manufacturing process of our books, and to further support our policy, preference is given to printers that have FSC and PEFC Chain of Custody certification. The FSC and/or PEFC logos will appear on those books where full certification has been granted to the printer concerned.

Typeset by Techset Composition India (P) Ltd., Bangalore and Chennai, India.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by the Lavenham Press Ltd.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Where did this book begin? One answer is at the kitchen table in the warm winter sun, talking about students in postgraduate writers' circles. Were they likely to take the risk of trying out new forms in their writing? The word 'risk' hung in the air, and we decided to see where we could travel with it.

Many people have helped to make this book possible. First, we thank the Research Office at the University of Cape Town. Brenda Cooper encouraged us to write the initial research proposal for the Knowledge Project and led the workshop that brought all the authors together at Kalk Bay. She has remained interested in the project throughout. Robert Morrell continued with just the right mix of challenge and flexibility.

Shaheeda Jaffer, Robert Prince and Andrew Deacon were members of our lively Postgraduate Literacies research group in the Centre for Higher Education Development, where this project began. Heather Jacklin, Hilary Janks and Ann Johns gave useful comments in the early stages.

Special thanks to Anna Roderick and Tommi Grover at Multilingual Matters. Anna took a risk in accepting this manuscript and has eased our way at every step.

Mary Ralphs was a wise editor, writer's friend and sounding board. Tessa Botha generously read the manuscript with a careful eye.

We are grateful to the Carnegie Foundation for funding our part in the Knowledge Project, and to the Centre for Higher Education Development for supporting our Postgraduate Literacies initiative.

Finally as editors we thank the contributors to this book. Each one of you has turned risk into challenge and possibility. Surely this is a good sign for postgraduate students, their teachers and the making of knowledge.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAVE	African American vernacular English
ABET	Adult basic education and training
ANT	Actor network theory
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
UCT	University of Cape Town
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

Contributors

Moeain Arend is a lecturer in the Language Development Unit in the Centre for Higher Education Development at the University of Cape Town. He currently teaches and convenes a first year academic literacy course in the Faculty of Humanities. His main research interests are in academic literacy, workplace literacy and ethnography, and the movement of written texts and literacy practices across institutional boundaries.

Kate Cadman is a consultant senior lecturer at the University of Adelaide in Australia where she specialises in English for academic and specific purposes, and transcultural research education in the humanities and social sciences. Kate has conducted international consultancies on the writing of theses and articles for international publication in many Asian countries, and currently reviews for several international journals including the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* for which she is an editorial board member. Among her recent publications are a *TESOL Quarterly* article asking, 'TESOL and TESD in remote Aboriginal Australia – the true story?' (2011, with Jill Brown), and a co-edited book titled *Bridging Transcultural Divides: Asian Languages and Cultures in Higher Education* (2012, with Xianlin Song).

Suresh Canagarajah is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of applied linguistics and English at Pennsylvania State University. He teaches postcolonial theory, composition and World Englishes. His latest publication is *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations* (Routledge, 2013).

Mapfumo Clement Chihota taught applied linguistics at the Zimbabwe Open University before joining the University of Cape Town (UCT) as a PhD student in English language and literature. Between 2003 and 2009, Mapfumo served in the UCT Centre for Higher Education Development as

a writing centre consultant and a part-time lecturer on the Postgraduate Writing Project. Mapfumo currently lives with his family in New Zealand, where he works for the Ministry of Social Development. He previously published a reflection on the pedagogic space afforded by Writer Circles (*Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2007).

Brenda Cooper was for many years the director of the Centre for African Studies and a professor in the English department at the University of Cape Town, where she is now an emeritus professor. In 2009 she moved to Salford, where she is an honorary research associate at the University of Manchester and runs *Burnish*, which organises workshops on academic writing. She has published widely on African fiction in English, postcolonial literary theory and African studies. Brenda is currently writing a cross-genre book that is a mixture of life writing, invention and diasporic African art and literary studies. It is titled *Floating in an Anti-bubble from South Africa to Salford: A Book about Art, Language, Diaspora and Personhood.*

Linda Cooper is associate professor in the Centre for Higher Education Development and teaches adult education at the University of Cape Town. She shares responsibility for widening access to adult learners and for implementing recognition of prior learning (RPL) within the institution. She has been involved over many years in supporting trade union education and is a member of the International Advisory Board of the Researching Work and Learning Conference. She has published on the history and contemporary practice of worker education; the impact of globalisation on workplace learning and knowledge; and on the theorization of different forms of knowledge.

Somikazi Deyi is currently a lecturer in the African Languages Department at the University of Cape Town and course convenor of isiXhosa in the Faculty of Health Sciences. Her love of expressing herself in writing started at an early age with poetry and short stories. Some of her poetry was published in 1993 by Buchu Books through a project known as the Omnibus Series for New Writers, and as an individual anthology of poetry titled *Praising God through Poetry*. She has also published the books, *Phila unikwe ubomi*; *Ndibonga iNkosi yam* (poetry) and *Umama* (collaborative work).

Aditi Hunma lectures at the University of Cape Town on a new foundational writing course called 'Working with texts in the Humanities,' offered by the Humanities Education Development Unit (EDU) for first year students in the extended degrees. Her involvement in the course design and

teaching is aligned with her PhD research where she explores performative spaces and methods to nurture the writer identities of international students with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Over the years, she has also tutored on linguistics courses, offered one-on-one writing support at the UCT Writing Centre, taught English in two South African high schools and developed a writing module for international students at UCT. She is currently interested in the affordances of safe and dynamic online spaces to promote students' critical thinking in writing.

Ena Lee is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She teaches EAL (English as an Additional Language) theory and methodology courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level as well as first-year foundational academic literacy courses. Her research interests include EAL teacher education, student and teacher identity and anti-racist education.

Theresa Lillis is professor in English language and applied linguistic at the Open University, UK. Motivated by an interest in the politics of access and participation, her research areas include the academic writing and literacy practices of students and professional scholars and writing across academic and non-academic domains, particularly in the area of social work. Her publications include *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, and Desire* (Routledge, 2001), *Academic Writing in a Global Context* (with Mary Jane Curry, Routledge, 2010) and *The Sociolinguistics of Writing* (Edinburgh University Press 2013).

Moragh Paxton is currently acting head of the Language Development Unit in the Centre for Higher Education at the University of Cape Town. She has nearly 30 years of experience teaching academic literacies at all levels of higher education and in many different disciplines. Her main research area is writing and she has used text-oriented ethnographic approaches to gain insights into the experiences and practices of a very diverse group of students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She currently leads the *Integrated Literacies for Learning* in science research project, which explores a range of academic literacies, including the quantitative and digital.

Mary Scott has taught English literature and educational studies in universities in South and the United Kingdom. She has presented at international conferences in South Africa, the United States and China, and has published a number of peer-reviewed papers on postgraduate student writing, especially that of cross-national, cross-lingual students. She is the founding director of the Centre for Academic and Professional Literacy Studies at the

Institute of Education University of London and runs the Interuniversity Academic Literacies Research Group which has members on all five continents.

Emmanuel Sibomana taught English and French at different high schools in Rwanda, worked as a specialist for French examinations in the Rwanda National Examinations Council and lectured at Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) in the Department of Languages and Linguistics. Currently, he is a PhD candidate in Applied English Language Studies (AELS) at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). He is also a sessional lecturer of the following courses: New Literacies for Teachers in the Language in the Department of Literacies and Literatures (Wits School of Education), Communication and Learning Skills and Basic Research Skills at Wits Plus (Centre for Part-Time studies). His research interests are language pedagogy in ESL and EFL contexts and use of a foreign/additional language as a medium of instruction.

Lucia Thesen is a senior lecturer in the Centre for Higher Education Development at the University of Cape Town. Since the 1980s she has been working at the intersection of the politics of academic communicative practices and access for students on the margins of the university. From her current position as postgraduate literacies coordinator she is committed to teaching, debating and interrogating the current forms in which research is communicated in writing in the English language. She is co-editor (with Ermien van Pletzen) of *Academic Literacy and the Languages of Change* (Continuum 2006).

Risk as Productive: Working with Dilemmas in the Writing of Research

Lucia Thesen

Writing in the Contact Zone

The written product – thesis or journal article – has been central to the communication of research since the birth of the early modern university in the 18th century. As fleeting ideas and false starts slowly evolve into settled forms that give material expression to the outcomes of research processes, writing requires us to commit to *this* path, for *now,* and to leave other paths behind. Given the pressure to produce work that will pass through and travel safely on beyond academic gatekeepers, many student and novice researchers experience a sense of loss at the compromises made when developing a written account of their research. In the process of writing, various experiences and modes of expression are revised or erased along the way. In the contemporary higher education landscape, which is characterised by an unprecedented movement of people, texts and capital, this problem of erasures and silences is a deeply political issue. What forms and knowledges are being erased? Why? Who benefits, and who remains silent? The need to understand the dynamics and consequences of deletions and silencings, as well as to explore what is set aside as postgraduate researchers negotiate an unpredictable readership, is what brought the authors of this book together. The contributors approach these issues by means of a new reading of the idea of risk, one that emphasises risk taking as productive and by exploring what this means for the process and product of research writing.

The research project from which this book has grown began as a collaboration in Cape Town, South Africa, and then, as we saw that the writing-related challenges encountered by South African research students are not solely a local concern (albeit that they are amplified here by the legacy of apartheid), the circle widened to include colleagues in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Canada. Clearly, the challenges involved in postgraduate writing are not a specifically 'African' or 'southern' concern; they are an expression of global phenomena related to changes taking place in higher education. The changes in question turn on policies and discourses of increasing participation and widening access to higher education, but are simultaneously constrained by a major shift in the nature of knowledge production in the direction of the 'knowledge economy', which, to quote Usher (2002: 144), 'replaces an epistemological with an economic definition of knowledge'. One of the effects of these changes is the significant increase in mobility for both 'international' students crossing national borders, and 'adult' students, entering university from the workplace (see Boud & Lee, 2009; Enders, 2004).

Mobility has complex effects. One is that the writing competencies students develop as graduates or professionals in countries on the margins of the world system may not translate successfully to new settings in which they may find themselves writing about their research. The pull of the centre also means that greater numbers of new researchers are writing in English, which is frequently neither their 'home' language nor their primary language of learning (Lillis & Curry, 2010). Research writing practices are not only skewed towards English – by no means a neutral language – but also realised in what Cadman (2003) calls 'divine discourse'. That is, the constraints on what counts as a relevant area of study, the criteria by which a thesis is assessed, and the fact that the styles that are conventional in the 'global university' are embedded in an intellectual worldview that 'does not recognise, and therefore cannot know, the limitations of its own taken for granted, almost sacred, understandings of what constitutes "knowledge" and its expression in the English language' (Cadman, 2003: 1).

There is a growing concern that this 'internationalisation' is reinforcing the historical dominance of 'northern' Anglophone knowledge production, rather than opening out new conversations and perspectives in a meaningful way (Connell, 2007; Keim, 2008). One expression of this dominance is the recycling of theory from the metropole. Theory, argues Connell, is typically 'made' in the global north, and applied or generalised to the south (2007), capturing the south as an ethnographic other.

As an alternative to starkly drawn north/south or centre–periphery geographical and conceptual divides, the metaphor of a contact zone permeates

this study. For Mary Louise Pratt, who first coined the term, the contact zone refers to 'social spaces in which cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery and their aftermaths' (Pratt, 1999: 2). Pratt also uses the term as an imaginary – an 'attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjuncture, and whose trajectories now intersect' (Pratt, 1992: 7). The contact zone offers a way of reading power as *relational* rather than binary. In our project, the concept offered a productive canvas for our exploration of the geographies of writing. The social spaces of the contact zone range from the writers' circles described later in this book to wider circles of geopolitical contact, including the relationships that have shaped the making of this book. It is no longer possible to imagine spaces in which the contact zone is an option, a matter of choice: rather, the contact zone is inevitable. This is felt particularly strongly among those writing and researching in the global south. The contact zone is the crucible in which we produce knowledge through writing. In contested spaces we need to understand the agency that informs the decisions that writers and gatekeepers make about what will go into texts, and what styles and languages are chosen. We can no longer ignore the many silences, stammers, whispers, deletions, or the bland pro-forma templates that offer the possibility of prefabricated meaning. Thus, in these contested spaces, risk is also not an optional, but rather an inevitable part of the condition of knowledge making, as writers and gatekeepers weigh up what can or cannot be said.

The remainder of this chapter has two sections. In the first, different approaches to writing pedagogy are briefly outlined, contrasting generic 'how to' guides with critical approaches to research writing. The concept of 'voice' is chosen as a way of tracking writer agency across spaces. The notion of voice also draws attention to the silences and erasures that occur if writers fail to make sense to their intended audiences. The section ends with the idea of writing one's way through what we call the 'postgraduate condition' – a sustained predicament over time – and the ways in which it leads writers to grapple with 'risky' decisions about both content and form. Having identified risk as an important element in the writing of research, a path is traced in the second section through the influential literature on risk in mainstream social theory. This scholarship tends to generalise across global spaces and feeds into a climate of 'risk management'. Arguing for an alternative and a more productive approach to risk and risk taking, our notion of risk is located in selected postcolonial writing that tends to foreground paradox rather than superficial coherence. The chapter ends with a return to risk and writing, and then introduces the chapters that follow, all of which are concerned with risk 'from below'.