From Text to Corpus – Developing Disciplinary Writing Programmes for Masters Students

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Many pedagogically useful insights have been gained from corpus studies of academic writing (e.g. Hyland, 2000; Biber, 2006). However, in most cases, the direction has been from an analysis of a corpus of exemplars of a particular genre, to classroom activities which draw on this analysis (e.g. Tribble, 2002; Charles, 2006). The approach reported in this paper reverses the direction of travel. In a series of pilot projects in which we are working with Masters students in two programmes: Pharmacy and ELT and Applied Linguistics, we have started from instances of complete texts or text extracts, and then used Genre / SFL approaches (e.g. Swales, 1990, Gardner, in press) to develop pedagogic resources. These materials are then supplemented through the analysis of disciplinarily specific corpora of apprentice writing, with the results of this analysis being used to extend classroom and reference materials for tutor supported classes or self-study.

The writing development programme which we report here is also innovative in that it has been developed in close cooperation with disciplinary specialists, and is designed so that, in the longer term, writing development workshops can be delivered by these specialists rather than by language teachers. Thus, it is the disciplinary specialists who select the text genre which they consider most useful to their students, as well as identifying high scoring and low scoring exemplars which will be the initial focus of pedagogy. These specialists have also negotiated student permission for the contribution of assignments to the growing King's College London Apprentice Writing Corpus (AWC).

In this presentation, we will describe the rationale and framework of the writing development programme, and demonstrate how corpus based materials are used to supplement this course. We will also report on the experience of delivering the programme during the pilot, and present results from the evaluations which have been carried out with participants during the first phase. A final section will focus on how this approach can be extended to other disciplinary areas and plans for future exploitation of the corpus.

References

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