# Switching the paradigm in academic literacy: from a normative to a transformative insight in academic writing

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Recibido el 12-06-20; primera evaluación el 06-12-21;
segunda evaluación el 21-02-22; aceptado el 02-03-22

**Abstract**

Academic literacy in a second language (L2) is a competence required by current society in academic and professional fields. However, perspectives have changed throughout the years in order to comply with the requirements of modern society; challenging academic writing standards. Therefore, an ample and inclusive comprehension that informs current practices occurring worldwide, where English is considered a lingua franca for communication, is required. This systematic literature review aims to describe an overview of paradigms towards academic writing as a *continuum*, integrating both traditional and current literacy practices throughout a revision of empirical studies conducted in this area. To conclude, switching from traditional normative approaches to more transformative ones, under the scope of *New Literacy Studies* and longitudinal studies, is suggested as an alternative towards academic literacy in English in L2.

**Keywords**: academic writing, literacy practices, literature review, second language writing.

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**Cambiando el paradigma de la alfabetización académica de la escritura académica en inglés como lengua extranjera: desde una perspectiva normativista a una transformativa**

**Resumen**
La literacidad académica en una segunda lengua (L2) es una competencia requerida en el campo académico y profesional actualmente. Sin embargo, las perspectivas han ido cambiando para alinearse con los requerimientos de la sociedad moderna; desafiando los estándares propios de la escritura académica. En consecuencia, se requiere comprender mejor las prácticas letradas actuales, donde el inglés se emplea como una lengua franca. Esta revisión sistemática de la literatura existente sobre el tema pretende describir la escritura académica como un *continuum*, integrando perspectivas tradicionales y alternativas sobre la alfabetización académica a partir de una revisión de estudios empíricos en el área. En conclusión, se propone un cambio progresivo hacia enfoques más transformativos como los *Nuevos Estudios de Literacidad* y estudios longitudinales que describan las prácticas actuales de escritura académica en inglés como L2.

**Palabras clave**: escritura académica, prácticas de alfabetización, revisión teórica de literatura, escritura en segunda lengua.

**Mudando o paradigma do letramento acadêmico: de uma perspectiva normativista a uma transformativa da escrita acadêmica em inglês como língua estrangeira**

**Resumo**
O letramento acadêmico em uma segunda língua (L2) é uma habilidade requerida no campo acadêmico e profissional atualmente. No entanto, as perspectivas vêm mudando para se adequar às exigências da sociedade moderna; desafiando os próprios padrões da escrita acadêmica. Em consequência, é necessário compreender melhor as práticas letradas que ocorrem na atualidade, onde o inglês é usado como uma língua franca. Esta revisão sistemática de literatura pretende descrever a escrita acadêmica como um *continuum*, integrando perspectivas tradicionais e alternativas sobre o letramento acadêmico a partir de uma revisão de estudos empíricos da área. Em conclusão, sugere-se uma progressão voltada a enfoques mais transformativos como os *Novos Estudos de Literacidade* e estudos longitudinais, que descrevam as práticas atuais de escrita acadêmica em inglês como L2.

**Palavras-chave**: escrita acadêmica, práticas letradas, revisão de literatura, escrita em segunda língua.

## 1. Introduction

In our modern and technological society, people from different backgrounds need to interact with each other, thus becoming English the language for this multicultural communication. Swan (2012) described English as a 'lingua franca' for people who, being native or non-native speakers, communicate among themselves using this language. Nonetheless, this term has been under controversy as it overlaps different disciplines and fields, such as Applied Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition and English Language Teaching (Majanen, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2004). Despite the lack of consensus of terms in the area, this language is widely taught and learnt all around the world, at different levels and for different purposes (Espana, 2009). That is why learning a foreign language is considered a requirement to succeed in a globalised and competitive society.

English teaching can vary according to the context, level and purpose required for communication, being taught from preschool to university levels in many countries (Graddol, 2006). Regarding the levels of proficiency, the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2011) provides descriptors and guidelines to organise the curriculum and the syllabi of courses offered by different institutions, as well as standards for international certification. However, teaching English differs regarding two main aspects: the nature of the context in which it is learnt, and the linguistic purpose intended. Among the variety of terms and sub-fields that have emerged in this area, the following arise within the literature: English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL), for the former criterion; and General English (GE), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for the latter. In-depth descriptions of each of these categories will be provided in the results section of this literature review.

Learning a foreign language means that future speakers need to develop oral and written skills in each language they are learning, referring to speaking and listening to the former and reading and writing for the latter. Among the different teaching methods used nowadays, a communicative approach towards the target language is prioritised (Richards, 2006). This Communicative Language Teaching (CLT hereafter) focuses on the learners' needs to communicate and interact. Although CLT has succeeded in developing oral skills, which emerge from actual interaction among users of the language learnt, more formal instruction, effort, time, practice and cultural knowledge are required to master writing skills in language learners (Beltrán-Palanques, 2014). Therefore, alternative teaching approaches towards writing

and a more thorough notion of literacy are required to comprehend actual practices occurring in the field of English Language Teaching and Learning. Research findings informing current changes in academic writing follow in the results section.

Immersed within a globalised community, literacy in a second language is demanded as a competence in tertiary education. For instance, economics of education emphasises the necessity of being able to communicate effectively, both orally and in written contexts (Murnane & Levy, 1996; Alfa Tuning Project, 2013). Many universities worldwide have incorporated English courses to their undergraduate and graduate curricula, in order to prepare their students for the requirements of our current society. In these courses, written assignments in English are required as a means of evidence of the linguistic and communicational competence in a second language (L2 hereafter). Writing academic texts in English (L2), similarly to the process in L1, requires a social approach towards pedagogy (Bernstein, 1990); being explicit the content, format and rationale of the texts assigned and how they can be found in the target community. Academic literacy in L2 implies not only recognising the nature of texts, and the message conveyed within it, but also being able to respond to them appropriately (Hyland, 2007).

## 2. Theoretical perspectives in the area of research

English learners present difficulty in achieving academic standards and formal register while learning to write under traditional CLT English classes, becoming specialised EAP courses an alternative to overcome this phenomenon (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). ESP and SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics) propose alternative pedagogic models that focus on genre theory and research to make learners become aware of what needs to be learnt and assessed within each context; enhancing the development of contextualised curriculum materials and activities for writing classes (Hyland, 2007). Notwithstanding these situated approaches should foster academic standards in second-language writers, current literacy practices are still regarded as informal as they do not fit the impersonal and sophisticated language of formal writing (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). Moreover, the movement of *New Literacy Studies* has emerged as a response to legitimise actual practices of writing in the academic community (Lillis & Scott, 2015).

Hyland and Jiang (2017) recognise that informality has entered oral and written discourse in recent years, following academic writing this tendency and becoming less formal. This current situation tensions the prescriptive formal

conventions observed in the literacy practices, challenging the notion of what could be referred to as academic or not. Mcgrath and Kaufhold (2016) claim eclecticism in academic literacy, requiring a 'bottom-up' approach and more flexibility towards the traditional principles to describe current practices as they occur these days. In that sense, the movement of *New Literacy Studies* tries to offer an alternative and comprehensive understanding of academic writing as a situated social practice, in which communication is the main target.

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the different theoretical frameworks regarding academic writing in English as a foreign language, with an emphasis on the current literacy practices occurring in this area and alternative pedagogic approaches. Therefore, the following questions emerge as guidelines for this literature review:

- Which notion of academic literacy is required nowadays to describe writing practices as representative of scholar and research communities?
- How can this variety of theoretical frameworks and pedagogic models correlate to each other to contribute to this ample notion of academic literacy?

On that account, a revision of research articles was conducted and is described in the methodology section. Three main aspects of academic literacy in L2 were considered: the purpose of learning English as a foreign language, challenges facing academic writing in English in tertiary education and current literacy practices in academic writing. The results of this revision and its analysis are included in the third section of this literature review, followed by the discussion and conclusion.

## 3. Methodology

Bibliographical research of articles in indexed journals was conducted in Web of Science and Scopus databases, becoming the five recent years and its close relationship to academic writing in EFL context the first filter. Although the topics partially relate to each other, keywords were essential to narrow the search process towards Academic Writing in English as a foreign language. Table 1 depicts the search criteria and the keywords used in this literature review.

**Table 1. Keywords used in this literature review**

| Search order | Keywords |
|---|---|
| 1 | «academic literacies» |
| 2 | «academic writing pedagogies» |
| 3 | «academic writing» AND «English language instruction» |
| 4 | «second language writing» AND «academic writing pedagogies» |
| 5 | «English for academic purposes» OR «English for specific purposes» AND «academic writing» |
| 6 | «academic literacies» AND «EFL writing» OR «ESL writing» |
| 7 | «second language writing» AND «academic writing» |

Source: Own elaboration based on the articles revised for this literature review.

Initially, considering the keywords in the databases, 250 articles were found. However, more precise criteria were required to align the sources to the objective of this bibliographical revision. Under the scope of EFL, several practices of English language learning and instruction can be found, being considered academic writing among them. Therefore, a systematic revision of both titles and abstracts of each of the articles that refer specifically to academic writing in EFL contexts was conducted, obtaining 60 papers. The inclusion criteria for the articles revised in this literature review were (1) publication date within the 15 recent years, (2) written in English in indexed journals, and (3) research referring to academic literacy in tertiary education and second language writing.

Articles referring to academic literacy at school level, regarding primary or secondary education; or specific areas within professional fields were excluded. Following these criteria, 17 articles informing Academic Writing in English resulted in the final revision.

Table 2 describes the 17 articles finally selected as the data-driven source for this literature review, organised in the following areas of research within this field: genre-based pedagogy (SFL), English for Specific Purposes and *New Literacy Studies*. This classification was obtained after a brief revision of the introduction, methodology and discussion sections of each paper; inferring the epistemological foundations of each author based upon the bibliography, the authors cited, and the concepts regarding language and communication. Keywords provided in each article also contributed to group them into the three categories previously described.

**Table 2. Articles considered in the literature review**

| Article | Methods | Sample | Theoretical stance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Adamson, J. & Coulson, D. (2015). Translanguaging in English academic writing preparation. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, *10*(1), 24-37. | Quantitative | 475 Japanese university students answering a questionnaire | New literacy studies |
| 2. Byrnes, H. (2009). Systemic-functional reflections on instructed foreign language acquisition. *Linguistics and Education, 20*(1), 1-9. | Literature review | Review and description of 5 papers using SFL in foreign language instruction | Genre-based pedagogy SFL |
| 3. De Silva, R. (2015). Writing strategy instruction: Its impact on writing in a second language for academic purposes. *Language Teaching Research*, *19*(3), 301-323. | Quantitative | Longitudinal study of 90 participants in a pre-test post-test intervention. | English for Specific Purposes |
| 4. Edola, I., & Oskoz, A. (2017). Writing with 21st century social tools in the L2 classroom: New literacies, genres and writing practices. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 36, 52-60 | Qualitative | 4 participants in a case study | New literacy studies |
| 5. Garcia, J. & Litzler, M. (2015). Current Perspectives in Teaching English for Specific Purposes. *Onomázein*, 31, 38-51. | Literature review | Historical revision and up-to-date discussion of the field. | English for Specific Purposes |
| 6. Gea-Valor, M., Rey-Rocha, J. & Moreno, A. (2014). Publishing research in the international context: An analysis of Spanish scholars' academic writing needs in the social sciences. *English for Specific Purposes*, 36, 47-59. | Quantitative | 111 university students in Spain responding a questionnaire | English for Specific Purposes |
| 7. Green, S. (2013). Novice ESL writers: A longitudinal case-study of the situated academic writing processes of three undergraduates in a TESOL context. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *12*(3), 180-191. | Qualitative | Interviews with 3 participants (English teachers) in Oman. | New literacy studies |
| 8. Hyland, K. & Jiang, F. (2017). Is academic writing becoming more informal? *English for Specific Purposes,* 20, 125-134. | Quantitative | Corpus of academic texts from 1965 to 2015 | English for Specific Purposes |

| Article | Methods | Sample | Theoretical stance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9. Kaufhold, K. (2015). Conventions in postgraduate academic writing: European students' negotiations of prior writing experience at an English speaking university. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 20, 125-134. | Qualitative | Ethnographic study of 12 participants in an English university. | New literacy studies |
| 10. Kaufhold, K. (2018). Creating translanguaging spaces in students' academic writing practices. *Linguistics and Education*, 45, 1-9. | Qualitative | 2 participants in longitudinal case studies in Sweden. | New literacy studies |
| 11. Lillis, T. & Scott, M. (2015). Defining academic literacies research: issues of epistemology, ideology and strategy. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice*, *4*(1), pp. 5-32. | Literature review | Description of emergence of academic literacy in higher education | New literacy studies |
| 12. Mcgrath, L. & Kaufhold, K. (2016). English for Specific Purposes and Academic Literacies: eclecticism in academic writing pedagogy. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *21*(8), 933-947. | Qualitative | Academic Writing workshop with 13 university postgraduate students | New literacy studies |
| 13. Park, G. (2013). 'Writing is a way of knowing': writing and identity. *ELT Journal*, *67*(3), 336-345. | Qualitative | Corpus of 54 autobiographies between 2002 and 2007 of migrants in the US | New literacy studies |
| 14. Spirovska, E. (2015). Selecting and adapting materials in the context of English for Academic Purposes – is one textbook enough? *The journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes, 3*(1), 115-120 | Quantitative | Survey to 53 students in Macedonia using a Likert scale | English for Specific Purposes |
| 15. Strauss, P. (2017). Caught between two stools? Academic writing in 'new' vocational disciplines in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *22*(8), 925-939. | Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews to 27 postgraduate lecturers in the UK. | New literacy studies |
| 16. Swales, J. & Post, J. (2018). Student use of imperatives in their academic writing: How research can be pedagogically applied. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 31, 91-9 | Quantitative | Corpus: 800 A-graded papers of the University of Michigan, US | English for Specific Purposes |
| 17. Tribble, C. (2017). ELFA vs. Genre: A new paradigm war in EAP writing instruction? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 25, 30-44. | Literature review | Characterisation of recent research literature and empirical studies in the area | Genre-based pedagogy SFL |

Source: Own elaboration based on the articles revised for this literature review.

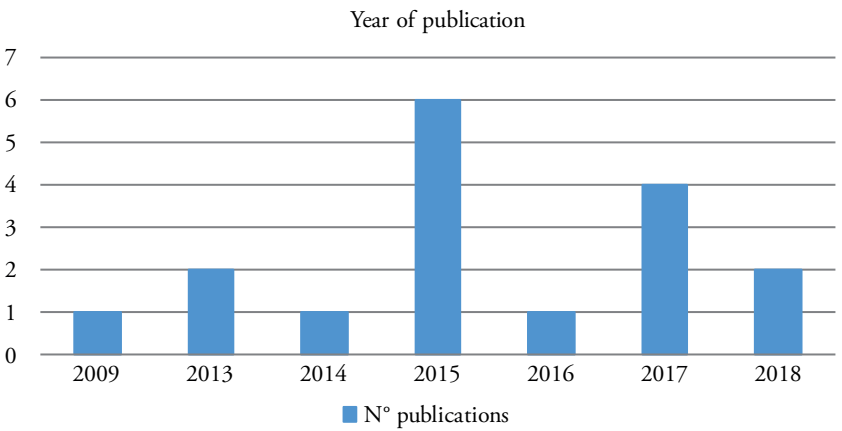
## 4. Results

Under the scope of functional linguistics, foreign language instruction aims at achieving a communicative competence rather than an advanced linguistic proficiency. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of writing academic texts is required. This section provides an overview of the different theoretical frameworks informing academic writing in English as a foreign language. Current literacy practices, as well as alternative pedagogic approaches, are reported in the 17 research articles that are part of this study.

To begin with, a synthesis of bibliometric descriptors is provided, considering the year of publication, its methodological design and the theoretical stance behind each article. Regarding the language of publication, only papers written and published in English were considered in this revision. The main findings of the research articles part of this literature review follow, suggesting a switch from traditional normative approaches to more transformative ones as an alternative towards academic literacy in English as a second or foreign language.

Regarding the year of publication, articles describing conducted between the years 2005 and 2020 were considered in the initial stage of this literature review. However, the first research reporting a challenge towards academic writing traditions was published in 2009. A total of 17 papers were identified within this period, outnumbering years 2015 and 2017 with 6 and 4 published articles respectively, which represent 59% of the studies considered in this literature review. Figure 1 illustrates the number of articles in each year of publication, where a steady increase in publications can be observed.

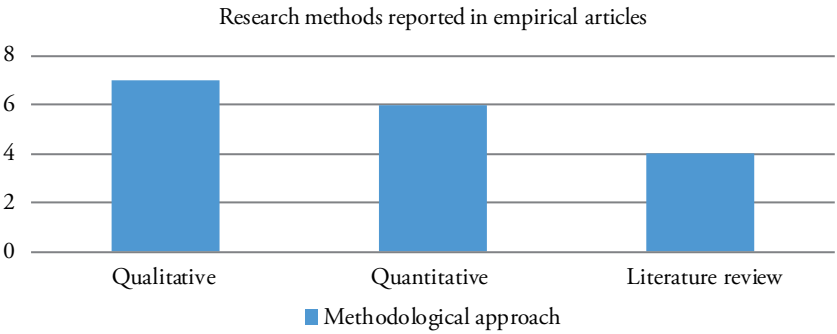
**Figure 1. Number of articles published in each year (period 2005-2020)**




Source: Own elaboration based on the articles revised for this literature review..

Regarding research methods involved in each of the articles part of this revision, 42% (N=7) informed qualitative procedures in their methodological sections, whereas 6 articles (35%) were conducted under quantitative methods. A total of 4 papers (13%) systematic literature reviews in this field. Figure 2 provides an overview of the research methods considered in this literature review.

**Figure 2. Overview of research methods reported in this literature review**




Source: Own elaboration based on the articles revised for this literature review.

Finally, from the 17 articles considered in this revision of bibliography, 53% of them (N=9) describe practices developed under the scope of *New Literacy Studies* whereas 35% (N=6) reported writing under EAP and ESP approaches. On the other hand, two papers (12%) inform genre-based pedagogy (SFL) as a model to develop skills in academic writing. An analysis of the findings reported and discussed in these research articles follows, classified under these categories: the purposes for learning English and the subdivisions within it; challenges in academic writing in tertiary education; and current literacy practices emerging in the academic community.

### 4.1. Purpose for learning English

Regarding the purpose of learning English, Garcia & Litzler (2015) describe a significant difference regarding the approach each learner has towards the language, affecting both the curriculum and syllabi as well as courses design and teaching approaches. Aims, interests and learners vary between GE and ESP, stating Hutchinson (1987) that «in theory nothing, in practice a great deal» (Garcia & Litzler, 2015, p. 53). GE aims at improving communicative competence in English, developing general skills as well as linguistic structures

needed for fluent interaction, independently of the context. In contrast, ESP focuses on meeting the special needs of particular learners or group of learners, as engineers, physicians, business people, scholars, etc. (García & Litzler, 2015). However, Muresan and Perez-Llantada (2014) characterise the varied scope of ESP as representative of learners' interests and target communities' coexisting in society. The «growing body of research and theory, and ever-diversifying and expanding range of purposes» enrich this area of English language instruction (Belcher, 2006, p. 134).

The variety of purposes and classifications under the scope of ESP required an internal subdivision, emerging the following three categories: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Professional Purposes (EPP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Garcia & Litzler, 2015). ESP faces a particular workplace in either academic or professional contexts, placing EAP within this category. Hyland and Shaw (2016) also recognise the belonging of EAP into the ESP group and states its degree of difficulty compared to communicational courses. In that respect, EAP requires the teaching/learning of specialised linguistic knowledge and literacy skills in order to prepare university students to successfully communicate in English in academic and research settings (Swales, 2009), becoming a prominent L2 educational area worldwide.

The academic and professional communities expect users to communicate in English, mostly under academic, commercial, social and cultural exchange pressure (Curry & Lillis, 2010). Therefore, the number of non-native English-speaking scholars publishing in this language has been dramatically increasing (Gea-Valor et al., 2014). The latter suggests that new teaching methods, materials and approaches interfacing task-based learning and rhetorical consciousness-raising are now required. Consequently, a needs analysis of the learners is essential to focus both on the content, linguistic knowledge and skills, and the genres, types of texts, to be acquired and developed in EAP courses (Spirovska, 2015). Two different schools proposed pedagogical models to address the requirements of academic writing in L2 contexts: Genre-based pedagogy, emerging from the Systemic-Functional Linguistics, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) coming from the CLT approach. Major features of both follow.

Despite considering the importance of content and language in communication and sharing a pedagogical approach, each model has its own characteristics. On the one hand, genre-based pedagogy emphasises the social purposes of texts to communicate in each genre, suggesting a teaching-learning cycle where texts are deconstructed, analysed and collaboratively written (Byrnes, 2009). The purpose is to familiarise writers within the genre and empower

them in identifying key structures and linguistic resources shared by the academic community for each genre. Genres are specific to each culture and community, urging teachers to go beyond isolated linguistic resources and to focus on the social practices shared to become a member of each community (Tribble, 2017).

On the other hand, although ESP emerged to focus on purposes rather than learning the language system (Swales, 2009), its syllabus provides a more-guided approach towards writing if compared to genre pedagogy. Teaching patterns focusing on clear instructions and guidance that make the academic speech explicit, in terms of rhetorical steps, grammatical structures and semantic and pragmatic meanings, are required to succeed in formal academic writing (Garcia & Litzler, 2015). De Silva (2015) describes gatekeeping and community membership as the main contributions of ESP. The former understood as the capacity of specialised language to grant access to the professional and academic communities whilst the latter provides linguistic resources required by these communities to communicate effectively (De Silva & Hood, 2009). Not only does it allow learners to act as full members of the target group, where they can convey opinions, viewpoints and ideas, but it also promotes a better understanding of the messages delivered within these communities. However, under this approach, text features and organisation patters need to be internalised from samples to actual writing, in order to foster performance and skills in the target language.

### 4.2. Challenges in Academic Writing in Tertiary Education

Writing is a process that undergoes continuous development through educational contexts, where content, language, peers and communication play a crucial role. Consequently, learning to write is present during schooling and tertiary education, as a variety of writing exercises and models are required to fulfil its communicative purposes within a community (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). Developing writing skills in the first language (L1) is scaffolded throughout primary and secondary education, where students learn how to communicate in the most common genres used in each society. Furthermore, academic writing courses in L1 are provided by many universities worldwide during undergraduate programmes to allow students to develop their writing skills in more professional and specialized texts. These texts frequently refer to students' careers, professions or are transversal to all of them in academic contexts, to which many of them had no previous exposure during schooling (Garcia & Litzler, 2015).

A gap in terms of register and language proficiency emerges as the main difficulties experienced by English learners in EAP courses, who require technical, elevated or abstract vocabulary, complex sentence structures and the avoidance of the personal voice (Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Mcgrath & Kaufhold, 2016). An informal register in written texts, by means of contractions, slang, fossilised errors, false cognates, a limited range of linkers and lack of paraphrasing techniques seem to be the most common weaknesses in written tasks. This provides evidence of the lack of academic and formal standards that learners struggle to overcome when fostering more advanced levels. Therefore, reading and writing in academic contexts, hereafter referred as academic literacy, usually represents a challenge for university students since no previous exposure to these genres was provided in schooling (De Silva, 2015). In fact, not only can this issue be described in foreign language instruction, but it also occurs in academic writing in L1. Academic literacy requires then a visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1990) where the content, format and rationale of texts is made visible to the learner (Hyland, 2007).

Genres inform the cultural practices within a specific community and the impact they have within them, in this case, the academia. Zavala (2017), in a longitudinal ethnographic study, reported cases of university students who feel their voice was not represented in the academic documents assigned by teachers and curriculum. Both describe that academic discourse does not convey natural communication and identify these genres as a threat to their identity. Street (2010) also described cases of alternative literacy practices in southern Asia that do not align with the formal, clear, precise, concrete and transparent features of academic discourse. This is how the approach of *New Literacy Studies* arises with its primary emphasis on the social construction of the knowledge and meaning-making processes, emphasising the communicative and constructive nature of writing. *New Literacy Studies* pretends to analyse how knowledge is constructed in academic circles and communities, assuming the traditional academic discourse as an only alternative of using language derived from the western school of thought.

### 4.3. Current literacy practices in Academic Writing: *New Literacy Studies*

An informal style has never been considered appropriate in academic contexts as it enhances a more subjective interpretation of the writer towards a topic, risking its objectivity, sophistication and intelligibility. However, Hyland and Jiang (2017) proposes an alternative notion of a *continuum* between formal and informal styles in academic writing where the traditional conventions of

the former need flexibility. In this regard, informal use of a language attempts to build a more familiar relationship with readers, where assumptions about a shared context and more thorough background knowledge make communication possible. Therefore, texts that include an informal register as the first-person pronoun, colloquial language, verbal phrases, among others are now considered valid as actual samples of literacy practices. Ethnographic and longitudinal research try to describe writing as a means of constructing authors-identity as well as to situate these practices in each community context.

Ideas are never generated in isolation, as writing is a means of new knowledge making throughout social interaction (Park, 2013). This collaborative process assists the writers-students into moving from the individual dimension to sources and social contexts, from which an academic discourse, and therefore literacy, arises. To develop this skill, reading as a complementary activity is also needed to involve the learners into their new roles actively; that is why writing needs to be taught as implicit teaching facilitates its learning and development. The following characteristics of writing seem essential to foster this skill in learners: (i) writing as a collaborative activity, (ii) the influence of the learning environment, and (iii) the need of interaction and activities within a disciplinary discourse where the learners get familiarised with the genres and their purposes (McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016).

Contrary to the traditional quantitative research in linguistics and language learning, longitudinal studies enrich the understanding of writing as an educational phenomenon, providing a global comprehension of writing as a process, its impact in learning and literacy and a description of the variables involved in writing development (Green, 2013). Park (2013) describes writing as «situated, social and political practice offering new writers in English an opportunity to find power and legitimacy in a new language» (p. 344), in line with the movement of *New Literacy Studies*, which describes actual written practices occurring worldwide. The main contribution of this approach towards writing is of a legitimating tool that writers and authors, independently of their cultural or linguistic background, use in academia to nurture themselves continuously to become part of such communities.

However, no deterministic or causal arguments can be driven from these methods as no generalisation of their findings is pretended, but a more in-depth comprehension of the educational and social phenomena around writing. The latter provides a better understanding of literacy practices and how writing is developed by writers in higher education; a context in which more research about the role literacy plays in diverse communities is required. Therefore, ethnography becomes a tool that provides reliability in legitimising

literacy practices within each context and culture. Under an ethnographic perspective, previous knowledge of learners can also be considered as an input in teaching-learning processes (Lillis & Scott, 2015).

As a matter of fact, some initiatives have been conducted in tertiary education to integrate both academic literacies with ESP approaches that might be perceived as epistemologically incompatible in academic writing contexts. McGrath and Kaufhold (2016) describe that a commitment towards a 'bottom-up approach' is now observed at universities, allowing more pluralistic pedagogical choices. Strauss (2017) claims that traditional academic writing requirements do not serve the interests of the disciplines or the students anymore, as they cannot make changes to promote proficient literacy in each vocational area. Kaufhold (2015) emphasizes the relevance of students' involvement in the academic work as voluntary participation of them in her study; providing evidence of their willingness and commitment towards their acquisition of academic writing. Therefore, learners become active participants by incorporating their previous knowledge and learning experiences and gaining confidence as writers.

Finally, a new notion regarding the multilingual circumstances of foreign language instruction has emerged, as no full immersion programmes are possible in EFL contexts. Adamson and Coulson (2015) refer to the use of L1 in English academic writing preparation to achieve metacognition in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) contexts. Doiz et al. (2013) describe this linguistic phenomenon as translingualism, defining it as «the adoption of bilingual supportive scaffolding practices» towards language learning. Therefore, a broader approach in academic writing is required to negotiate meaningful tasks and to understand and convey meaning.

## 5. Discussion

Developing academic literacy skills, especially in terms of formal writing, is considered a key factor nowadays to succeed in a globalised society where people from different backgrounds interact. To achieve a diversity of purposes, English is used as a lingua franca (Spada, 2007), which requires updated pedagogical models and approaches towards language learning (Spirovska, 2015). According to Swales and Post (2018), EAP has increased its importance in the ELT field due to its frequent use in academic exchange and research. In that sense, no more unidirectional models to teach writing should be considered valid. Genre-based pedagogy and ESP provide with alternative approaches that aim to address the objectives required by our technologised world (Garcia

& Litzler, 2015). Despite the commonalities shared by them in terms of the functional perspective of language (Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Swales & Post, 2018), its purpose and the community membership intended for the language users (Swales, 2009; Tribble, 2017), each has its own features underlying the theoretical framework behind.

De Silva (2015) acknowledges that language learners and users face difficulties in academic literacy contexts since they have no previous exposure to the genres involved in university or professional communities during schooling. Register and language proficiency are described as the weakest areas within EAP courses, representing this aspect the most difficult to overcome to achieve more advanced levels, where formal standards are required. Academic genres try to situate the learning and writing processes but are often regarded as non-representative of the inner-self and not conveying natural communication (Street, 2010). In fact, university students interviewed by Zavala (2017) identify these genres as a threat to their identity. These circumstances lead to a reconceptualisation and emergence of new, current and actual literacy practices, somehow regarded as vernacular and «informal», which constitute legitimate indicators of academic writing development (Kaufhold, 2018).

Hyland and Jiang (2017) claim that current literacy practices might not follow any more objectivity, lexical-sophistication and impersonalisation as academic writing conventions demand. Instead of observing fixed writing patterns, he recognises a *continuum* between formal and informal styles requiring the former to become more flexible; in order to build a more familiar rapport between readers and authors. Such a degree of informality makes communication possible, legitimising these texts in the academic community. To support this approach towards writing, ethnography and longitudinal studies provide a more thorough focus on learning and development, becoming writing a means of new knowledge making throughout social interaction (Rogers, 2010). Therefore, language learners need to familiarise themselves with the genres of each community, as well as with their purposes (McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016).

Under these circumstances, *New Literacy Studies* emerge as an alternative approach to be considered towards top-down, quantitative methods that become unfamiliar to the literacy practices prevalent worldwide (Green, 2013). Nevertheless, the idea is not to describe and prescribe new methods to be imposed in the curriculum and widely generalised as valid practices, becoming the purpose of this literature review to understand literacy as a transformative practice which requires the learner to involve and commit in his own processes (Kaufhold, 2015). No pedagogical model could be regarded as being more

effective or cutting-edge than others. Conversely, broadening the traditional understanding of writing within the academic community seems urgent to provide more pluralism in pedagogical choices that correspond to the variety of literacy practices observed worldwide (McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016).

## 6. Conclusions

The research studies revised for this systematic literature review lead to conclude that current literacy practices challenge traditional standards in second language writing, especially in academic and professional communities. Although degrees of formality, impersonal speech and objectivity are still appreciated under the positivist paradigm in scholar and research fields, evidence of less formal and closer language is present among researchers in written communication. Language, similar to society, has a dynamic nature and adapts to the requirements of current times. Under this premise, no more should be unidirectional and prescriptive models regarding academic writing favoured, becoming necessary to reconceptualise and redefine the concept of literacy itself. A more comprehensive overview of theoretical frameworks seems necessary to describe the writing practices involved in academic, professional and vernacular contexts.

Broadening the traditional notion regarding academic literacy would lead to more plural teaching methods and pedagogic models towards writing, which challenges second language learners. Alternative approaches such as Hyland's *continuum*, *New Literacy Studies,* Genre-Based pedagogy, longitudinal research studies, translingualism, among others; seem necessary to provide teachers with a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon which could empower their students as effective users of the target language. However, interpretation of the results presented here should be carefully handled, considering the diversity of contexts; as well as the study design and participants involved. This literature review does not recommend generalisation of the findings of this research, but a more in-depth comprehension of the educational and social phenomena around writing; understood as a process aiming at communicating voice and message of its authors effectively.

Neither teaching methods nor definitions of academic literacy should be described and prescribed to integrate successfully writing to the educational curriculum. Conversely, a correlation between a variety of frameworks informing literacy practices is recommended in order to understand literacy as a transformative and contextualised practice; which requires involvement and commitment from the community. Therefore, a reflection from learners, teachers,

researchers, institutions and the curriculum is still required; familiarising with the genres and purpose of each community. Only under such circumstances could second language writers, English learners in this context, experience a natural transition within the educational levels and find power and legitimacy in a new language. To sum up, conclusions from this literature review should not be taken as a global and unique truth but as guidelines that invite to innovate teaching practices in second language writing to encourage learners to find their voice in this new language through an active and independent role.

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**Roles de autor: Esquicha A**: Conceptualización, Metodología, Validación, Análisis formal, Investigación, Escritura – borrador original, Escritura, revisión y edición, Visualización, Administración del proyecto y Adquisición de fondos.

Cómo citar este artículo: Esquicha Medina, A. (2022). Switching the paradigm in academic literacy: from a normative to a transformative insight in academic writing. *Educación, 31*(60), 155-175. https://doi.org/10.18800/educacion.202201.007

**Primera publicación:** 22 de marzo de 2022 (https://doi.org/10.18800/educacion.202201.007)