

THE IMPACT OF AKAN ORAL INTERACTIONAL DISCOURSE ON UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC WRITING

AUTHOR'S NAME:

Names given– VERA EKUWA MANSА

Family name – ARHIN (PhD)

Language centre, university of Ghana

AFFILIATION: LANGUAGE CENTRE

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

LEGON

GHANA, WEST AFRICA

EMAIL: verahin3@yahoo.com

MOBILE: +233244629652

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Vera Ekuwa Mansa Arhin, PhD

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Abstract

Research in English as an additional language (EAL) has received global attention, because of the need for effective communication across and within geographical boundaries. The focus of this area of research, in recent times, has evolved from a deficit model, to an investigation of text invention practices of non-native speakers of English in academic settings. From an analysis of the features of oral discourse practices, written assignments, and interviews of some Ghanaian undergraduate students of the University of Ghana, this study, which uses an academic literacies approach, reveals social practices reflected in the way some prior oral and cultural discourse practices of Akan, a major language in Ghana, are brought into students' academic work in English to express their ideas. Examples of these are: face to face strategies of a conversational norm, storytelling elements that appear in introductions of essays, and conclusions based on the collectivist nature of their Akan oral culture. The findings, therefore, suggest that learners going through an acculturation process, and staff representing native speaker authority or 'standards' could mediate their preferences to reflect the transformational nature of academic literacies. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are provided at the end of this paper.

Keywords: Orality; English as an additional language; academic writing; academic literacies.

1 Introduction

The use of indigenous languages and discourse practices in academic writing is explored not only in Ghana (Adika, 2012; Arhin, 2000), but also in South Africa (Bangeni&Kapp, 2005; Paxton, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006), and in the US where immigrants draw on aspects of their prior oral discourse practices as they communicate in English (Singhal, 2004). Indeed, what is clear in Second Language (L2) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) research is that the preserved elements of personal or cultural voice of undergraduate students must not be ignored, since they act as stored knowledge of the world that is drawn on to perform new tasks in the process of text construction (Field, 2003). It is for this reason that this study, using an academic literacies approach, highlights the need for students and lecturers alike to mediate antecedent genres and academic discourses in meaning making Canagarajah (2002), Clark &Ivanic (1997) and Lillis and Scott (2007). By extension, this research area is also relevant to members of a global academic community who probe the writing style of non-native academics (Canagarajah, 1996; Yankah, 2012).

Though EAL has been extensively studied, this qualitative case study, which adds to the conversation, extends the scope of research done in contrastive rhetoric and L2 academic writing. In the subsequent paragraphs attention will be paid to how this inter-disciplinary research brings together studies in Akan, and academic writing to highlight the role of students' 'identity' in text construction.

Adding to existing literature in academic writing, this study, which shifts its attention from previous research that relies on deficit models that problematize L2 writing, describes how students' essays reflect learners' reliance on their local cultural and linguistic resources to create academic texts during their acculturation process similar to studies conducted by Archer (2008), Paxton (2003, 2004, 2006) and Sternglass (1997).

Most of the research done in Ghana over the past years in undergraduate academic writing, have focused on two main areas: the identification of problems in students' writing and the investigation of the causes of those problems. With regard to identifying problems, various researchers discussed interlanguage-related issues reflected in most student essays. Adika (1999), in his analysis of expository texts for example, unearthed various discourse-level problems which he broadly categorised as "weak handling of information relationships at the sentence level and across paragraphs, which results in a lack of cohesion and a breakdown of communication in portions of the text" (p.14). Among other things, he concluded that the theme-rheme (given-new) progression of student writing was unsteady because most of the texts studied displayed weak handling of shared and new information (pp.50-55).

Possible causes of these problems have been assessed and discussed. While, for example, Adika (1999) attributed the lack of cohesion and the indiscriminate assumption of shared knowledge between the writer and the reader to the students' ignorance of the interactive nature of writing (p.162), Adam (1997), observed that individual attention paid to students was almost non-existent and that lecturers failed to comment on the quality of writing produced by their students. Other identified causes ranged from questions dealing with types of classroom practices (Odamtten, Denkabe, &Tsikata, 1994; Adam, 1997) to speculations concerning cognitive learning styles (Arhin, 2000). Underpinning speculations by the above-mentioned researchers investigating the cause of the decline in writing ability is an assumption that there is a clear definition of the acceptable proficiency level to be aimed at. It may be argued that this angle of academic writing research may be problematic, since unlike the structure of the research article, the discourse structure of academic essays has not been well defined in terms of a move structure (Dudley-Evans, 2002).

In spite of this observation, it may be argued that members of academic discourse communities expect ‘new members’ to exhibit the discourse conventions of the new culture as they write (Bartholomae, 1985). This new culture, as taught in the first-year academic writing programme at the University of Ghana, emerges from techniques shared in many American freshman composition textbooks that teach learners to write non-fiction expository texts. These ideas about writing, though still hazily defined, ultimately become the yardstick against which these L2 undergraduate learners’ essays are measured (Lea & Street, 2008).

Admittedly, academic writing is not achieved in a vacuum. There is a reading audience that should be considered, as well as strategies that govern text construction. The aspect of text construction, which this paper investigates, is embedded in the notion of ‘genre’ and ‘discourse community’. And, the idea of communities is one that has its roots in the social constructivism theory which views knowledge as that which is created through the discourses of social communities. Indeed, ways in which individuals understand the world are shaped by their perception of the world. And, these perceptions are in turn, shaped by their culture and the society within which they live (Hyland, 2006). Based on this understanding, and through an analysis of students’ essay samples, the findings revealed that some oral practices of the Akan that affected students’ academic writing could be traced to implicature.

Drawing on Grice (1975), Obeng (2003) notes that implicature is one of the features of conversation, and one of the five characteristics of implicature is ‘cancelability’. According to Obeng (1994), this offers the speaker some degree of protection. For example, he shows how Akans who speak indirectly enjoy communicational immunity, by exploiting indirectness strategies such as evasion, metaphor, circumlocution, innuendo, proverb, euphemism etc. Riddles, tales, and hyperboles are also used when one wants to save face. “Other verbal indirection strategies include triadic communication involving the use of intermediaries, pseudo-soliloquy, pseudo addressee ...” (p. 11). Obeng’s (2003) remark that in Akan, one who uses this strategy may start dealing with the end of his or her discussion and gradually introduce the listener to the thesis of his or her problem is confirmed in this study. As Grice (1975) does, the Akan believe that brevity should be the norm in informal conversation; however they believe that a sensitive issue or delicate story demands the use of circumlocution. This is captured in the saying,

Asɛm a ɛyɛden noyɛka no mpɛmeampɛmea

Story which it-be difficult that we-say it meander-meander

“A delicate story is told in a roundabout way” (Obeng 2003:41).

“Speaking candidly,” according to Obeng (2003), is oftentimes seen as “confrontational, impolite and politically risky” (p.3). Even though one can choose to speak candidly, Saah (1986) remarks that among the Akans of Ghana “a person who uses plain or blunt language instead of euphemisms is regarded as not being able to speak well.” (p. 369). He also adds, “a person who is able to decorate his speech with such embellishments as proverbs, metaphors, and idioms is seen in the eyes of the elders as a wise or witty person” (p. 369). As emerging academics, the participants of this research are likely to carry this cultural notion, which borders upon circumlocution, pseudo-soliloquy, and the employment of a pseudo addressee over to their communities, as they view their new discourse space as formal– in a cultural sense. Therefore, it is important for them to properly position themselves as writers in their new world of new writing conventions, where an appreciation of the expectations, and an assessment of their new ‘audience’ is key.

Consequently, this study which focuses on the impact of implicature, and other related oral rhetorical practices, from the oral culture of students, can be likened to earlier studies in contrastive rhetoric, which also investigated the influence of first language and culture of various L2 speakers, such as Germans, Asians, and Arabs, on their academic work in English (Clyne, 1991; Egginton,

1987; Hinds, 1990; Ostler, 1987; Cheng, 1985). Their findings revealed ways in which the rhetorical norms of one's L1 influenced text construction in one's L2, and these are discussed in the ensuing paragraph.

Clyne's (1981) research, for example, revealed that though attention was paid to content, the organizational preferences of written discourse of Germans was rather 'haphazard' in structure when contrasted with the more linear style of English writers. Hinds (1990) also described the 'quasi-inductive style' or the four-unit system of writing of the Japanese writer: the *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* framework adopted from classical Chinese poetry, was different from the more coherent and deductive patterns taught in western colleges (Casanave, 2004; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Arabic ESL writers, according to Ostler's (1987) research, were identified by their tendency to use a series of coordinators and parallel constructions in their essays, thereby, reflecting a rhetorical pattern similar to that of classical Arabic, and the Koran.

This study is different in two ways. Unlike research done in contrastive rhetoric, the Ghanaian second language writers, like the generation 1.5 students who immigrated to the US at different levels of education (Singhal, 2004), are unlikely to be affected by L1 writing norms in any significant way since few students under these circumstances can read and write their L1. Contrastive rhetoric mostly compared participants' writing in English with their writing in their L1, but only 4% of the 160 Ghanaian students interviewed for the purpose of this study, for example, said they occasionally read and wrote in their L1 (Akan). Those students who claimed to read and write in their L1 also admitted that they hardly practised the L1 writing skills they had acquired in their primary and secondary school education. Second, whereas Hinds (1983) questions how analyses of individuals' essays in L2 can possibly be pointers to likely transfer of L1 rhetorical strategies to L2, when L1 texts of the learners, and details of the learners' sociocultural background are hardly ever examined by the researchers in contrastive rhetoric research, this cannot be said of this current study which investigates aspects of Akan discourse practices as well. This study, which adds to conversations in L2 writing, turns its attention to a sociocultural approach which investigates the expectations and the preferred practices of learners as they write in their chosen fields of study (Lea and Street, 1998). Consequently, the academic literacies approach, which this study adopts, will be used profitably to respond to the following questions:

- a) What does the literature tell us about Akan communicative interaction?
- b) How are features of oral Akan discourse integrated into participants' academic writing?
- c) To what use can their preserved conversation strategies be put in developing academic writing skills?

These questions lead to an assessment of oral and sociocultural undertones present in participants' essays, which should be viewed as representing a people's identity that shapes, and unearths the complex process of knowledge dissemination and text creation in an academic setting. This should draw attention to the fact that academic writing programmes must provide a platform for both new and existing members to expand the borders of what is perceived as 'right' in order to contribute to the evolving nature of language in academic communities.

2 Participants and Methods

An Ethnographic approach was used to explore participants' academic writing practices during text production (Lillis & Scott, 2007). This methodology, which emerges from social linguistics, involved semi-structured student interviews, and textual analysis of students' essays and conversation samples, which helped to reveal the extent to which students, in this case study,

handled conversation and writing. First, through non-random sampling, a set of participants was selected from two of the several groups of students of the academic writing course designed to teach writing skills to first year students of the University of Ghana. Two eighty-member focus groups studying degree programmes in a range of disciplines in the humanities and sciences were used for the purpose of this study.

Data gathered from participants after students had been taught to adopt a process-driven approach to writing, demonstrated students' preferred discourse practices when writing expository essays across the curriculum. The convenience sample option of the non-random approach was selected because both classes were taught by the researcher for a period of twelve weeks (one semester); therefore, monitoring processes, and occasional think-aloud procedures could be carried out, in and out of class during fieldwork observation. Second, for the purpose of establishing norms of language used by students outside lecture hours, another non-random sampling method – volunteering – was used to select the second set of participants for the research. A corpus was derived from students who were willing to have their conversations recorded in public interactions where they were expected to speak off the cuff, and, linguistic features were obtained from these recordings for the study.

The students selected a topic of their choice from a list of essay topics obtained from their fields of study, and were asked to show an understanding of what had been taught in the academic writing class, such as, cohesion, coherence, and academic referencing conventions, as they wrote. All 160 samples reflected various degrees of transfer at the levels of discourse, sentence, and word patterns.

The following section discusses practices from students' prior oral discourse that influenced their academic writing. The study identified two key conversation-based strategies: face-to-face conversation strategies, and storytelling elements. These appeared in introductions and conclusions of twenty-seven essays, randomly selected as representative samples of student writing practices. However, for the purpose of this study, some paragraphs of these essays were randomly selected for illustration purposes only.

3 Face-to-Face Strategies of Conversational Norms

The essays analysed, showed signs of the writers hesitating as they mediated conversational norms of their culture on the one hand, and academic writing norms and expectations of a new discourse community on the other. In academic writing it is generally expected that the language of texts should mark a distance between the writer and the topic in order to give the appearance of objectivity (Hyland, 1999; Johns, 1997; Kroll, 2003). Most essays, however, reflected the writers' use of conversational strategies such as turn taking. For many of these student writers, the concept of audience that existed in their antecedent repertoire was one who listened as they 'spoke' through the medium of writing. This dependence on face-to-face strategies employed in conversations was exhibited in various ways in their essays: cueing for the 'listener' to respond to his or her imaginary 'speaker' while providing imaginary response(s) on behalf of the listener expressed through a Question and Answer strategy; pausing, for real time processing –to allow time for meaning making; and engaging in culturally accepted oral conversational turns that relied on Ghanaian storytelling norms. These strategies are discussed below. Relevant parts of essays have been converted to bold type for ease of reference.

3.1. Cueing for the 'listener' to respond to his or her imaginary 'speaker'

Writing about Akan oral discourse strategies, Obeng (1994) posits that, "... verbal indirection strategies include triadic communication involving the use of intermediaries, pseudo-

soliloquy, pseudo addressee...” (p. 11). The extract below, which is an introductory paragraph of a student’s essay, illustrates this point. The writer exhibited dependence on face-to-face strategies usually employed in the sample conversation texts that captured students’ day-to-day conversational norms. Generally, all samples revealed that students, even as they wrote essays, drew their pseudo audience as close to them as possible through an act of pseudo soliloquy reflecting an L1 conversation norm:

EXAMPLE:

ESSAY TOPIC: *What is income? How does it contribute to wealth and poverty?*

EXTRACT: **If you earned several more thousands of cedis each year, how would you spend it? Would it be on little extras or probably a better car?**

You might choose to invest it in stocks or bonds or even lavish it on unnecessary. Regardless of what you want to buy, because of scarcity: the inadequacy of resources to satisfy all our wants, there will still be additional goods and services that you would want but cannot have. All other things being equal, *ceteris paribus*, it is better to receive more income than less. **Some people make more money than others. Why? Is it training, education, inborn skills, physical attributes or just plain luck? Yes. Yes? Yes! It is all of the above. Your income will make you wealthy or poor.**

The writer seemed to assume a rather paternalistic position that reflected societal power relations which frowned on distance. Physical distance, or proxemics, as a paralinguistic mode of communication is very important to the Akan communicator, just as the use of space has cultural implications. In the Akan community, it is usual for a parent to admonish a child, if there were distance between them, by saying: “*hwebaabi a wogyina a wone me re kasa*” (See where you are standing and speaking to me) (Edu-Buandoh and Okyere, 2009). Similarly, the writer of the extract who provided ‘expert’ information to an audience that needed it, used punctuation marks to cue the imaginary ‘listener’ (who was not supposed to be out of earshot), to respond to questions posed, as the writer-‘speaker’ provided imaginary response(s) on behalf of the ‘listener’.

Two discourse types were present in the text: the language of academia, evidenced by the definition given to ‘scarcity’ and a Latin phrase widely used in economics – *ceteris paribus* – on the one hand; and a Question and Answer strategy (found in the final lines of the essay), drawn from the writer’s oral community, on the other. As suggested by Yankah (2002), it is possible for the Ghanaian not to achieve the level of distance needed in some academic writing tasks. He argues, for example that in Africa, speech is interactive, linking the speaker to the hearer in time and space. He also adds that in oral traditions the emphasis is on dialogue (p.46).

What both students and academics need to understand is that there is likelihood that both prior and academic discourse will be present in texts of L2 learners who have pursued an academic writing course. According to Hyland (2006), “Social constructivism ... sees the agreement of community members at the heart of knowledge construction” (p.39). However, an attempt to strengthen both discourses in an intellectual climate to enhance academic ‘biculturalism’ requires a process of adjustment that may often receive a level of resistance, not just from the academic, but also from the student. One student, for example, who after pursuing the twelve-week programme in academic writing, decided to continue to employ strategies from her oral discourse community, had this to say during an interview which sought to understand why she incorporated poems in her essay and used punctuation marks to ‘mimic’ her tone of voice:

... what most people do – they are technical and mindful of rules and instructions, I’m not saying I disobey the rules but then they, they write like a

lecturer has taught you to define the subject and then after give three reasons and then conclude, it's very structured and the... the paper doesn't reflect their personality or whoever is writing. If you take some people's scripts you cannot tell if he wrote it or she wrote it's because it's kind of the same but then when I write it, I want to fuse it with the technical and with my personality, my emotions, so that it would be a beautiful theme... something like a fusion of rules and then my personality that's why – that's the difference between I think what I write and what other people write.

Indeed, many essays that reflected this thought process posed an ambivalence about the idea of audience. Was it fellow course mates or members of their academic discipline? The other question to ask is what stage in the writing process were they likely to gain a level of distance and objectivity where necessary (Hyland, 1999)? For this group of writers it seemed that it was difficult for them to address their academic audience, and to reposition themselves in a new literacy space where writing must be more elaborated to maintain coherence, 'since speech and writing work differently as language systems' (Nystrand, 1983, p. 62).

The extract that follows reflects yet another indirection strategy that was drawn into the academic discourse space from oral strategies used – the use of dialogue and storytelling to reach out to students' reading audience.

3.1.1 Transference of Storytelling Elements in Culture: Introductions

Further examination of students' essays revealed that the thesis statements of several essays were delayed and presented, in the third paragraph. The delayed thesis statements and other forms of digression in essays mirrored cultural norms of conversation and storytelling since, for the first few minutes, most group discussions and/or stories told hovered around general issues which usually had no bearing on the theme of the main discussion. Thus, confirming Obeng's (2003) remark that in Akan, it is appropriate to gradually introduce the listener to the thesis, 90 per cent of sample essays analysed reflected this oral strategy. According to Osam (1986), relationships are also established between the storyteller and the audience through a series of opening formulas, and these are known as performatives or interaction. This strategy, which establishes common ground, is used for a few minutes before a story begins.

Again, essays were, especially in the introduction and conclusion paragraphs, decorated with such embellishments as metaphors, perhaps to exhibit their level of wisdom to 'elders' of their new academic communities as is expected in their cultural communities (Saah, 1986). Below is an example to illustrate the point:

EXAMPLE:

ESSAY TOPIC: "Biopsychology: Can We Link Human Behaviour with the Brain?"

P1 **A cerise mass full of nerves lies within a box. The box, specifically known as the skull protects it from injury. It gives us power. Power to kill, eat and sleep.It gives us power to decide on what we want to do. It controls everyone-the mad man on the street, the little girl who cries when her mother takes her to school, our leaders,you who decides to sit in a lecture hall and listen to your tutor.Everyone! It is the brain, that three poundmass**

of soft spong [sic] matter made up of billions of nerve cells. It keeps us alive and controls us.

- P2 Kofi, 16, **wakes** up every morning at five, brushes **his** teeth, **takes** his bath. (He **likes** his water warm, about 40°C) His **clothes** are already ironed. He **always irons** them the night before. He **takes his breakfast** of porridge and **sweet** bread and **makes** sure he is at the **school bus stop** before **7:30am**. At exactly **7:30am**, the **bus** will arrive and he will board it for **school**. It is a routine. **The question is thus raised, is Kofi just disciplined or is he being controlled by something...**

Though portions of the extract contain truths in the sciences that may appeal to an academic audience, the text may pose problems for an academic audience who believe that texts should conform to the genre requirements of a community or classroom (Johns, 1997; Kroll, 2003). Perhaps, Wood's (2001) comment on science research articles, though not directly related to academic writing for undergraduate students in the sciences, is still relevant here: "An RA on the molecular biology of cancer, for example, will not vary according to the cultural background of the main author, since the background is that of cancer research, not that of a Japanese author, for example" (p.77).

In the extract above, the opening formula of the storytelling strategy of the students' oral community was relied on. The writer, like a storyteller, captured the meaning of 'routine'— a word which is relevant to the question to be answered in narrative form and which dwelt on experiences lived by his perceived student audience in Ghana. The use of sound effect to appeal to the emotions of his 'listening audience' who would usually vocalize or subvocalize in the reading process, was evident. The /s/ sound, for example, seemed to create sibilant alliteration, for effect. And, almost like a dramatist, the writer 'turned' to the readers to draw them into the discussion, with the emphasis on '**Everyone!**' to signal proxemics, a term used to draw attention to the collectivist and inclusive nature of the communicative events in students' oral community. An ellipsis mark used at the end of the second paragraph, according to the writer when interviewed, was also meant to signal a pause for the much-needed thinking space and real time processing (Rost, 1990), for the 'reader/listener'. However, according to Wood (2001), the norms and practices of the discipline of scientific research articles require a writer to understand 'discipline specific' norms, which must be employed, rather than 'culture specific norms'. Each claim should be well supported by the factual evidence.

The storytelling elements in the extracts presented in this paper so far raise questions about the students' intended 'purpose' and their understanding of the expectations of 'audience'. According to (Nystrand, 1983):

As with all composition, the writer must carefully balance what is said, i.e., the text, against what need not be said. And what need not be said, of course, depends on the actual context of use, i.e., who's reading, what they know, when they read it, what they want to find out, and so on. (p.58)

To discuss opinions that clarified students' envisioned audience and purpose, which made them produce such texts, the researcher obtained some responses during interview sessions. The following, from a participant, captures the opinion of 80 per cent of the interviewees:

It is, it influences by sometimes the music we hear and the books we read you know...things what we see on TV is different from what lets say... your generation is used to and we like to write that way but then it makes it less boring for us to write you know.

When you write and you start with a story or a poem or a dream, the person can easily identify with it from the beginning and it's not like you're going to... you know, when you just give a definition like 'psychology is'...stating ...you know, it's very academic but then you want to start with something more... very emotional, something that when the person will say 'ooh is this what happened?' You know, the person will be thrilled and the person would want to read and find out, even when the content is not as good as the person expects but the person has already been glued to what you've written from the beginning, so it's more ...and let the person to have to feel more like just see that's what I think is the goal of what we do.

This drew attention to some students who write not solely to present facts, but rather to excite the reader through indirection. The contribution of students' prior education to this phenomenon cannot be ignored, as at the pre-university stage students were usually asked to write stories and essays that were not without excitement. This rather engaging art was, as far back as 1977, described by Olson as the 'how true!' effect.

Samples of concluding paragraphs provided below, provide further insights into not just the use of storytelling strategies employed in student essays, but also the indirection conflict- avoidance strategy of the Akan— an Akan art that does not make the arguer explicitly present their case.

3.1.2 Transference of Storytelling Elements in Culture: Conclusions

An aspect of the guiding philosophy of the Akan, collectivism, is captured in concluding paragraphs of sample essays. This social outlook, which places premium on cohesion, is exhibited in storytelling practices. Osam (1986), indicates that in storytelling, listeners at the end of the story, were either beckoned to provide the conclusion of stories through consensus building or were left with an inconclusive open-ended part to consider and 'digest.' Below are two concluding parts of essay samples that exemplify strategies used by an oral Akan collectivist community:

EXAMPLE:

ESSAY TOPIC: *Is Political Science a Science?*

In this sample, the writer of an argument paper asks readers to debate his position expressed in the essay:

Conclusion: **All in all the two schools of thought have been presented and is left entirely to us to decide who has convinced us enough and join them in their belief. The ball is in your court. Is political science a science or not? Choose wisely**

Though the first few words of the concluding paragraph give the reader a sense of expectation of finality, the ensuing sentences present the reader with a rather shocking ending that violates reader expectation of the academic structure of texts. This style, however, reflects a collectivist feature of oral Akan (Agyekum, 2004). What is to be noted here is that cultures are similar in certain ways. These students, as in the case of the Japanese students of Hind's research left the conclusion to the imagination of the reader, and the correlation among patterns of discourse in non-native speakers' could be a platform for generating a framework for the future of world Englishes. These findings seem to provide cues that may respond to Casanave's (2004) question on contrastive rhetoric research:

...where do our preferences come from, as people, as writers, as readers, and, importantly, as members not just of one homogenous culture but of multiple and often fuzzily defined subcultures? (p.53)

It seems, from the available data, that two or more cultural experiences (multiple subcultures) of the participants are relied on in the text invention process. Concluding paragraphs, in other cases, for example, drew on storytelling, family gathering and Akan radio/television talk-show discourse practices, which would usually end with an advice or an invitation to addressee(s) to contribute to the discussion. Usually, the subculture of the students' subject area, and 'images' from the prior culture which is used as an extended metaphor to express their understanding of new knowledge obtained, competed for space in academic writing. An example follows:

EXAMPLE:

ESSAY TOPIC: How Does Culture Vary from Society to Society?

Conclusion: A close examination of the various elements of culture has led us to the realization that culture varies from society to society. Different cultures emphasize different things. Cultures are integrated and patterned differently and display tremendous diversity from society to society. **So the next time you are gobbling down cow meat with relish in Ghana don't assume that people from different societies with different culture do the same. An art because his society doesn't share your culture.**

Beyond the storytelling genre, the Akan culture which may be considered as collectivist by nature seems to promote similar group dynamics in households. It might be suggested that their cultural concept of introductions, which is usually crafted to impress the listening ear of 'listeners', and conclusions based on consensus building, has been drawn into the essays. Therefore, it could be the case that for them, everyday experiences act as cultural metaphors that help to explain new information in their disciplines to their audience, who, from the analysis of language used, are fellow students. These essays exhibited the question and answer strategy and the use of collective pronouns such as 'we' and 'us'. For these learners who are repositioning themselves in a new discourse space, their audience and purpose of writing and the interface between conversation and writing seem to be hazily defined.

Paxton observed a similar situation in which students drew on oral narratives during their text invention processes, as she analysed the essays of some learners at the University of Cape Town (Paxton, 2006). An understanding of the struggles that ESL writers go through as they reposition themselves in new academic spaces is necessary, if their ideas are to be appreciated, and if lecturers are to expose them to other, possibly, more acceptable disciplinary practices.

4 Implications for Teaching and Learning

While orality is acquired naturally, literacy is learnt. This may be the reason why most students feel more inclined to use more of their oral strategies than the academic strategies taught in the academic writing programmes, which they still grapple with. Kroll (2003), however, cautions that there is the need to focus students' attention on writing skills, since:

... full participation in the world community, particularly within interconnected economic, technological, and geopolitical realities, can require a fluency in English that goes beyond the spoken language and embraces a variety of uses of the written language as well. Because the English language cultures (among others) are

increasingly literacy-driven cultures... and digital-literacy driven (Warshauer, 2001), the pursuit of English entails a pursuit of written English, offering those who acquire skill in this code the possibility for improved life chances. (p.1)

Consequently, it is for this reason that this study investigated the extent to which such oral strategies employed by students, which seemed to take precedence over extensive reading and writing, affected their academic essays.

Kroll's assertion, however, does not take into consideration the notion that written texts are complex, and are continuously reshaped by readers who interact with texts in order to define new sets of socially accepted rules— what Kramsch (1999, p.81) refers to as “the concept of appropriation”. According to Bakhtin (1986), “our speech is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of our-own-ness, varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework and re-accentuate” (p.89). The teaching of writing, therefore, entails more than working with simplistic sample essays, as writing grows with changes that occur within a discipline, and is further shaped by purpose as defined by a given topic, and a perceived audience. For example, Paxton (2001), like Nystrand (1987), believe that the wording of tasks assigned, might also influence students to draw more on one discourse type rather than another.

For appropriate language choices to be made, students need to be exposed to varied forms of written communication from which meaning can eventually be made. As discussed, students admitted that this was what was lacking in their training. Their lack of self-expression is evidenced by fragmented discourse, and this may be improved upon if instructors provide comments that both shape and improve students' writing skills (Adam, 1997; Sternglass, 1997). Again, students, such as those observed in this study may have to be encouraged read extensively.

Davis (1988), cautions that target genres within a syllabus are to provide samples of writing which may guide new members to appreciate and recognise the style of writing in a particular discourse community. Archer (2008), studying the exigencies emerging from research that introduces students to their disciplinary discourse concludes that the complex and evolving nature of language of academic disciplines, and the students' inability to easily process these new forms, requires an apprenticeship model of teaching that responds to students' initial writing needs. For example, Paxton (2003; 2004), shows how in the field of economics, both language of textbooks and language of scholarly journal articles should be introduced to students through close reading activities for a broader perspective of academic writing. For while the language of textbooks provide samples of 'single-voicedness', journals provide samples of the structure of debates, questioning, and discussions which are needed in academic essays (Hyland, 1999), which can offer students models of writing worth emulating.

Through close reading of academic texts, learners are also able to understand the evolving nature of academic discourse. The language of engineering, according to Archer (2006a; 2006b), is one that straddles the discourse of science (logic, truth and formality), and the language of practical issues in management, politics, sociology, economics and development. In both economics and engineering, as in most disciplines, it is pointed out that there should be a level of detachment, through an author's voice. However these 'rules' change as the purpose for which, and audience for whom language is generated shift from formal to rather informal spaces.

Therefore, to gain absolute control of both antecedent and new academic language which does not make writers lose their identities, students may also be introduced to writings of scholars in their locality who deal with issues in their culture while writing academic papers. The ability of Ghanaian scholars to incorporate oral rhetorical features into texts is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, drawing on Gyekye's (1995) ideas, Bediako (2004) asserts that one should not marginalize

this style of conveying information to members of one's community. For Bediako, describes Danquah, who was an eminent Ghanaian scholar and politician, as one whose intellectual discourse was interspersed with Akan idioms and expressions. This practice has some advantages. A study by Paxton (2006), reveals how storytelling and informal narratives of ESL students' prior discourse may be helpful in triggering connections from personal experience that will help learners to scaffold learning in their new discourse communities.

For students as well as instructors of tertiary institutions to participate meaningfully in sharing and creating meaning, the teaching and learning of academic discourse should be a life-long experience within which shifts that accommodate new ways of 'saying' are accepted within broader norms of existing academic practices.

5 Conclusions

Ghanaian undergraduates seem to write the way they speak, and this research gives credence to previous researchers' findings (Adams, 1997; Adika, 1999; Odamtten *et al.*, 1994). Samples of extracts from student essays reflect elements of oral discourse: prosody (intonation, rhythm and pausing), pitch (marked by punctuation marks in sample essays), familiarity with 'interlocutor' (marked by questions that draw readers close to the writer/speaker who expects a level of cooperation from audience – an informality in speech style), and fragmented sentences indicating the writers' 'real time processing strategies' that would normally occur because of time pressure during speech (ellipsis based on assumption of shared knowledge between writer and reader). In the teaching of writing, such patterns can be traced to the expressionist approach, which encourages beginner writers to write about themselves, sharing their beliefs and experiences mostly through narratives. Expressivists believe in a process approach that assumes that meaning 'resulted from a private search in which the writer drew on both intellect and emotion to discover a personally significant truth' (Moran & Ballif, 2000).

Yet another consideration is that EAL writers bring to their writing, their own histories and resources. In this particular study, what cannot be ignored is that an understanding of the oral discourse practices of these EAL undergraduates is necessary if their ideas are to be appreciated, and if lecturers are to expose them to other disciplinary practices that will liberate them to express new ideas without losing their identity. Ivanic's (1998) study found the following:

...learner writers are not so much learning to be creative, as learning to use discourses which already exist – creatively. ... On the other hand, a writer's identity is determined not completely by other discourses, but rather by the unique way in which she draws on and combines them. (p.86)

Students at the undergraduate level will also have to expand their schematic knowledge of text construction and assume a 'bicultural identity' – one that effectively makes use of both antecedent oral cultural practices used to orally convey information, and disciplinary practices that will be understood and appreciated by their audience (González & de Rivera, 1999; González, Chen, & Sánchez, 2001). This idea is also suggested by the social constructivist approach, which requires writers to be aware of the demands of their discourse community. To conclude, "a dialogue needs to be set up between what students bring and what the institution expects, in order to evolve innovative spaces within the curriculum" (Archer, 2008, p.1).

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