

**Academic Discourse in the Outer and Expanding
Circles: An Open Invitation to Authors**

Introduction

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Habib Abdesslem
University of Manouba & King Khalid University

This Regular Issue was intended as a Special one on *Academic Discourse in the Outer and Expanding Circles*. It was preceded by papers on the same topic, but the Editorial Board of *Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics* chose not to delay their publication. I hope those authors who are engaged in preparing papers on the same topic will not be deterred from submitting their work to *AJAL*.

In this Introduction, I include for our readers and future contributors (i) the 2019 *Call for Papers*, which I would like them to consider as an open invitation, (ii) introduce the three papers on academic discourse in this Issue, (iii) reflect on the role *AJAL* has been playing to improve academic discourse and promote research publication in different underprivileged contexts, and (iv) provide readers with a list of the papers *AJAL* has published on academic discourse.

Academic Discourse in the Outer and Expanding Circles

The three-world ideology-oriented division that characterized most of the second half of the 20th century's Cold War era has given way to what is called today Developed,

Emerging, and Developing countries (economies). First World countries have maintained their supremacy and are ranked as Developed countries. Former Second World communist countries, namely Russia and China, together with other countries such as India and Pakistan, are top Emerging countries. A few Third World countries have risen to the rank of Emerging countries, but many are classified as Developing and some, political correctness aside, are underdeveloped. With the exception of South Korea, perhaps, no Third World country has joined the Developed countries club.

The second half of the 20th century also witnessed an unprecedented spread of English outside the countries where it is predominantly a Native Language and beyond Great Britain's former colonies where it is a Second Language and often a lingua franca. Braj Kachru's three-circles model tried to capture this expansion. Kachru referred to the countries where English is a native language as Inner Circle, the countries where it is a second language as Outer Circle, and the countries where it is a foreign language as Expanding Circle.

Seen from a postcolonial perspective, Kachru's classification debunked the long standing supremacy of English and the native speakers of English. The works produced by Inner Circle variationist sociolinguists and English language teaching researchers who embraced Kachru's ideas had a rather apologetic tone, while their Outer Circle peers felt empowered. There was a general consensus that native speakers' varieties are not always the most preferred varieties, that teachers who are nonnative speakers of English can be more efficient than their colleagues who are native speakers, and that Standard English is not the only yardstick to evaluate a person's linguistic competence.

World Englishes is now a thriving research area in the field of applied linguistics, and teaching English as an international language (TEIL) is a practice that the reality on the ground imposes.

All countries having English as a first language are both Developed and Inner Circle. Language, power, scientific knowledge, and technological innovation are inextricably linked. Standard English is learnt and used, albeit with different accents, in many Developed, Expanding Circle countries, such as Germany, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Russia, and The Netherlands. It is taught in most Developing, Expanding Circle countries, such as Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Bahrain, and Iran. Outer Circle speakers in Emerging countries, such as India or Pakistan, or Developing countries, such as Nigeria or Bangladesh, may find it easier to communicate in and across local or regional Englishes. But, when it comes to having access to scientific knowledge or contributing to it, students and scholars across the three Circles are more than aware that they have to have a very good command of Standard English.

Inner Circle, Developed countries have maintained their linguistic, economic, and scientific supremacy. Aside from some accent variations and code mixing, Inner Circle Standard English is expected in most academics' spoken discourse genres. And since the written form is devoid of accent and intonation, written academic discourse is expected to be in no variety other than the Standard one. Scholars in these Inner Circle, Developed countries are major contributors to knowledge, which they formulate and present according to the rhetorical patterns of their respective disciplinary genres. Most high ranking journals are published in Developed, Inner Circle countries and most top

universities in the world are American or British; some high quality journals are published in other European countries, such as Germany, Sweden, and The Netherlands; a few are published in China and South Korea; and hardly any are published in Developing countries. The Inner Circle has maintained its "glamour" for academics, even for those who are working in prestigious universities and research centres based in Emerging or Developing countries. "World Englishes" has gained acceptance by teachers and sociolinguists, but it is dispreferred even in informal academic settings and unacceptable across a large number of academic discourse genres.

However, academic discourse is not completely detached from the socio-cultural contexts in which it is produced and disseminated. Novice and expert Outer Circle and Expanding Circle academics have issues with acculturation in the Inner Circle peers' modes of reasoning, rhetorical practices, and even lexical and syntactic preferences.

AJAL welcomes Studies, Reflections, and Book Reviews on academic discourse, particularly in the Outer and Expanding Circles. Academic Discourse analysis covers Genres such as: Research Article, Book, Thesis, Book Review, Presentation, Thesis Defence, Thesis Report, Lecture, Tutorial, Letter of Intent, Letter of Recommendation, Supervisor-Supervisee Interaction, and Referee Report. It covers issues such as: Universality, localism, and power in academic discourse practices; Rhetorical patterns and structures in academic discourse genres and subgenres; Genre stability, change, and hybridity; Stance in and across academic disciplinary genres; Plagiarism and authenticity; and Research publication policies, processes, and strategies.

The Papers in this Issue

Almontassar Bellah Taieb and Naoual Toumi compared lexical bundles in expert writers' research articles published in peer-reviewed applied linguistics journals and lexical bundles in novice MA students' applied linguistics dissertations completed and defended in Tunisian universities. They identified four structural categories of four-word bundles: NP-based, PP-based, VP-based, and miscellaneous "others" (p. 9). They concentrated on the most used bundles in the two corpora via AntConc and they weeded out bundles that included proper nouns or contained discipline specific terms. Their main findings showed that students' bundles types and tokens are not as varied as those used by experts and that, while text-oriented clausal bundles are frequent in students' discourse, research-oriented phrasal bundles are frequent in experts' discourse. Taieb and Toumi attribute experts' greater variation of lexical bundles and functions "to the discipline's discursive demands" (p.1). They note that students showed "signs of maturity in their rhetorical practices" (p.23) and they recommend several genre-based pedagogical activities that would help students improve their academic writing even further.

Curneyt Demir studied fourteen different categories of syntactic complexity in the first five thousand words of two hundred MA dissertations in English Language Teaching (ELT) produced between 2016 and 2020. He compared one hundred dissertations produced and supervised by attested native speakers of English at twenty three universities in four Inner Circle countries – USA, UK, Canada, and Australia – and one hundred dissertations produced and supervised by local non-native speakers of

English at twenty two universities in four Expanding Circle countries – Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and China. The author used Skewness tests to determine normality of distribution in each of the two corpora. He used Syntactic Complexity Analyzer (L2SCA) to quantify the frequency of the fourteen categories. Then he applied parametric and non-parametric tests to compare the frequency of syntactic categories used by writers within each group and across the two groups in the two corpora. The study revealed that Inner Circle writers' overall syntactic complexity is higher and more varied than Expanding Circle writers'. It also revealed that while there are similarities in the use of particular categories across groups in the two corpora, there are differences in the use of other categories between writers belonging to different countries. Demir recommends that non-native speakers of English produce "a decent level [of sentence complexity] that does not disrupt the flow of reading fluency" (p.40). He considers the explanations of significant differences he offers between writers belonging to particular countries, such as Saudi Arabia or the US, as being tentative and require further investigations.

Academic syllabus designers, textbook writers, and teachers can benefit from studies such as Taieb and Toumi's and Demir's. They can focus on syntactic complexity at the sentence level and the lexical bundle level to explain discursive functions in academic discourse. By doing so, they can contribute to enhancing their students' reading skills and help them progress towards composing persuasive and reader-friendly texts in their respective disciplines. However, teachers should guard their students against slipping into mechanical uses or blind imitations of expert writers.

In his paper, Marii Abdeljaoued paid tribute to his former teacher, supervisor, co-author, and mentor. He reported on the English language policies and the academic research practices in Tunisia from the perspective of Tunisia's avowed critical applied linguist, Tahar Labassi. Labassi did not accept the politicised view that French and English were in competition in Tunisia. He revolted against the ill-advised, rash, and populist decisions that introduced English language programmes without consulting experts in the field or preparing materials and teachers. As a pacifist and humanist, Labassi considered English as a means for promoting scientific and technological progress, dialogue between cultures, and peace and understanding between nations. As a political activist and trade unionist, he militated against the unscrupulous manipulation of the masses. As a scholar, he lamented the lack of resources and incentives researchers in poor countries suffer from, and he called for more cooperation and communication between scholars across the world, especially when it comes to research and publication.

Labassi's presence in Abdeljaoued's paper is so conspicuous and so strong. This presence is indicative of the tremendous influence his works, thoughts, and deeds have had on his students, colleagues, and many among his compatriots. The tribute Marii paid in this paper to the late Professor Tahar Labassi reminds academics that "Money cannot buy Gratitude".

Academic discourse and research publication: AJAL's role

The Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles demarcations for English are associated with the British colonial legacy. The terms gained currency on account of the correspondences

each of them had with the adjectives "first", "second", and "foreign" that defined and classified the predominant language or languages a community speaks. The twenty first century's unprecedented people's mobility, the astounding advances in information technology, and the spread of English as a second language in many Developed, Expanding Circle countries in Europe have loosened the twentieth century's Circles demarcations. The spread of English in Developing and in most Emerging countries (i.e. the Periphery), has boosted these countries' economies and industries, but its effects on education, research, and academic publication are not as positive as we are led to believe. The movement of students and scholars from the Periphery is more unidirectional than ever in this globalisation age. Gifted students and promising scientists consider English as their passport to the Centre (i.e. the Inner Circle and the Developed Expanding European Circle countries). These students and scholars are not disembodied thinking heads. They are attracted by a higher quality of education, better career prospects, and better living conditions in the Centre. They are driven out by the different scourges ravaging their respective countries. Whether they are a loss to their home countries is hard to tell, but they are a gain to their host countries.

Eminent researchers and academics publish their work in high quality journals affiliated with high ranking universities and renowned publishing companies in the Centre. Predatory and mediocre journals seem to be catering for those disadvantaged academics in the Periphery who cannot get published easily and whose countries and universities lack financial or human resources to establish or maintain quality journals.

While being as rigorous and selective as Centre journals, *AJAL* has been providing generous guidance for its contributors and free access to its readers from both Centre and Periphery. It does not charge publication fees or access fees. Its editorial team members are well established professional academics who are affiliated to universities in different parts of the world. They are devoting their time and expertise to serving emerging scholars and to helping them raise their research and teaching standards and to saving them from the dangers of falling prey to mediocrity and predation.

Academic discourse and research publication: *AJAL*'s achievements

The references below testify to the effort *AJAL* has exerted to promote research on academic discourse analysis and pedagogy.

Abdeljaoued, M. (2021). English in education and academic research: In memory of the late Professor Tahar Labassi. *Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6 (2), 72-94.

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Abdi, O. (2021). The use of connectives in the written academic discourse of students majoring in Arabic and their peers majoring in English. *Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6 (1), pp. 32-59.

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- Rezoug, F. & Vincent, B. (2018). Exploring lexical bundles in the Algerian corpus of engineering. *Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3 (1), pp. 47-77.
- Taieb, A.B. & Toumi, N. (2021). Exploring conventionalized phraseology in advanced academic writing of Tunisian linguistics students: A lexical bundles analysis. *Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6 (2), 1-30.
- Wei, J. & Duan, J. (2019). A comparative study of metadiscourse features in English research article abstracts in hard disciplines, 4 (1), 1-37.

Conclusion

As Editor-in-Chief of *AJAL* and Guest Editor of *Academic Discourse in the Outer and Expanding Circles*, I would like to thank all authors who responded to my Call for Papers by submitting typescripts. I owe a great debt of gratitude to those whose papers are published and those whose papers were turned down for their patience, understanding, and cooperation. I look forward to receiving more submissions on the same topic, particularly from Outer Circle countries, such as India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and South Africa.