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The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics, University of Auckland, 2012
Abstract

Traditional assumptions about the nature of academic writing and its acquisition by undergraduate students are now being challenged by teaching practitioners and researchers alike. At the same time, the written production of NESB (non-English speaking background) students suggests that simplistic categorisations into first- and second-language writers have limited relevance to writing proficiency or instruction.

This thesis takes a cohort of Business undergraduates, from a range of language backgrounds, who are studying in a New Zealand university and examines the role of academic writing in their study experiences through a mixed-method approach. Firstly, a series of linguistic analyses of their Semester One examination essay writing identifies the extent of use of established features of academic writing (Biber, 2006). Next, case studies of seven members of the cohort chart their progress through their degree programme, and explore the students’ writing development and changing views of writing through interviews and group discussions.

The findings show that students brought a range of writing skills and attitudes to their university study and that, while lexical and rhetorical aspects of academic writing were established early, more complex syntactic forms were less readily acquired or understood. Findings also show that student experiences, staff expectations and changing discourse demands influenced students’ valuing of academic writing skills.

The results of the study highlight the need for subject specialist teachers to explicitly ‘demystify’ (Lillis, 2000) discourse practices and expectations around student writing early in the study programme. However, the results also indicate that the incorporation of specialist writing instruction into disciplinary programmes is necessary for students’ development of linguistic aspects of academic writing and a wider understanding of its function within the academic community.
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

Dedication

Dedicated to David, Jan and Bob

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Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................. 2
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 3
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................. 7
List of Tables .................................................................................................................................... 8
Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................... 10
  1.1 Overview of the chapter ............................................................................................................. 10
  1.2 The role of academic writing in university study ...................................................................... 10
  1.3 Context for the study ............................................................................................................... 10
  1.4 Development of research knowledge ...................................................................................... 11
  1.5 Rationale for the study ............................................................................................................ 13
  1.6 Structure of the thesis ............................................................................................................ 14
Chapter 2: Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 15
  2.1 Overview of the chapter ........................................................................................................... 15
  2.2 Background to academic writing ............................................................................................. 15
    2.2.1 The evolution of present-day writing theory ................................................................. 15
    2.2.2 Academic literacy and literacies and academic writing .................................................... 18
  2.3 Quantitative research: Linguistic analyses of academic writing ............................................ 19
    2.3.1 Large-scale studies ......................................................................................................... 20
    2.3.2 Studies of groups or individual linguistic features .......................................................... 26
    2.3.3 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 38
  2.4 Qualitative research: Students’ academic writing .................................................................. 39
    2.4.1 Student experiences and perceptions .............................................................................. 39
    2.4.2 Research on learners ....................................................................................................... 49
    2.4.3 Issues in learning and teaching academic writing .......................................................... 51
    2.4.4 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 58
  2.5 Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 58
Chapter 3: Methodology .................................................................................................................. 60
  3.1 Overview of the chapter ............................................................................................................ 60
  3.2 Purpose of the study ................................................................................................................ 60
3.3 Pilot study ........................................................................................................ 61
  3.3.1 Background .............................................................................................. 61
  3.3.2 Data analyses ........................................................................................... 62
  3.3.3 Results of analyses ................................................................................ 63
  3.3.4 Conclusions and implications for the main study design ......................... 63
3.4 Design of the main study ................................................................................. 65
  3.4.1 Preliminary issues in the design of the study ............................................. 65
  3.4.2 Design of the study .................................................................................. 67
3.5 Summary of the chapter ................................................................................... 99

Chapter 4: Quantitative Results ........................................................................... 100
  4.1 Overview of the chapter .............................................................................. 100
  4.2 Background to the Baseline Survey of student academic writing ............... 100
  4.3 Conciseness in academic writing ................................................................. 102
  4.4 Results of the Baseline Survey .................................................................... 102
    4.4.1 Content and function words .................................................................. 104
    4.4.2 Sentence structures .............................................................................. 120
    4.4.3 The use of features of academic writing .............................................. 129
    4.4.4 Measures of conciseness ..................................................................... 131
    4.4.5 The Tesco Case Study ......................................................................... 132
  4.5 Key Findings of the Baseline Survey ............................................................ 143
  4.6 Summary of the chapter .............................................................................. 144

Chapter 5: Qualitative Results ............................................................................ 145
  5.1 Overview of the chapter ............................................................................. 145
  5.2 Background to the Longitudinal Studies of student academic writing ......... 146
  5.3 Results of the Longitudinal Studies .............................................................. 147
    5.3.1 Group discussions ............................................................................... 147
    5.3.2 Individual interviews .......................................................................... 155
      5.3.2.1 Case study: Ben ........................................................................... 157
      5.3.2.2 Case study: Grace ....................................................................... 166
      5.3.2.3 Case study: Dipak ....................................................................... 176
      5.3.2.4 Case study: Imogen ..................................................................... 186
      5.3.2.5 Case study: Jalal .......................................................................... 196
      5.3.2.6 Case studies: Lucy and Dylan ...................................................... 209
    5.3.3 Academic writing development .............................................................. 228
Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Overview of the chapter

6.2 Background to the research study

6.3 Quantitative Findings

6.3.1 Background to Quantitative Findings

6.3.2 Discussion of Key Findings #1 and #2

6.3.3 Discussion of Key Finding #3

6.4 Qualitative Findings

6.4.1 Background to Qualitative Findings

6.4.2 Discussion of Key Finding #4

6.4.3 Discussion of Key Finding #5

6.4.4 Discussion of Key Finding #6

6.4.5 Discussion of Key Finding #7

6.4.6 Issues relating to Qualitative Findings

6.5 Discussion of Findings overall

6.6 Summary of the chapter

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Overview of the chapter

7.2 Summary of Findings

7.2.1 The acquisition and development of features of academic writing

7.2.2 Attitudes towards academic writing and their effect on achievement

7.3 Implications for teaching

7.4 Limitations of the study

7.5 Suggestions for future research

7.6 Concluding comment

Appendix

List of References
List of Figures

Figure A: The three principal approaches to writing 16
Figure B: Model of writing as communicative language use (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996) 17
Figure C: Achieving validation through accuracy (adapted from Creswell, 2007) 71
Figure D: Ratings % compared with main and subordinate clause use 122
Figure E: Ratings % compared with non-finite clause occurrences per 1000 words 124
Figure F: Range of T-units by clause length 124
Figure G: Process for producing qualitative findings 145
Figure H: Academic progress of individual Focus Group members by GPAs 228
Figure I: Principal areas affecting writing and academic progress 234
List of Tables

Table 1: The six dimensions of variation across genres (Biber, 1988) .................................................. 21
Table 2: Categories and sub-categories of the most common features of academic prose (Biber, 2006) 23
Table 3: Features of NS and NNS student writing (Hinkel, 2002) ......................................................... 24
Table 4: Measures of developing success in writing (Christie, 2002) ..................................................... 27
Table 5: Register features of school-based texts (Schleppegrell, 2001) ................................................. 28
Table 6: NZ national curriculum objectives for senior secondary classes .............................................. 33
Table 7: Classification of activities for Business assignments (Currie, 1993) ....................................... 35
Table 8: Pilot study analyses .................................................................................................................. 62
Table 9: Features incorporated into main study design from the pilot study results ............................. 64
Table 10: Features of different research procedures (Creswell, 2003) ................................................... 68
Table 11: Perspectives and terms used in qualitative validation (Creswell, 2007) ............................... 70
Table 12: Design characteristics of the study (after Creswell, 2003) .................................................. 72
Table 13: Baseline Survey, participants’ demographic data .................................................................. 77
Table 14: Longitudinal Studies, participants’ demographic data .......................................................... 78
Table 15: Analyses of MGMT191 Cohort examination scripts ............................................................. 88
Table 16: Classification of clause types (after Biber et al., 1999) ......................................................... 89
Table 17: Principal categories among the most common features of academic prose (Biber, 2006) 92
Table 18: Content of group discussion and interview questions ......................................................... 96
Table 19: Structure of case studies ....................................................................................................... 97
Table 20: Staff interview questions ..................................................................................................... 98
Table 21: Features not included in the MGMT191 analysis ................................................................. 103
Table 22: Content word classes as % of all content words .................................................................. 104
Table 23: Summary of academic features of nouns .......................................................................... 108
Table 24: Summary of academic features of verbs .......................................................................... 112
Table 25: Summary of academic features of adjectives ................................................................. 114
Table 26: Summary of academic features of adverbs ...................................................................... 116
Table 27: Summary of academic features of prepositions ............................................................... 117
Table 28: Dependent clause sub-types in MGMT191 corpus ............................................................ 118
Table 29: Specific individual lexical features .................................................................................... 119
Table 30: Percentages and ranges for all clause types ....................................................................... 121
Table 31: Percentages and ranges for all clause use .......................................................................... 123
Table 32: Average words and clauses per T-unit ................................................................. 126
Table 33: Average sentence patterns .................................................................................. 127
Table 34: Use of word class and dependent clause academic features in relation to the LSWE corpus 130
Table 35: Measures of conciseness (after Biber, 1988, p.255) ............................................. 132
Table 36: Content word classes as % of all content words ..................................................... 133
Table 37: Noun features of the two corpora ........................................................................ 134
Table 38: Verb features of the two corpora ........................................................................ 135
Table 39: Adjective features of the two corpora ................................................................. 135
Table 40: Rankings of the first 12 function words in total corpus ......................................... 136
Table 41: Rankings of the first 12 content words in total corpus ........................................... 137
Table 42: Syntactic features and structures of the two corpora ............................................. 138
Table 43: Analysis of section content .................................................................................. 140
Table 44: Focus Group demographic data (reproduced from Chapter 3) ......................... 148
Table 45: BEN, Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words) ......... 162
Table 46: GRACE, Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words) .... 172
Table 47: DIPAK, Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words) ... 182
Table 48: IMOGEN, Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words) 192
Table 49: JALAL, Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words) .... 206
Table 50: LUCY, Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words) ... 221
Table 51: DYLAN, Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words) .... 224
Table 52: Variations in occurrence of academic writing features and structures over 4 semesters 229
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of the chapter

This introductory chapter provides the background to the thesis by first examining the role of academic writing in university study and then describing the context for the present study. After outlining the development of research knowledge on academic writing over recent decades, the chapter goes on to explain the rationale for the thesis and its structure.

1.2 The role of academic writing in university study

Writing is a skill central to academic activity at all levels but for tertiary students it takes on particular significance as the primary means of displaying understanding of disciplinary knowledge for the assessment of academic progress. Nonetheless, the student will also be required to produce an extensive range of other written texts in the course of study. The mastery of these specialised discourse forms is not made easy for the novice writer, for the specific conventions for writing within each discipline are complex, intradisciplinary differences often subtle and nuanced, and expectations are often assumed by teaching staff to be a matter of common knowledge or commonsense.

The skills of academic writing, then, are not easily acquired and this circumstance, together with its crucial role in student achievement, has encouraged considerable inquiry into academic writing in tertiary contexts. Hence, it continues to be an important, engaging and fruitful area for research, and one which holds a special interest to those who design and teach academic writing courses.

1.3 Context for the study

This study is set in a large urban university in Auckland, New Zealand’s biggest commercial and financial centre, with an extensive multicultural population. The university itself is home to a sizeable international student community and its multicultural character is supplemented by an increasing number of Maori and Pasifika students who, together with the children of recently arrived migrant families, are often the first in their family to take up university courses. Hence the student demographic is changing, reflecting social, educational and political aims to include larger numbers of non-traditional students in tertiary study. A variety of institutional support services is available to assist newcomers in adjusting to the university environment, and for those from non English-speaking backgrounds language
credit courses are offered. In addition, a number of disciplines and subject papers offer intra-faculty help for second-language students.

At the time of this study, the Business School had just set up a new degree programme, the Bachelor of Business and Information Management (BBIM) which offered a double major in Information Management together with Accounting or Human Resource Management (HRM) or Marketing. The programme placed a strong emphasis on developing Information Management (IT) skills and understanding to a high level, collaborative working relationships, enhanced communication and language capacities, and teaching and learning approaches which encouraged deep learning and independent and critical thinking. The programme was delivered at a satellite campus, whose smaller size and friendly atmosphere encouraged many of the social and pedagogical aims of the programme.

1.4 Development of research knowledge

The literature on academic writing, following trends over the past five or six decades, has widened its focus from purely linguistic inquiries to investigate the cognitive processes involved in writing and the social and cultural contexts which both inform and constrain the shaping of academic texts.

Linguistic research into academic writing has exploited advances in digital technology to create large bodies of text known as corpora and to analyse them in a depth of detail and to a degree of accuracy not previously possible. These corpora are generally available for research purposes, encouraging both large-scale investigations and quite narrowly focused inquiries into language patterns. Corpus linguistic studies also increasingly take advantage of the growing interest in discourse genres, the kind of writing typically associated with a certain interest group or discipline, to discover the linguistic practices characteristic of that group as it realises its shared communicative aims (Hyland and Milton, 1997; Stubbs and Gerbig, 1993; Swales, 1990, 2004). Research of this kind, however, has tended to focus on academic writing at the higher levels, rather than on student writing, although corpora of native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) novice writing are growing in numbers and in size e.g. British Academic Written English (BAWE), International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS).

At the other end of the scale, the work of novice academic writers can be studied through small corpora created by a subject teacher and devoted to one class or several streams of a writing course. These have considerable interest for the teachers and the institution concerned and can throw unexpected lights on
students’ linguistic practices but accounts of their findings tend to be limited mainly to conference presentations and local publications.

The area of novice academic writing which attracts the bulk of interest from linguists, educators and journal publishers is the work of second language writers (Silva and Matsuda, 2001; Matsuda and Silva, 2005). As will be argued in the Methodology section of this present study, the terms *second language* (L2), *EAL* (English as an additional language), *NNS* (non-native speaker) and others are widely used but far from precise in their application over a wide range of student language experience and proficiency. However most studies continue to investigate students’ acquisition of writing and discourse conventions according to this categorisation.

Cognitive studies of writing have covered both first and second language users (Chenoweth and Hayes, 2000) and there is an extensive literature on child language development, transitioning, more recently, into children’s mastery of the language needed in primary and secondary schooling (Christie and Derewianka, 2008; Martin, 1993). Cognitive studies have also discussed writing processes, often in an instructional context and for pedagogical purposes (Emig, 1971; Calkins, 1983; Clay, 2001; Graves, 1983). Socio-cultural theory has influenced the direction of research on writing within a wider context of literacy because of the increasing involvement of first-language (L1) writers from non-traditional backgrounds. These include the so-called Generation 1.5 (Harklau, Losey and Siegal, 1999), who migrated as children to the host country. The presence of these students in schools and tertiary institutions reflects the striking extent of global migration in recent times but also displays, in a narrower socio-cultural context, their partial exclusion from the literacy experiences of the country’s first-language students, because of the prevalence of the home language in out-of-school reading, writing and discussion activities.

Case studies of student experiences in tertiary study have tended not to focus directly on writing so much as on the broader topic of acquisition of academic literacy in the case of L1 students (Lea and Street, 1999, 2000), especially in their first year of study (Krause, Hartley, James and McInnis, 2005; Murray, 2010; Yorke and Longden, 2008). With L2 students, the issue of acculturation into their academic discipline certainly includes writing, often a major component of their adaptation, but covers other social and academic aspects as well (Casanave, 2002; Duff, 2010; Leki, 2007; Zamel and Spack, 2004).
There has been a lesser interest in any of the linguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural aspects of writing looking at students from English-speaking backgrounds whose main (and frequently sole) language is English. This is in part because traditionally these students came from family circumstances of advanced literacy and were expected to have acquired the skills of academic writing already at home and in their secondary schooling (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Smith, 2005). This assumption has been slow to change. It has also, until recently, been based on the view that the language differences for first-language students are minimal, constituting perhaps a more formal and specialist vocabulary and denser sentence structures; and that discourse conventions, if not explicit, are transparent for them (Grabe and Kaplan; Hyland, 2009b). A further distraction from a focus on first-language novice academic writers is the economic pressure on tertiary institutions to enrol international students and the consequent establishment of pre-sessional and credit courses and support services for them, causing the expansion of an already extensive research industry into L2 writing and a redirection of focus from other linguistic populations.

Even less frequently subject to inquiry is the situation where students from a variety of language backgrounds are studying together in content classes. To a certain extent, the readiness to provide various forms of writing support can be attributed to concerns of content teachers with neither the time nor the expertise to deal with what may be very complex linguistic issues (Hyland, 2006; 2009b; Paltridge, 2001). Implicit in this response, however, is the assumption that the needs of more advanced and proficient writers can be met through generic approaches to academic writing, instead of the conventions of a specific discipline.

1.5 Rationale for the study

In view of the areas noted above where research inquiry might add useful knowledge to a somewhat restricted field, a study of students’ development of academic writing suggests itself as an appropriate, valuable and under-investigated topic for inquiry, with direct relevance to teaching approaches and curricula in English-medium tertiary institutions.

An investigation along these lines should be broadly based, applying a view of writing which takes into account not merely linguistic but also sociocultural and cognitive considerations. In this way, the students’ experiences can be explored, together with the texts themselves. This goal could be realised in an approach which incorporates qualitative and quantitative methodologies and provides the
opportunity to focus, not merely on the writing product, but equally on the human agents in the writing context and their perceptions of their lives as student writers.

There appears to be an opportunity then to undertake a New Zealand-based study which uses a mixed-method approach to capture both the linguistic features of novice tertiary writing and the cognitive and socio-cultural influences on their developing understanding of academic acculturation, as perceived through their own accounts of their experiences. The mixed-method concept might be realised through the collection and analysis of students’ essay writing to identify features characteristic of written academic prose, while student experiences would be collected and reported in a series of individual case studies. In this way, a comprehensive picture of undergraduate writers and their writing could be obtained.

The broad aim of this research study, accordingly, is to investigate the role of academic writing in tertiary students’ academic achievement through reporting on both linguistic aspects of their writing and their personal perspectives on their tertiary writing experience.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter One has provided an introduction to the thesis by describing the importance of academic writing in tertiary study, the context of the study, the state of current knowledge on the topic and the research rationale and aim. Chapter Two discusses the current literature in more detail, highlighting the contributions of earlier research to the topic under investigation. In Chapter Three, the methodological approach to the study is described and accounted for, and the processes for collecting and analysing data are explained. Chapters Four and Five detail the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses respectively. Chapter Six, the Discussion, interprets these results, compares them with previous research and evaluates their contribution to the expressed aims of the study and to wider research. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by looking at the limitations of the study, its implications for teaching practice and its wider contribution to present-day understandings of student academic writing.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter provides a review of some of the recent literature on academic writing relevant to the broad areas of interest discussed in Chapter 1.

It begins with an account of the evolution of understandings of writing until the beginning of this decade and goes on to discuss Grabe and Kaplan’s (1996) model of writing as a communicative activity, which provides a theoretical basis for understanding the internal and external influences informing the production of written text. This summary is followed by a review of recent studies on three aspects of academic writing: quantitative linguistic analyses of student writing; qualitative accounts of students’ writing experiences as they adjust to academic literacy conventions and practice; and problematic and controversial issues raised in the literature.

2.2 Background to academic writing

2.2.1 The evolution of present-day writing theory

Influences on writing theory

Our views on writing have undergone dramatic changes in the last five or six decades to evolve into an interpretation which is far removed from historical perspectives of this activity. The concern for textual features which marked research, instruction and assessment around writing in the past has been subject to influences from education, cognitive psychology, anthropology and the social sciences, amongst others, broadening our perspective of what happens, how and why, in the production of writing.

Textual research sparked the first developments in this evolution through register analysis (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens, 1964), which drew attention to the linguistic features characterising a particular type of spoken or written discourse. This analytical approach was developed further with the identification of macro-elements of a text, in the form of the pragmatic purposes of successive sections, labelled moves, which typified and differentiated various kinds of written texts (Bhatia, 1993; Dudley-Evans, 1989; Swales, 1990). Meanwhile, the work of educationalists and cognitive psychologists had highlighted the recursivity of the internal processes of the writer, and sought responses to questions
about differences between skilled and novice writers in producing a text (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Emig, 1971; Flower and Hayes, 1977, 1980; Graves, 1983).

The third strand in this evolving notion of writing arose through research on the social and cultural context in which a writer operated, which pointed out that while textual and cognitive factors might account for some of the decisions made in the composing of texts, the external world equally informed and limited choices in their production process. Related to this development was the notion of discourse communities, which sought to explain these differences in linguistic practices by showing how shared knowledge and expertise in specific areas, shared goals in communicative activities and shared perceptions of how these goals might be most appropriately realised in linguistic form created discourse communities (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995; Paltridge, 2004a; Swales, 1998, 2004). This conceptualisation of writing, while broad in its scope, is especially applicable to writing in the academy.

Thus our notion of writing has evolved over the past sixty or so years from a rather narrow linguistic view of the lexical, grammatical and rhetorical features of a finished text to a framework which encompasses text, writer and setting through consideration of linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural factors, as is shown in Figure A (The three principal approaches to writing).

A model of writing theory
Gathering together the various elements that contribute to a description of writing is an extremely complex process and the task of understanding what makes ‘good’ writing and explaining it to others for assessment or instruction purposes is even more problematic. While writing quality may be assessed
holistically, the Grabe and Kaplan model implies that an understanding of writing quality must address textual, cognitive and sociocultural components, as well as the choices and constraints that these three components bring. The choices made in the act of writing can be subject in different ways and at different stages to one, two or all of these influences and the constraints they bring.

These factors have been brought together by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) in their model of writing as communicative language use.

The authors envisaged the components of their model as operating within two areas, the first the external context of situation and performance and the second, the internal working memory. The recursive nature of the process which takes place both externally and internally can be seen in Figure B (Model of writing as communicative language use, Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).
In their model of writing, Grabe and Kaplan attempted to capture the essential elements of the process while taking into account the influences which affect decision-making before, during and after the writing operation. Their model incorporates pre-writing experiences, and influences and attitudes arising from the social context, in order to account for a writer’s linguistic, discoursal and conceptual choices, and demonstrates how the cognitive processing which takes place is not a simple linear series of stages but a far more indirect progression. At the same time, linguistic, cognitive and social factors are seen to be closely intertwined, influencing one another in intricate and complex ways.

The complex nature of writing, then, offers researchers a number of approaches in designing a study. They may on focus the writer, the reader, the process or the product, and may choose this focus from a range of perspectives and for a variety of purposes, combining these choices in different ways. Given this extensive range of possibilities, the following review must necessarily be selective, to fit in with the broad aims of this study, as set out in the Introduction. It will cover the literature in three main areas: linguistic analyses of academic writing at various levels, studies of students’ tertiary writing experiences, and discussion of issues arising from instruction in academic writing. In reviewing the linguistic analyses of academic writing, the interest will be as much on the measures used in the analyses as on their findings, since the measures represent criteria indicative of academic writing quality.

2.2.2 Academic literacy and literacies and academic writing

We use the term *academic writing* to refer to the writing produced in a tertiary educational setting, which must attend to appropriate discourse practices within a discipline. This description includes the concept of academic sociocultural and linguistic adaptation through knowledge of disciplinary genres, but the production of academic writing must also draw on certain cognitive practices in making and shaping knowledge, such as abstraction, analysis and organisation (Street, 2000, p.197).

In the tertiary context, *academic writing* may cover a range of proficiency levels, from novice student writers to academics in their professional capacity as researchers and teachers. The term may also refer to the work of primary and secondary schoolchildren.

However, recent trends position the study of academic writing within the wider realm of *academic literacy*, in response to external sociocultural factors, such as changes in student populations described in the Introduction (Lea and Street, 2000). Building on earlier approaches to tertiary literacy, which had been seen in terms of skills for university study, and later as academic socialisation through acquisition
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

of genre practices, Lea and Street constructed a model of academic literacy which showed the significance of certain cognitive processes associated with learning in higher education. These processes expect students to take on ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge which may be completely unfamiliar to them from their previous learning and life experience.

This has led in turn to the concept of academic literacies which seeks to explain how, in the course of their programme, students must thread their way through different approaches to what constitutes acceptable writing form, style and content between and within disciplines. In order to succeed, students have the task of identifying the appropriate discourses within each subject, a variety of text types and a range of staff attitudes, and they must then apply them to the content with which they are working. The particular issue for students is that these approaches are frequently far from obvious, even though they are taken for granted by the expert practitioners who are both audience and assessors for student writing (Lillis, 1997; Lillis and Turner, 2001). In this process, students take on a role of would-be practitioner of academic discourse, an academic identity which varies considerably according to the field in which they apply these understandings. Moreover, their views of acceptable writing may conflict with their assessors', and students must make a conscious decision to conform to the discourse expectations or challenge them, to accept the discoursal identity or resist it (Benesch, 2001; Ivanic, 1994, 1998).

This complexity was bluntly summed up by Dave, a college student in the study by McCarthy (1987). ‘[F]irst you’ve got to figure out what your teachers want. And then you’ve got to give it to them if you’re gonna get the grade,’ followed after a moment of reflection by ‘And that ain’t so easy’ (p.233).

2.3 Quantitative research: Linguistic analyses of academic writing

Previous investigations of the linguistic features of academic writing often differentiated between lexical and syntactic aspects of writing, facilitating the production of somewhat narrowly focussed small-scale studies of individual items or related groups of items. However as understanding has grown of the close relationship between lexis and grammatical structures and of the role of multiword expressions in promoting automaticity and fluency in language, there is a correspondingly greater interest in combined lexical and grammatical inquiry, which is favoured by large-scale computer-based studies. In the following section, large- and small-scale studies are separately addressed in 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 respectively.
2.3.1 Large-scale studies

Large-scale ‘inventorial’ (Bruce, 2010) or umbrella studies, designed to identify the range of essential linguistic features of academic writing, have been relatively rare in comparison with research on individual features of the register, because of time and the complexities attendant on dealing with large quantities of data. However, the opportunities offered by computer technology are gradually changing this situation. In particular, the problem of collinearity (Haswell, 2000), whereby individual items appear in varying frequencies across genres but also cluster according to genres, can now be resolved by computer-generated statistical procedures.

Multi-dimensional studies

Biber’s (1988) multi-feature, multi-dimensional analysis of variation between speech and writing across 23 genres was one of the first studies to adopt a computer-based approach on such a large scale. It analysed a corpus made up of spoken texts from the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English and written texts from the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen Corpus of British English. The resulting data provided information on how linguistic items clustered in groups to generate a certain ‘dimension’ characteristic of a particular genre, and provided evidence of the distinct varieties of spoken and written texts. Presenting each dimension on a continuum, Biber was able to show the extent to which not only genres but also sub-genres were represented by specific linguistic clusters or, in contrast, were distinguished by the absence of these clustered features.

Biber identified six dimensions of features which were either especially frequent or noticeably uncommon in particular genres and sub-genres (Table 1: The six dimensions of variation across genres). In Dimension 1, where the group of linguistic items is termed ‘Involved versus informational production’, academic prose sub-genres such as mathematics and natural science show a high information density through their use of certain co-occurring linguistic items, in contrast with the nature of telephone conversations, where the absence of those features promotes a style low in informational content. In Dimension 3, ‘Explicit versus situation-dependent reference’, the degree of explicitness realised by its linguistic clusters is very high in technology and engineering academic prose, in comparison with sports broadcasts, which rely instead on a shared understanding of the current situation for reference.
Addressing the data from another viewpoint, Biber also showed how genres or sub-genres could be defined by their scores over the six dimensions. Thus academic prose in general is typified by linguistic features which favour a high informational load (Dimension 1) and explicit reference (Dimension 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 1</td>
<td>Examples of high-scoring genres: face-to-face and telephone conversations</td>
<td>Characterised by: private verbs, that deletions, present tense, contractions, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of low-scoring genres: academic prose and official documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 2</td>
<td>Examples of high-scoring genres: all fiction genres</td>
<td>Characterised by: past tenses, third person pronouns, public verbs, present participial clauses, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of low-scoring genres: professional letters, academic prose</td>
<td>Characterised by: present tense, adjectives, low occurrence of past tenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 3</td>
<td>Examples of high-scoring genres: official documents, professional letters</td>
<td>Characterised by: WH relative clauses, pied-piping constructions, phrasal co-ordination, nominalisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of low-scoring genres: broadcasts</td>
<td>Characterised by: lack of the above; time and place adverbials; adverbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 4</td>
<td>Examples of high-scoring genres: professional letters, editorials</td>
<td>Characterised by: prediction, necessity and possibility modals; conditional clauses; suasive verbs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of low-scoring genres: broadcasts, press reviews</td>
<td>Characterised by: simple reportage or opinion but lack of persuasive features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 5</td>
<td>Examples of high-scoring genres: academic prose, official documents</td>
<td>Characterised by: conjuncts; passives; past participial clauses; WHIZ deletions, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of low-scoring genres: fiction genres, personal letters, conversation</td>
<td>Characterised by: low occurrence of the above; lack of technical language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 6</td>
<td>Examples of high-scoring genres: prepared speeches, interviews, spontaneous speeches</td>
<td>Characterised by: that complements to verbs and adjectives; that relatives as objects; demonstratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of low-scoring genres: fiction genres</td>
<td>Characterised by: lack of the above, because of limited planning time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The six dimensions of variation across genres (Biber, 1988)

There is a variable use, according to sub-genre, of the second dimension (narrative style), the fourth dimension (use of overt expression of persuasion), and the fifth dimension, (abstract technical information), while Dimension 6 (online informational elaboration), a high-scoring dimension in oral discourse, is understandably under-represented in nearly all academic genres.
So various characteristics of the genres and sub-genres under investigation could be identified according to their linguistic elements. At the same time, these findings reinforced the growing understanding that academic language is surprisingly differentiated, not only between its spoken and written forms, but also according to its various academic disciplines, and even the text types conventionally selected within any disciplinary community. Such variation within disciplines has had wide implications for teaching academic English, provoking debate over who should take the responsibility for the instruction of disciplinary discourse. This discussion is addressed in more detail later in this study.

Biber’s work on variation in language paved the way for a much larger inquiry, lasting over a period of several years, which produced the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (LGSWE) (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan, 1999). This very comprehensive study presents in unprecedented detail the grammatical findings emerging from a corpus of 40 million words gathered from four registers: conversation, fiction, news and academic prose. From this undertaking, 54 grammatical features particularly representative of academic prose were later isolated (Biber, 2006, pp.15-18). These are shown in Table 2 (Categories and sub-categories of the most common features of academic prose).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>SUB-CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns and noun phrases</td>
<td>Nouns overall; nouns vs. pronouns; absence of pronouns; specific pronouns this and generic one; plural nouns; nominalisations; anaphoric expressions; definite article the; demonstrative determiners; noun phrases with modifiers; noun phrases with pre-modifiers; nouns as pre-modifiers; noun phrases with post-modifiers; noun phrases with multiple post-modifiers; noun and/or noun binomial phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives and adjective phrases</td>
<td>Adjectives overall; attributive adjectives; specific predicative adjectives; derived adjectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs and verb phrases</td>
<td>Copular be and become; existence verbs; specific lexical verbs; specific prepositional verbs; verbs with inanimate subjects; derived verbs; tense and aspect; passive voice; specific passive verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs and adverbials</td>
<td>Specific adverbs; specific amplifiers; specific degree adverbs; linking adverbials; purpose and concessive adverbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent clause features</td>
<td>Relative clauses with the relative pronoun which; participle clauses as post-modifiers in noun phrases; noun complement clauses as post-modifiers in noun phrases; abstract noun + of + -ing clause; extraposd that clauses; extraposed to clauses; subject predicative to clauses; -ing clauses controlled by adjective predicates; concessive adverbial clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other features</td>
<td>Prepositions; of phrases; prepositional phrases as post-modifiers in noun phrases; stance noun + of phrases; preposition + which in relative clauses with adverbial gaps; selected coordination tags: and so on, etc.; quantifier each; semi-determiners same, other, certain and such; dual gender reference he or she etc; lexical bundles with noun phrases and/or prepositional phrases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Categories and sub-categories of the most common features of academic prose (Biber, 2006)
As a footnote to the multi-dimensional approach, Grabe and Biber (cited in Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p.47) found that college ‘freshman’ compositions failed to conform to the dimensions determined for any sub-genres of academic writing, suggesting that composition writing as studied by U.S. novice tertiary students has limited relevance to the writing they will encounter in their academic course.

A somewhat similar multi-dimensional inquiry was carried out in Haswell’s (2000) study, where the measures were applied to student writing. The longitudinal study first determined a set of nine factors (somewhat in the manner of Biber’s dimensions), each encapsulating common aspects of proficient academic writing of graduates already established in professional employment. These included sentence length; clause length; elaboration of ideas; expansion of information; reliance on local cohesion; establishment of local boundaries; expansion of ideas; fluency; and vocabulary facility. As a result, these measures might then be expected to include elements of both academic and professional workplace writing. Together with their relevant linguistic features, they were then applied to the assignments of a group of 64 students at two points, in their first year of study and again in their second, with the aim of measuring improvement in their progress towards a competent academic level of writing over the intervening 12 months. The discussion of the results points out that, while the group as a whole recorded improvement on eight of the nine measures, individual students’ improvement varied between considerable progress and very little; indeed, 15 of the cohort received a lower rating for the second piece of work than for the earlier one. However Haswell’s study is a much narrower one in terms of variables, placing the main emphasis on syntactic structuring and more readily quantifiable aspects such as total words and clause length.

Other large-scale studies

Another comparative study of student writing, adopting a Contrastive Rhetoric methodology, was carried out by Hinkel (2002), to identify the lexical, syntactic, clausal and discoursal characteristics of NS (native speakers of English) and NNS (non-native speakers of English) student writing. In her study, Hinkel took the essays of 1457 first-year college students, comprising seven roughly equal groups of NS, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Arabic L1 backgrounds, and compared their linguistic and rhetorical features, based on the 68 items which her survey of the literature on grammar and lexis established as being ‘prevalent and expected in Anglo-American academic texts’ (Hinkel, p.65). This study varied from Biber’s in certain aspects but, like his, it placed an emphasis on the identification of a wide range of individual linguistic features, and sought to show which of these items were most
often apparent in the work of the norm group, the NS writers. In fact, virtually all the items examined by Biber (1988) appeared in Hinkel’s study, including the analysis of clausal and lexico-grammatical features. The main results are set out in Table 3 (Features of NS and NNS student writing, Hinkel, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. MOST COMMON FEATURES OF NS WRITING</th>
<th>B. FEATURES SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER IN NNS WRITING</th>
<th>C. FEATURES SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER IN NNS WRITING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present tense</td>
<td>Interpretive and vague nouns</td>
<td><em>it</em>-clefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitives</td>
<td>Assertive pronouns</td>
<td>Perfect aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person pronouns</td>
<td>Public and private verbs</td>
<td>Progressive aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive adjectives</td>
<td>Expecting/tentative verbs</td>
<td>Predictive modal would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed strings</td>
<td>Modal verbs of necessity</td>
<td>Passive voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase-level coordinators</td>
<td>Be as a main verb</td>
<td>Present participles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Be</em> as a main verb</td>
<td>Predicative adjectives</td>
<td>Past participles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private verbs</td>
<td>Amplifiers and other adverbs (manner, conjunct and adjective/verb modifiers)</td>
<td>Reduced adjective clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-person pronouns</td>
<td>Phrase- and sentence-level conjunctions</td>
<td>Reduced adverb clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominalisations</td>
<td>Exemplification markers and emphatics</td>
<td>Fixed strings (idiomatic phrases and collocations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Features of NS and NNS student writing (Hinkel, 2002)

Because the prompts supplied were typical of first-year composition classes, however, the results reflected the more personal tone of the topics, which were based on the writers’ own opinions and experience, rather than disciplinary content. Moreover, since the aim of the Hinkel study was to identify curriculum areas which teachers might address in their teaching of L2 students, there is no extensive discussion of the most common NS features per se. An examination of the findings shown in Table 3 (Features of NS and NNS student writing) suggests that the NS writers (Column C) were prepared to use the rather more complex syntactic and grammatical forms while NNS writers (Column B) favoured extensive use of lexical choices (though not the lexico-grammatical forms). The only features where the two groups appear to have overlapped was in their common use of *to be* and private verbs.

Hinkel herself examined at some length the extent to which each individual cultural group varied from the NS writers. The results show, in Hinkel’s view, a number of important linguistic features, principally lexical and lexico-grammatical, that should be specifically taught in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. There is, she observes, ‘a high degree of need for teaching idiomatic vocabulary use’ (p.247),
together with strategies for text cohesion and the syntactic and lexical features that are typical of formal academic writing. She also notes that phrase-level structures are particularly important in contributing to the quality of written academic prose, and as such structures are generally lacking in NNS writing, this point becomes a significant criterion in distinguishing L1 from L2 writing (p.75).

As part of a wide-ranging Australian project to frame tertiary student literacy, an interdisciplinary study by Kaldor, Herriman and Rochecouste (1998) of 174 essays from first- to fourth-year students in Accounting, Anthropology, Engineering and Zoology was carried out using an SFL approach. This examined macrostructure, content, rhetorical mapping and vocabulary. The measures of rhetorical mapping included intersentential signalling, linking and sequencing, together with cohesion and information packaging, while the vocabulary section studied genre- and discipline- appropriate lexis. Although there was a lack of signalling of macrostructure, with limited use of headings and paragraphing, the student writers tended to over-use or under-use certain intersentential signals. They also made frequent inappropriate lexical choices for reference, conjunction, and other forms of cohesion. This indicates that signalling was mainly a surface-level skill, applied only within paragraphs, and that students had little real understanding of coherence.

The Stanford Study of Writing (ssw.stanford.edu/), a five-year longitudinal study, collected the work of 189 students throughout their programmes, with the aim of gaining an overview of student writing and development for incorporation in writing curricula. Studies based on this corpus are now beginning to emerge. Rogers’ (2008) PhD thesis on student writing development suggests that critical factors in writing development are awareness of audience and discussion with and feedback from teachers and peers but also notes a non-linear pattern of development.

Given the opportunities afforded by the Biber analysis to examine the range of established academic features in the writing of students from a mix of language backgrounds, it is surprising that to date no studies appear to have done so, particularly in view of the developmental aspects which could profitably be investigated. In contrast, the number of studies examining second-language academic English writing is extremely extensive, and while attention is now being directed towards first language students’ writing, this generally takes place within the broader framework of academic literacy. In view of the plethora of technological tools available, there appears to be considerable scope for a wider approach to the writing of students from mixed language backgrounds.
2.3.2 Studies of groups or individual linguistic features

Investigations of writing have also built up a considerable body of research into individual linguistic items used in the academic register, and again one may identify an emphasis on the work of L2 writers. Such studies have been facilitated by easily accessed computational programmes and the ability to establish small-scale corpora, giving teacher-researchers the opportunity to investigate the writing of their own students. While inquiries of this kind, covering a range of linguistic features, continue to proliferate and far outnumber large-scale multifeature investigations (for lists of studies, see Biber, 2006; Kennedy, 1998; McEnery and Gabrielatos, 2006), their diversity makes it difficult to provide a coherent synthesis which relates specifically to academic writing.

NNS writers’ use of linguistic features

Many linguistic studies relate exclusively to NNS writers. To illustrate the scope of NNS research, one may cite studies into modality, e.g. certainty (Hyland and Milton, 1997) and would-clauses (Frazier, 2003); hedging (Hyland, 1994; Salager-Meyer, 1994); reporting and directives (Hyland, 2001); the use of the personal pronoun we (Luzón, 2009); engagement resources (Siew Mei, 2007); and linking adverbials (Shaw, 2009).

Comparative studies of student writers can also be found. Differences between mature and less experienced writers of rated TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) essays were analysed by Grant and Ginther (2000), across several linguistic categories. They found that essay length, lexical specificity and lexical features increased with proficiency (based on the TOEFL rating), as did grammatical structures such as nominalisations, the occurrence of adjectives, adverbs and prepositions, and the use of clausal subordination and the passive voice. All this suggests that the more mature writers had a wider range of linguistic resources and used them to bring precision, clarity and an academic tone to their texts.

Hinkel produced a series of in-depth studies, based on her previous large-scale examination (2002) of various aspects of NNS language. These more focussed studies noted use of adverbial markers and tone (2003a); use of very simple syntactic and lexico-grammatical constructions (2003b); and hedging, inflating and persuading (2005). A further fertile source of data has been the ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English) assembled by Granger and her colleagues (Granger, Dagneaux, Meunier and Paquot, 2002, 2009), which has generated a number of studies comparing the language practices of NS and NNS writers (see, for example, Bolton, Nelson and Hung, 2003; Lorenz, 1998). However, a more detailed
coverage of the large body of work on NNS writing will not be attempted here, since the current investigation addresses principally student writing across all linguistic backgrounds.

NS writers’ use of linguistic features

An interest in the writing of children in their early years of schooling was a logical outcome for researchers of the Sydney School of Linguistics, given their affiliation with Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and its principles of child language development (Halliday, 1975, 1989). Halliday explained his approach to grammar, not as a set of fixed principles, but in terms of a range of choices made from systems which construed meaning through function, and he saw children’s speech developing on this basis. Systemic-functional linguists, such as Martin and Rose (2008), Christie (2002), Coffin (1997) and others have had a considerable influence on English language teaching in Australian school curricula and internationally (Schleppegrell, 2001; Schleppegrell and Colombi, 2002; O’Dowd, 2010). In a 2002 study, Christie described the changes in handling grammar involved in the transition to secondary school, where the foundation for advanced literacy is established and developed. In practice this means the creation of ‘the capacity … to handle the building of generalisation, abstraction, argument and reflection on experience that advanced literacy seems to require’ (pp.45-46). Features embodying this capacity are set out in Table 4 (Measures of developing success in writing, Christie, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASURES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control of reference, especially properties for creating endophoric reference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and control of Theme choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased facility to handle abstraction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing ability to build identifying and attributing statements through the verb to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility in creating nominal groups, including complex nominal structures and clause embedding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The provision of circumstance information through prepositional phrases and manner and modal adverbs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Measures of developing success in writing (Christie, 2002)

In their studies of academic language needs at secondary level in the U.S. (United States) context, Schleppegrell (2001, 2004, 2008), and Schleppegrell and Colombi (2002) also adopted an SFL viewpoint, paralleling the work done by Christie and others in Australia. Schleppegrell argued that the essentials of
academic writing, including features such as an authoritative stance, the presentation of information and a high degree of structuring, can only be achieved by attention to lexical and syntactic choices on the part of the writer, and that such awareness must be actively taught in schools. Her 2001 study identified the characteristics of the academic register encountered in and required for schoolwork. (See Table 5, *Register features of school-based texts*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES AND STRATEGIES</th>
<th>REALISED THROUGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical choices</td>
<td>Specific, technical vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical density</td>
<td>Dense, elaboration of noun phrases through modifiers, relative clauses, and prepositional phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>Lexical (rather than pronominal) subjects, nominalisations and expanded noun phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segmentation</td>
<td>Sentence structure; structure indicated syntactically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>Mainly declarative; attitude conveyed lexically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clause linkage and conjunction strategies</td>
<td>Clause-combining strategies of embedding, use of verbs, prepositions and nouns to make logical links, conjunctions have core (narrow) meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational strategies</td>
<td>Hierarchical structure, using nominalisation, logical links indicated through nominal, verbal and adverbial expressions, and thematic elements that structure discourse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5: Register features of school-based texts (Schleppegrell, 2001)*

Both the Christie and Schleppegrell studies emphasise the need for a greater student awareness of the metalanguage of sentence structuring, and the ability to employ, not just the advanced vocabulary but also the syntactic features of academic language. This can only be achieved through incorporating the teaching of academic language into the curriculum.

Another approach to the study of linguistic norms is variation across disciplinary discourses (Biber, 1988, 2006; Braine, 1989, 1995; Hyland, 1999b, 2000; Nesi, Sharpling, and Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004; Poos and Simpson, 2002; Samraj, 2000, 2004). Such studies have shown that specific academic disciplines often vary considerably in their genre preferences. While much of this research has dealt with doctoral writing, such disciplinary variations need to be identified early in students' writing experiences. Tertiary students may therefore need to be made aware early of different sets of linguistic features according to the various disciplinary conventions within their programme of study.
Linguistic features in timed and untimed writing

With the establishment of the process approach in writing instruction, calls were made from the 1980s onwards for a similar approach to be incorporated in writing assessment, based on the premise that timed writing did not permit students to display their full range of ability because of the lack of adequate time for planning, drafting and revising their work (Huot, 1996; Kroll, 1990; Raimes, 1982; Zamel, 1983). However, studies on this aspect of composing have been limited in number and diverse in their methodological approach and research design, and have produced somewhat inconclusive results (Elder, Knoch and Zhang, 2009). A Michigan study of primary and high school writers found that an increase in time produced a more marked impact on the scores in older writers at Grade 10 level than on younger writers (Hamp-Lyons and Reed, 1990, cited in Hamp-Lyons and Kroll, 1997, p.26). In the case of L2 writers timing has been shown to have an effect on students’ performance (Cho, 2003; Del Principe and Graziano-King, 2008) but not necessarily in all areas e.g. grammatical accuracy but not lexical features (Kenworthy, 2006); prewriting but not revision (Worden, 2009); content, language and mechanics but not organisation and vocabulary (Shin, 2003), while Caudery (1990) found no significant difference in scores overall. In addition, the wide body of research on plagiarism in student assignments raises the issue of whether undetected plagiarism may have some effect on evaluations of untimed writing.

Measures of complexity and cohesion

An area which has generated investigation in recent years is measures of complexity and cohesion, again with a strong bias towards L2 pedagogy.

Following on from findings by Faigley (1980) and Witte and Faigley (1981), measures of complexity have been employed in studies of writing proficiency and skills improvement, often in conjunction with other factors including fluency and accuracy. For example, syntactic complexity as a measure of proficiency was studied by Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki and Kim (1998), who examined both lexical and grammatical properties. Their findings established the importance of clause depth as a measure of proficiency. Ortega’s (2003) study showed that the ESL settings appeared to produce higher proficiency levels than FL (Foreign Language) contexts, and that changes in syntactic complexity were unlikely to become established without at least a year of tertiary-level writing instruction. Observation of the progress of five Chinese learners by Larsen-Freeman (2006) included both oral and written complexity, and revealed a ‘waxing and waning’ of patterns of complexity over the period of the study (p.590). McNamara, Crossley and McCarthy (2010) used sentence structure overlap and the number of words before the
main verb as measures of syntactic complexity, but found that only the first of these (equating to the Theme in Hallidayan terms) was an effective predictor of complexity.

On the other hand, Biber and colleagues (Biber, 1988; Biber and Gray, 2010; Biber et al., 1999), argued against the notion, implicit in the previous studies, that complexity is a distinguishing feature of written rather than oral texts and asserted that both were complex in their own ways. Elaboration by subordinate clause is a feature of oral discourse while written texts elaborate principally by means of compressed, highly modified phrases, so that clausal complexity through subordination is not unique to academic texts.

The creation of cohesion is of especial interest in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) instruction because of the opportunities afforded by computer analysis to compare practices across a wide range of cultures. Reid (1992) examined the diversity in rhetorical patterns of four referential and conjunctive devices among the Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and English writers, and established variation in practice amongst the four cultural groups and also according to topic. Similar comparative studies on the use of cohesive devices were carried out by Hinkel (2001) and Bolton, Nelson and Hung (2003), demonstrating the limited extent of this lexical resource in both L1 and L2 writing. However, the emphasis on cohesive forms may result in their over-use, and studies by Chiang (2003), Lee (2002) and Mahlberg (2006) stressed the need for care when teaching these items to novice L2 writers.

**Lexical bundles**

The concept of strings of language which are learnt and retrieved from the memory as units has been described in a variety of ways, e.g. formulaic sequences (Wray, 2002), lexical bundles (Biber et al., 1999; Cortes, 2002), phraseology (Cowie, 1998). But all are based on the notion that this ‘recurrence of co-occurring items’ (Hunston, 2008) plays a critical part in the acquisition of language fluency, whether the first language or a subsequent one. The concept has been subject to close investigation over the past fifty or sixty years, initially by Firth (see Chapman and Routledge, 2005, p.81), then Sinclair (1966), and Pawley and Syder (1983). Later research by Carter and McCarthy (1988), Cowie (1998), and others has shown that these multi-word expressions (MWEs) are essential in mastering linguistic genres such as academic discourse.

Biber et al. (1999, p.990) define lexical bundles as frequently recurring ‘sequences of word forms that commonly go together in natural discourse’. Corpus analyses arising out of the production of the
**Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English** illustrated how lexical bundles could distinguish academic prose from other genres e.g. conversation, news reports and fiction (Biber, 1988; Biber and Barbieri, 2007; Biber *et al*., 1999; Biber, Conrad and Cortes, 2004), and such fixed strings also appear to be a particularly strong differentiating feature among disciplines (Charles, 2006; Cortes, 2002; Hyland, 2006, 2008a). Comparison between NS and NNS use of these forms has demonstrated how the practice of second-language writers may differ appreciably from NS norms (Ädel and Erman, 2012; Granger and Paquot, 2009).

**Longitudinal studies of writing development**

Several longitudinal studies of NNS students’ writing development have been based on linguistic measures: Shaw and Liu (1995), Storch (2009), Storch and Hill (2008) and Woodward-Kron (2002, 2008, 2009). The measures used varied to some extent, as did the periods under investigation, but the overall results appear to support the importance of time as a factor in the accurate acquisition of more complex linguistic features.

Shaw and Liu (1995) carried out a study of the development of L2 writers’ use of register feature, based on Biber’s 1988 multi-dimensional findings, by looking at the work of 164 pre-sessional EAP programme participants at the beginning and end of their 3-month course. The expectation of a reduction in typical oral features towards a more academic style (i.e. increased use of impersonality, formality, explicitness and hedging, together with more complex syntax and rich modification) was realised, with the findings also noting a trend towards more formulaic phrases. The lack of change in accuracy figures was attributed not to lack of improvement but to changes resultant on the acquisition of new structures, which brought new types of error. The study concludes that, contrary to other studies (e.g. Ortega, 2003), even a short course might generate improvement in lexical performance through the appropriate application of ‘differentiated functional language’ (p.247) over a range of written discourse types. The implication here appears to be that syntactic forms may take longer to acquire. An unusual feature of Shaw and Liu’s research design was the inclusion of a microscopic analysis which examined in some depth those factors which appeared to account for the gross changes in style. In this way, they were able to look more closely at variation within the broad categories of oral and formal written English.

The study by Storch and Hill (2008) also involved a semester-long pre- and post-test investigation, applying both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative aspect compared scores on the DELA assessment of 39 newly-enrolled undergraduate and graduate students. In addition to DELA writing test
scores, measures of fluency, complexity and accuracy were compared and showed that while the average scores overall of the writing module improved, this was more marked at the lower IELTS Level 5 than at the higher IELTS Level 6. However, there was no significant improvement in measures of fluency, complexity and accuracy, the latter underlined by the minimal gain in form (vocabulary and grammar) in the pre- and post-test scores for writing. This appears to underline the difficulty of acquiring complex lexico-grammatical forms over the short-term.

A related study by Storch (2009) isolated the 25 students in the Storch and Hill study who had not taken up any form of language support, and the findings suggest that improvements in writing skills over the semester were mainly in content and structuring with little gain in error-free writing, or in complexity. However, individual aspects of improvement could not be identified because there was no fine differentiation within the overarching areas of fluency, content and form in Storch’s survey, which may account for the apparent contradiction with the Shaw and Liu findings.

The lack of improvement in more than surface features of grammatical and syntactic forms in these relatively short longitudinal studies appears to bear out Ortega’s hypothesis that at least a year may be needed to produce changes in grammatical accuracy and complexity. This longer period may account for the improvements noted by Woodward-Kron (2002, 2008, 2009) in her three studies of disciplinary knowledge analysed through an SFL lens. Woodward-Kron’s 2008 and 2009 longitudinal investigations over three years of study analysed NS Education undergraduates’ use, firstly, of technical and abstract vocabulary and, secondly, of lexico-grammatical resources. The first study found that the students’ capacity to acquire and use discipline-specific vocabulary and to engage with the conventions of their professional community progressed steadily throughout their course. Students’ linguistic capacity to reason and explain, report knowledge claims, and engage with disciplinary knowledge was the topic of the final study (2009), which compared high and low-scoring student texts. Woodward-Kron noted that the participants appeared to grow in their awareness and production of the relevant lexico-grammatical items to express these purposes competently by their final year, and that there was no marked distinction between the high and low scorers in their ability to expand their linguistic resources over this extended period of time.

**Taxonomies of competencies, skills and task requirements**

Many discussions, however, of what makes ‘good’ academic writing have tended to set aside specific linguistic features in order to address rather more abstract and generalised qualities, expressed in terms
of competencies. This is especially the case where national or state curriculum bodies are attempting to describe those aspects of writing expected at various levels of schooling, or rating criteria are being defined for the purposes of assessment, especially in the case of high-stakes assessments, such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). However the need for quantifying results in the latter case may rule out consideration of certain qualities, such as insight and originality of thought, which are less easily identified and evaluated in a standardised manner.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>LEVEL 8 ENGLISH CURRICULUM ACHIEVEMENT OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SPEAKING, WRITING &amp; PRESENTING</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Processes and strategies</td>
<td>(The student) uses an increasing understanding of the connections between oral, written and visual language when creating texts creates a range of increasingly coherent, varied and complex texts by integrating sources of information and processing strategies seeks feedback and makes changes to texts to improve clarity, meaning and effect is reflective about the production of own texts: monitors and self-evaluates progress, articulating learning with confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Students will:</em> integrate sources of information, processes and strategies purposefully, confidently and precisely to identify, form and express increasingly sophisticated ideas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Purposes and audiences</td>
<td>(The student) constructs a range of texts that demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of purpose and audience through deliberate choice of content, language and text form conveys and sustains personal voice where appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Students will:</em> show a discriminating understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>(The student) develops, communicates and sustains sophisticated ideas, information and understandings creates coherent planned whole texts by adding details to ideas or making links to other ideas and details ideas show perception, depth of thought and awareness of a range of dimensions or viewpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Students will:</em> select, develop and communicate sustained and insightful ideas on a range of topics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Language features</td>
<td>(The student) uses a wide range of oral, written and visual language features coherently, fluently and with control to create meaning and command attention uses an increasing vocabulary to communicate precise meaning uses a wide range of text conventions, including grammatical and spelling conventions, appropriately, effectively and with accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Students will:</em> select, integrate and sustain the use of a range of language features appropriately for a variety of effects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>(The student) organises and develops ideas and information for a particular purpose or effect, using the characteristics and conventions of a range of text forms with control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Students will:</em> organise texts using a range of appropriate, coherent and effective structures</td>
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Table 6: NZ national curriculum objectives for senior secondary classes for speaking, writing and presenting
Curriculum bodies set out taxonomies of desirable writing goals in fairly broad terms, as competencies. In New Zealand, for example, the Ministry of Education sets out the broad objectives for writing competencies in English Level 8 of the National Curriculum, the top level of the senior secondary school curriculum, as shown in Table 6 (NZ national curriculum objectives for senior secondary classes). Thus entry-level tertiary students schooled in New Zealand may be expected to have acquired these competencies and should display them in their academic study at university.

The national curriculum standards for writing at secondary exit level in Australian schools are still in the process of being developed and at present state-based provisions apply, expressed as general competencies over all language skills like the NZ standards. Language expectations for students entering public tertiary institutions in California (ICAS, 2002), also apply to all students, irrespective of language background.

The CEFR descriptor scales for all foreign language learning (Council of Europe, 2001) are prepared for the teaching of languages within a first-language (EFL) instructional setting. Criteria for writing international high-stakes examinations, such as TOEFL and IELTS, provide a further basis for comparison of expected competencies for second-language writers and, for this reason, may differ from criteria expected for first-language writers. In particular, there is a high value placed on accuracy for the L2 texts, a quality which is less emphasised in first-language writing assessment but tends to be taken for granted. The criteria are discussed in two forms, as descriptors for potential candidates and teachers of preparation courses, and as research reports for validation purposes.

However, research reports for validation purposes are publicly available. For example, studies of the vocabulary used by candidates in the IELTS speaking tests found that, overall, higher-scoring candidates used a wider lexical resource with a greater number of less common items (Read and Nation, 2006); while in TOEFL research the authenticity of writing tasks was validated through a specially created academic language corpus (T2K-SWAL), (Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd, Helt, Clark, Cortes, Csomay and Urzua, 2004). In another IELTS study, the features used by candidates in the writing module were analysed, in order to develop an ESOL common scale for writing assessment over all the Cambridge ESOL examinations (Hawkey and Barker, 2004).

The determination of necessary competencies may also be addressed by investigating the writing tasks that students are asked to undertake during their study as part of the assessment process. Following on
from earlier investigations (Bridgeman and Carlson, 1984; Canseco and Byrd, 1989; Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1981; Kroll, 1979), Sternglass (1993) carried out a longitudinal study using Larson’s set of categories of academic writing tasks (1991, cited in Sternglass, p.244). The first five of the nine categories were on the whole, ‘knowledge-telling’ tasks (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1987). However the remaining four tasks may be defined as knowledge transformation, that is, cognitive tasks involving analysis, synthesis and the creation of new knowledge.

Similarly, Casanave and Hubbard’s (1992) survey, which contrasted writing requirements in the Humanities and Social Sciences with those in Science and Technology, demonstrated that the knowledge-transforming tasks of problem solving and analysing were of critical importance in the Sciences, forming nearly 60% of all writing outside of exam answers. The requirements in the Humanities and Social Sciences, on the other hand, were much more equally divided amongst the various tasks.

Currie’s (1993) report of conceptual activities required in a Business Studies course approached the categories from a slightly different perspective, analysing how students may be expected to interpret an event or condition in the light of a specific theoretical concept (in this case, organisational behaviour). Currie classified the activities in the following way:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Finding and recording information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using a concept to find and report observational details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a concept to analyse data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classifying according to a concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing/contrasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining causal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolving an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speculating</td>
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*Table 7: Classification of activities for Business assignments (Currie, 1993)*
The more complex abstract activities require students to ‘operat[e] at significantly greater levels of remove from their data’ (p.107) or, in Cummin’s terms, within the higher degree of decontextualisation which characterises cognitive academic discourse.

A number of studies have examined the more general aspect of communication in Business courses, often including writing requirements, (Campbell, Brammer and Ervin, 1999; Cox, Brobowski and Mayer, 2003; Forman and Rymer, 1999; Knight, 1999; Plutzsky, 1996; Seshadri and Theye, 2000). In a more specifically writing-oriented investigation, the results of Zhu’s (2004b) survey of Business course tasks echoed Casanave and Hubbard’s (1992) earlier findings relating to Science and Technology in showing an emphasis on problem-solving. Apart from reporting a marked increase in writing assignments between undergraduate and graduate levels, the survey also underlined the importance of case analyses and book reports, which occurred frequently at both levels. The task types included case analyses; article/book reports; business reports; business proposals; design projects; library research; reflection papers; letters and memos; and research proposals/papers. This list provides some idea of the range and differing demands of the writing which students are expected to carry out, and serve to emphasise the kind of differences between disciplinary discourses referred to earlier, as well as consideration of workplace language needs.

Studies in a New Zealand context, with the aim of presenting authentic tasks to writing class students, particularly L2 students, were undertaken by Beckman (2005), Turner (2005), Wette and Lessels (2010) and White (2010). Turner’s examination of the cognitive and rhetorical demands of three undergraduate papers in three different subjects not only provided evidence of an overall disciplinary variation in the tasks and skills required but also found that the most frequently occurring cognitive skills required were of the less demanding knowledge-telling type, followed by knowledge-transforming tasks in the form of analysis and evaluation of material.

Wette and Lessels (2010) examined the relevance of writing tasks in a 20-week academic preparation course in comparison with what the students from the course found in the written assessments for their Business or Economics tertiary programme. In these findings, no major differences were established between the task instruction verbs or the text types in each case. However, because the preparation course was a general one, the application in Business and Economics papers of discipline-specific theory to case study situations constituted one major difference from the preparation course, as did a substantial increase in essay length and the need to transform and apply theoretical to real-life material.
Both this and the Turner study of preparation courses established that writing a literature review was the task closest to students’ later university writing experience.

The Beckman (2005) inquiry covered both reading and writing demands for first-year students. The findings of the section on writing task instructions drew attention to their often highly implicit and obscured nature, posing particular difficulties for NESB (Non English Speaking Background) students, and a discrepancy between the IELTS type of argument essay topic which formed the university entry requirement for such students, and the type of essay they encountered in their study.

White’s (2010) study examined text types required in essays in undergraduate writing assignments. His findings showed that evaluation, description and summarisation were the most frequently occurring task types. Although the essay was required in the Arts, Commerce and Music disciplines, and particularly in Media Studies, Education and Sociology, overall it accounted for little more than one-third of all assignments.

An interesting aspect of all these findings is the mix of knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming tasks, which suggests that, while the display of knowledge may be a common task in the early stages of study, the skills of analysing, evaluating and applying theoretical concepts soon become essential elements in students’ writing assessments. Moreover the degree of disciplinary variation established raises two issues in the design of generic writing courses: firstly, whether these skills are in fact transferable and, in the second place, if they are transferable, whether students can be effectively trained, as part of their general course, to identify and apply them in their disciplinary area.

In addition to the above studies, three lists have become available for students to assist them in their academic writing. The best-known of these is the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) which presents the most frequent words used in academic contexts over a range of disciplines. More recently, this has been followed by the Academic Formulas List (Simpson-Vlach and Ellis, 2010), which provides a corpus-based listing of the most frequent formulaic sequences used in academic discourse, both spoken and written. Finally, Paquot (2011) has developed a list of words, uncommon outside academic contexts, which might be used to ‘refer to those activities that characterize academic work, organize scientific discourse and build the rhetoric of academic texts’ (p.1).
2.3.3 Summary

In summary, where studies have looked at linguistic aspects of academic writing, both lexical items and syntactic structures have been shown to play an strong role in establishing an academic style, and particular parts of speech play varying roles in this process. Of especial significance appear to be nominalisation, in the form of grammatical metaphor, or the prepositional or clausal extension of nominal phrases through post-modification; cohesion through lexical choices; precision through discipline-specific vocabulary; and embedded clausal structures. Lexico-grammatical expressions, defined as ‘multi-word expressions, which function as semantic or structural units’ (Biber et al., 1999, p.988), are also seen as an essential component of academic style.

Although academic writing pedagogy tends to place a major emphasis on the organisation of ideas within an appropriate structure for the text type and to pay less attention to lexico-grammatical features of the register, the studies discussed above suggest that it is not only desirable but essential that the linguistic features of academic writing (and their grammatical metalanguage) are actively taught in schools and in pre-entry or first-year tertiary writing programmes because of their significant role in developing an academic style. These questions are addressed in more detail in the Discussion chapter.

When the studies discussed so far are set within a wider context of research on students’ academic writing, two points may be made. The first is an apparent concentration on research into individual features of academic writing, rather than the combination of features which are characteristic of the dimension. Thus the great majority of studies do not provide an overall picture of students’ progress, but simply show a certain aspect of their development. A second point is the continuing focus on second-language students. While the need for well-researched material on which to base L2 teaching programmes is acknowledged, this need seems to be very intensively addressed in research. Conversely, there is a lack of linguistic studies of the proficient users of English, whatever their language background, who make up the majority of student writers in our English-medium universities, and further research is needed to increase this very limited knowledge resource.
Qualitative research: Students’ academic writing

Student experiences and perceptions

Case studies of L1, L2 and Generation 1.5 writers

The search for material that broadly corresponded to the aims and likely participants of the current study produced a surprisingly small number of case studies of undergraduate writers and their writing experiences. The smaller number of studies, on the other hand, allowed for a slightly fuller consideration of the content. This review groups the studies by students’ language status: L1, L2 or Generation 1.5, although this categorisation raises some issues of validity, in view of the diverse external and internal factors governing novice writers’ acculturation experiences and acquisition of academic literacy (Plum, 1998, pp.222-224). With this reservation in mind, the following broadly accepted similarities and distinctions in academic literacies among them (Crosby, 2007, pp.40-41) provide a useful generalised picture of the three groups.

A Generation 1.5 student’s development in the first language has been interrupted by migration to another country with a different language, and the L2 (English, in most cases) is acquired principally through oral means, despite several years of host country schooling. As a result, the Generation 1.5 student tends to have limited academic language and metalanguage for discussing English, although he or she may have excellent oral skills and some understanding of the local educational and social culture.

ESL or L2 students are both advantaged and disadvantaged in contrast to Generation 1.5. While L2 learners’ development in their own language has been continuous and they are likely to possess the metalanguage for discussing English, together with a good grasp of formal (including academic) English, they may well have problems with writing fluently and accurately in English and a limited understanding of the educational and social culture of the host country (Ballard and Clanchy, 1984, 1997; Berno and Ward, 2003; Connor, 1996).

Classifications and descriptions of this kind are useful but they should be used with some caution, especially the assumption that, in contrast, entry into academic life is therefore straightforward for the native English speaker. Research makes it clear that, even for this group, acculturation into university is not easy, raising linguistic as well as social, cultural and academic issues, especially for minority students, mature adult students, first generation university students and the children of migrant
families (Candlin and Plum, 1998; Casanave, 2002; Ivanic, 1994, 1998; Lea and Street, 1999, 2000; Lillis, 1997, 2003). Moreover, since these sub-groups are not mutually exclusive, difficulties may proliferate.

Case studies of all these groups are reviewed in the following sections. More recent studies, especially of L1 writers, tend to take an academic literacies approach, so that writing is only one element within the literacies context, while L2 and Generation 1.5 studies are more likely to focus on the development of academic writing alone.

Case studies of L1 students

Dave (McCarthy, 1987)

McCarthy’s account of Dave and his writing experiences in an American college setting is an early example, and indeed for some years an isolated one, of interest in L1 writers. Over a period of three years, McCarthy followed Dave through classes in Freshman Composition, Cell Biology and Poetry, and found that he was very aware of differences amongst the writing conventions for his three classes. However, Dave was very context-dependent, focusing on the writing conventions and marker expectations for each individual subject and so could not transfer writing skills and knowledge from one to another. McCarthy’s account suggests that, while acquiring some grasp of the differing expectations for disciplinary writing is a necessary prerequisite to successful progress, finding commonalities across different contexts is also important if one is to benefit from previous writing experiences. Dave’s failure to understand this prevented him, in McCarthy’s view, from maturing as a writer.

Anna and Nick (Chiseri-Strater, 1991)

The importance of classroom practices was a valuable factor in contributing to the growing understanding of academic writing in the case study of the two American college undergraduates, Anna and Nick, described by Chiseri-Strater (1991). Where the context was sympathetic towards allowing personal identity to merge with the academic, each of the participants appeared to thrive. However, where the classroom setting did not encourage engagement with the discourse and content, they retreated into behaviours which identified them as indifferent or resistant students with little commitment to their learning. As a result, neither Anna nor Nick progressed in their understanding of academic literacy or the creation of a voice acceptable to both the discipline and themselves in the latter classes. The inference to be drawn from Chiseri-Strater’s study is that the apparent irrelevance of discourse conventions to one’s views of learning will alienate students, rather than engage them in their
subject or advance their academic literacy. Confidence in one’s ability to understand and write about a discipline develops through successful negotiation between the student and classroom teacher; otherwise the development of their academic identity can be compromised and progress delayed.

Rachel (Ivanic, 1998)
The case of Rachel, one of several mature students in Ivanic’s (1998) U.K.-based studies of identity in writing, is interesting in that Rachel’s identity as a student was established in her mind long before she came to university. Forced by family circumstances to leave school at 16, she waited until, at the age of 25, she enrolled in a programme in the Social Sciences at university. Despite this commitment, she did not intend to pursue social work as a career and this set up an unforeseen conflict between her identities of university student and prospective social worker, leading to ‘a love-hate relationship with the academic community’ (p.157). Ivanic illustrates this switching of identities in her analysis of an assignment, highlighting the game-playing strategy Rachel used as she alternated between sincerity and deception in her writing. This role-playing nonetheless brought stress to her studies and her view of herself, threatening not only her academic progress but also her enjoyment and satisfaction in finally reaching her goal of university study.

A ‘liminality’ approach (Gourlay, 2009)
Gourlay (2009) used a liminality or ‘thresholds’ approach (Meyer and Land, 2005, cited in Gourlay, p.184) to interpret her findings in the case studies of nine students and their academic literacies experiences over a period of three years, also in a U.K. setting. Using journals with drawings to provide a metaphorical view of themselves in the academic setting, students initially expressed a state of ‘ambiguity and destabilization’ (p.185), typical of the early stages of transition into tertiary study. As they progressed, they noted ‘breakthrough’ points occurring, usually as a result of good marks which served to validate them as legitimate students and increase their confidence in their student status. Other significant factors in the transition were social factors such as friendship and a sense of belonging. While the value of the threshold metaphor is limited as a framework for viewing transition into university life, the identification of the ‘breakthrough’ point is nonetheless useful in expressing the prolonged struggles over the obscure nature of academic practices, emotional and social adjustment and personal and academic identities which may precede understanding of literacy practices in the community.
Linda (Sternglass, 1993)
A ‘writing to learn’ perspective informed Sternglass’ account of Linda, a Black American nursing student, as she moved through her degree programme. Sternglass identified a number of emerging qualities in Linda’s writing as she proceeded: a more mature style of writing, an increasing ability to analyse and synthesise, and the development of critical awareness marking her growing confidence as a writer. Like others in the literature, however, Linda’s success was affected by the degree of interest she found in her writing topic and the need for a supportive writing environment in which to produce successful writing. The account is especially relevant to the current study because it melds a linguistic analysis of Linda’s writing with the account of her experiences, showing development not merely in the conceptualising of her task approach but in the acquisition of linguistic features of academic writing. It also illustrates the importance of instructional support through personal contact with expert writers who can facilitate transition into the academic community and engagement with its practices.

Six women from ethnic minorities (Lillis, 1997)
Language issues as part of discoursal practices are to the forefront in two related ways in the study by Lillis (1997) of six bilingual UK-born women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Working with this group, Lillis saw a tension between the women’s primary goal of completing their studies successfully and the requirement to adhere to the conventions of their disciplines. The students were conscious that they did not know ‘the rules of the game’ and also experienced frustration at the strict language requirements which often forced them to edit out material from their own life experience which could have added to the value of their work and contributed to the development of their own voice. This study points out the contradiction that lies between the opening up of university education to non-traditional groups and the continuing obscurity and alienating effect of its discourse expectations. For these participants, the devaluing of their own voice brought frustration, a loss of confidence in their literacy and a questioning of the worth of the academic experience.

Case studies of L2 writers
Much of the wider research on L2 students and their writing takes a deficit approach to their work, focussing on problems with linguistic expression, but case studies of these students are able to take a wider view of discourse problems and show the motivational qualities that help these writers succeed against the odds.
Yuko (Spack, 1997)
Spack’s (1997) account of Yuko illustrates this point. Yuko’s general proficiency and good TOEFL scores had not prepared her for the struggles that she found in her first experiences of study in an American urban university but she showed a determination to overcome her problems which led to her eventual success. She was intent on taking on an American approach to her writing, believing that her Japanese academic identity would hold her back. Her identity as an outsider, culturally and academically, had been brought home to her in her first year of study and changing this identity was a powerful motivator during her five-year period of study. In terms of social contexts for learning, Yuko seems to have relied on her researcher/mentor and some professors for emotional and academic support but was able to find her way through to becoming a critical and independent thinker in her field.

Ming (Smoke, 2004)
The strategies used to respond to problems encountered by Ming in the case study by Smoke (2004) may be characteristic of an outsider in the culture, as Yuko had found. Already a high-achieving student in China, Ming continued in this path after arriving in America at the age of 14. Cultural understanding was an important element in discussing art, as Ming was required to do early in her college study but she was also able, like Yuko, to make use of her own cultural understandings and use them to compensate for other gaps in her knowledge. She established excellent relationships with her teachers whose encouragement and support brought a growth in Ming’s confidence, so that eventually she was able to merge her interests and abilities with the requirements of her discipline, demonstrating her worth as an independent and creative thinker.

Ben (Leki, 2007)
Ben was an Engineering student from a Chinese academic family who arrived in the U.S. as a 17-year old, and the family background may have contributed to his understanding of the content and purpose of his work from the beginning of his study. The range of text types required during his course presented few problems for him, and as writing demands grew more complex, his valuing of its importance also grew. Much of his learning, including writing, was done in group settings as part of an enjoyable collaborative process which benefited his study and his developing academic and professional maturity. His supportive family background, relaxed and uncompaining personality and confidence in his own scholarly identity seemed to have smoothed his pathway to the completion of his programme, in spite of his second language background.
Jan (Leki, 2007)
The case of Jan (Leki, 2007), a Polish student who came to the U.S. at 17, exemplifies the situation of a student who fails to engage initially with his institution or the students around him, producing a sense of alienation from the academic community. In response, over the first three years of his programme he showed contempt for academic conventions by presenting (successfully) work that was superficial, recycled from previous assignments, plagiarised or resulted from other forms of cheating, an approach prompted by his isolation from his classmates and a rather negative view of the institution. In public, however, he assumed the role of the ‘good’ student (again successfully) making erratic but generally acceptable progress. It was his acceptance of a leadership role in his dorm which provided him with a social community and so contributed to his sense of belonging in the academic setting and his developing personal and academic maturity. These changes in turn established the motivation for a change of identity, academic engagement and a serious commitment to his Business study programme. Writing development played little part in this case study: its value lies rather in its descriptions of the effect that exclusion from a social network can have on student behaviour and motivation, and of the emotional, social and moral development which eventually brought to Jan an understanding of the learning purposes of his course.

Six NESB students (Bright, 2005)
Issues of acculturation into the discourse community and the acquisition of academic literacy are addressed in Bright’s (2005) study of NESB students’ experiences in a New Zealand university. All but one of the participants were selected specifically because they had carried out all their secondary schooling in New Zealand. To some extent, then, they took on characteristics and attitudes of Generation 1.5 students. Using metaphor as a means of exploring their view of learning English experiences, Bright found that their choice and explanation of the metaphor reflected a positive, often skills-based, view of the process. However, despite favourable assessments of their English proficiency, the participants experienced considerable stress in the early stages of their study, and attempted to compensate for linguistic difficulties with cognitive and metacognitive strategies rather than addressing language issues.

Chinese Master’s students (Chang, 2006)
Chang’s (2006) thesis on Chinese Master’s students writing their dissertations is not strictly a case study but it is one of the few instances of studies dealing with academic writing in a New Zealand setting and is therefore included in this section. Chang carried out a survey of 37 students on their thesis-writing
experiences and interviewed six from this group. Although they had the required language level for entry to their programme, the participants acknowledged the limitations of their specialist academic vocabulary and their ability to express more precise shades of meaning, and worked on language improvement through reading and writing practice, receiving much valuable input from their supervisors. The case study found that this personal interaction with supervisors enhanced the students’ experience and, where interaction was lacking, there was some discontent with the quality of supervision. It appears from this study that, where there are linguistic and other discoursal difficulties for overseas students, both the instructional and emotional support afforded by supervisors can be a critical element in the quality of the learning and achievement.

Case studies of Generation 1.5 students

Jinny (Frodesen, 2009)
Frodesen (2009) uses the term ‘latecomer’ to describe Jinny, the Taiwanese subject of his study, who migrated to America with her family at the age of 15. Jinny applied for college successfully on the strength of her high Maths score but received a very low verbal score in entry tests. Her language development was a prolonged process over several years and took in a number of writing and ESL classes. However, she passed up opportunities for more rapid language progress by avoiding language-rich papers, making very limited use of English socially, and volunteering little in oral discussions in class, partly because of her experiences of ostracism while at high school. The uptake of opportunities for enhancing language skills are dependent on both external and internal factors, and Jinny’s shyness and preference for mixing socially only with Chinese-speakers may have inhibited progress linguistically and academically.

Festina (Vasquez, 2007)
Festina, in the case study by Vasquez (2007) appears as a student who made strategic use of her excellent oral skills to give the appearance of a competent and promising all-round student at high school. However, her speaking abilities were far higher than her formal language resource, especially in writing, and her early promise was not fulfilled at college. She was an outgoing and active participant in class and quickly acquired an understanding of the expected cultural norms of her high school and college communities. She therefore appeared very knowledgeable and at ease in learning situations, establishing close and friendly relations with her teachers and to some extent showing up the quieter, though possibly more academically capable, class members. Through this behaviour she constructed the
identity of an able student, an identity which was accepted by her teachers, despite the contrary evidence of her written work. In the long term, she could not sustain this role. As the increasing demands made on her academic literacy revealed the limitations of her academic language, she could not cope and ultimately she left college without completing her programme. Not all accounts of students’ experience portray a successful outcome, and the attitude of Festina’s teachers in not acknowledging the implications of her disparate oral and written strengths encouraged Festina’s false assessment of herself as a capable student in tertiary study.

Crosby (2007) chose an academic literacies approach to her case studies of three Generation 1.5 students in the first year of university, analysing their progress in writing over the three stages of writing development: firstly, attention to surface features of grammar and expression; secondly, showing an understanding of broader features of academic discourse, such as source use; and finally, awareness of the situatedness of texts across genres and the need to adapt to these varying contexts.

Andrew (Crosby, 2007)
Andrew was born in Vietnam and at 17 preceded his parents and siblings into the United States, so that he could complete the final two years of high school. Andrew’s writing abilities in both English and Vietnamese languages were poor, influencing his negative view of writing at university. Characterised as an ‘ear’ learner by the researcher, Andrew showed other qualities of the Generation 1.5 writer in having a narrowly focused view of writing, whereby progress would come through an expanded pool of vocabulary and greater grammatical accuracy, and he did not have a global view of writing which also attended to development of content and the positioning of writing within specific disciplinary settings. However his narrow approach may represent an early developmental stage in L2 writing, in which vocabulary and sentence structuring are still to the forefront, as Crosby appears to suggest. It seems likely that as accuracy and results improve, so does confidence, and L2 writers become more aware of the larger issues of writing development.

Tiffany (Crosby, 2007)
Tiffany, in the second of Crosby’s studies, was also from an Asian background, Taiwan, and is described as having a multi-lingual, multi-literate background. Although she had only two years in the American high school system, Tiffany seems to have acquired a wider language resource and a deeper understanding of the purposes of academic literacies, in that she could employ the appropriate
metalanguage to discuss and analyse her writing experiences. She asserted that she ‘hated’ reading and writing, but she elected to study language-rich courses, in addition to Science and Maths subjects, in her first year, underlining her own view of herself as a reasonably competent writer in English. Tiffany appears to have been open to seeking and applying advice from tutors, and by setting aside personal feelings on reading and writing, she broadened her understanding of writing practices in a discourse setting and enhanced her progress in adapting to her academic environment.

Zack (Crosby, 2007)

The third of Crosby’s subjects, Zack, was of Indian origin but had been born and brought up in the Middle East, with a multi-lingual and multi-literate background in English, French and Arabic. He appears to have been better prepared for college than Tiffany and Andrew, linguistically and in terms of his expectations of the academic literacies of college, and armed with high scores in SAT tests, Zack seems to have entered college secure in his identity as a good writer. Unusually for a Generation 1.5 student, he welcomed the ‘openness’ of many of his writing tasks, rather than finding comfort in the formulaic approach that other less confident writers preferred, and his ability to work with the differing genres demanded by his range of papers also reflected this confidence and the maturity of his approach.

Zack came from a background and culture where English is one of the prioritised languages, so that his categorisation as a Generation 1.5 student is open to question. Crosby’s accounts suggest that the range of diversity in regard to academic literacy development may well be related to the range of language proficiencies and motivations which students bring to their academic study on entry. So, while all three of these students are characterised as Generation 1.5, it is clear that, as Crosby noted, there were contrasts in their understanding and approaches to tasks and their capacity to take on more advanced aspects of the writing process, or to understand the wider implications of writing within a range of discourse expectations.

The role of discourse in creating an academic identity for student writers

The theme which runs through the accounts of L1 writers is the role that academic discourse played in creating identities which in turn related to their engagement with their discipline. As students encountered the discourse demands of their study, confusion and perplexity set in and they struggled to understand what was required of them, with a variety of outcomes. This challenge continued in varying forms across years and subjects and teaching staff. Some accepted the conventions without question, seeing them as a pathway to success. Some resisted them, seeing them as constraints on their personal
expression and sense of identity. Yet others entered on a game-playing strategy, providing what was appropriate but in a cynical and indifferent manner. Some students were able to take on the identity of scholar and merge it with their own sense of self, producing a unique voice. At the other extreme, though no instances are given here, there may have been students who simply dropped out and returned to their previous life.

The accounts of L2 writers’ experiences were of a somewhat different nature, revealing the difficulties they found simply in acquiring the appropriate language and understanding the discipline expectations. These issues may be linked to the contrast between their cultural backgrounds and the American context in which they studied. However, their identity as scholars was evident and well-established from the beginning of their course. Yuko was typical in experiencing some loss of confidence initially when her work received poor grades but this was by no means a deterrent. She and the other students seem to have found this as a motivating factor and simply pressed on, improving their language and understanding of discourse requirements in the process but apparently confident of their ultimate academic success. The exception to this generalisation was Jan, the only European in the group, and his attitudes and development tend to mirror those of L1 students, such as Nick and Rachel, especially in the ‘game-playing’ and role-switching aspects of their experiences. One may speculate that such factors as cultural approaches to education, family pressures and, especially in the case of international students, financial concerns, also had some bearing on the acceptance of the context and its constraints.

The Generation 1.5 group appears to show characteristics of both the other groups. Zack, for example, seems to have been close to nativelike in his proficiency, and cultural considerations seemed to have played little role in his acquisition of academic literacy; while Andrew displayed the motivation and determination evident in the L2 writers. Only Festina, seems to have lacked both the motivation and the level of academic literacy in her first language or her second, and her academic goals eluded her.

Large-scale investigations

The 1998 study edited by Candlin and Plum of academic literacies in an Australian setting stands slightly apart from the tradition of case studies described above and resembles more a ‘textography’ (Swales, 1998), in that it presents an investigation into the literacy practices in two disciplinary cultures, Psychology and Computing. The account of student approaches to academic writing in the Psychology Department was based on data collected from Focus Group discussions with eighty students. Noting that the students’ mainly Anglo-Celtic background tended to hide the smaller group of students from
other cultures, Plum asserted that little consideration was given to this cultural diversity. Despite the wide-ranging continuum of writing practices across the genres and disciplines within Psychology and the department’s efforts to make their writing expectations clear, students experienced problems because differences in genre were discussed but variations in disciplinary literacy demands were not made explicit to students.

In a related study within the same overarching project, Spinks (1998) examined marker feedback through student assignments, Focus Group discussions and other techniques and concluded that markers were inconsistent in the amount and nature of feedback and their ability to comment authoritatively on academic writing conventions. Students valued feedback of any kind but would have appreciated more positive comments so that they could exploit their strengths in future writing. One interesting outcome was that students’ perceptions of inconsistent grading were not supported by the research analyses of academic results.

Staff and student attitudes and understandings regarding literacy, particularly writing, in the Computing department (Gollin, 1998) showed that a vocationally-oriented discipline, such as Computing, will experience tensions in articulating the varied literacy practices and resolving the differing demands of the university setting and the workplace. This situation was complicated by the influence of digital communication on writing practices in Computing, lecturers’ own varied understandings of academic literacy, their differing approaches to taking on the role of writing teacher, and uncertainty over which academic literacy practices could transfer to the workplace.

These studies are particularly valuable in both their large scale and their detail about undergraduate students’ literacy practices in a context similar to the New Zealand one.

2.4.2 Research on learners

First Year in Higher Education

From a learner’s perspective, the first year at university may bring a raft of unforeseen issues which impede a seamless and painless transition from high school (or possibly the workplace) to the academic context. Institutions too have vested interests, both pedagogical and economic, in ensuring a smooth passage for these students, and these considerations, together with the increasingly diverse social and cultural backgrounds of the student population, have turned attention to FYHE (First Year in Higher
Education) and student engagement issues in the literature. Large-scale studies have been carried out in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, while in New Zealand the situation has been addressed on a lesser scale, by institutions and individuals.

In the United States, the work of Tinto (1993, 1996) was influential in drawing attention to the attrition rate among students in or following their first year of higher education and how this problem might be addressed; and this topic is now extensively researched through Kuh and his research team, producing annual reports on surveys of student engagement (NSSE) in American higher education. This concept is based on the two interconnected premises that universities must create a stimulating and interactive environment that promotes student learning and that students must be prepared to actively participate in that environment (Bartlett, 2009; Krause, 2008). A satisfactory transition into the academic life is dependent on student engagement thriving in the first-year, which can foster student retention and lead to successful completion of the study programme.

Australian research along the lines of Tinto and Kuh is also well-established, producing a number of research studies since the mid-90s (Krause, 2001; Krause, Hartley, James and McInnis, 2005; McInnis and James, 1995, 2000) which indicate that the first year is a critical one in terms of student adjustment to the new environment and continuation of study for the full period of their programme. The 2005 large-scale study compared earlier findings from 1994 onwards for further exploring the FYHE experience, using student engagement as their focus. The generally positive responses of the report found student satisfaction in preparation for university and the quality of teaching and programmes that they experienced, although international students were less positive about how their expectations were met. A worrying trend was found in the amount of time committed to part-time paid employment off-campus, leading to a lesser commitment of hours for academic study.

Investigations of this kind have also been implemented in the United Kingdom, with a wide-ranging report on student engagement and retention in the first year of study produced by Yorke and Longden (2007, 2008) which allowed a comparison to be made with the Australian results. The authors noted that findings were broadly similar to the Australian report in satisfaction levels with courses and teaching. The UK report drew attention to the importance of social life as an engagement factor, and, in common with the Australian findings, expressed concern over the limited amount of time students were prepared to spend on study outside the classroom. Perhaps the most striking trend in both Australian
and UK reports was the increased emphasis on future employment in the thinking and decision-making of students.

Similar studies of the first-year experience have been reported in the New Zealand setting, although to date, none on the scale of the overseas studies mentioned above. Individual institutions and researchers have undertaken their own surveys of student engagement (Cameron and Meade, 2003; Gulik and Tippen, 2004; van de Meer, 2009) but both government and institutional interests appear to have reserved their main focus for reporting international students’ experiences and levels of satisfaction.

2.4.3 Issues in learning and teaching academic writing

The case studies and reports on the first year experience described above, together with studies of the role of teachers in academic writing instruction and course design, have identified several issues which are reviewed below.

Variation across disciplines, subjects and staff

The first-year experience is clearly made more complex and challenging by the range of disciplines that students’ may encounter even within one programme of study (Baynham, 2000), and the distinct patterns of language and rhetorical structure that mark individual discourses. As the term academic literacies implies, there is a need to come to terms with a range of literacy practices, and to develop the capacity to switch responses between one paper and another. This variation has been extensively addressed in the context of academic literacies and genre studies (Becher and Trowler, 2001; Gollin, 1998; Hyland 2009b; Johns, 1997, 2008; Kirkness, 2003; Lea and Street, 1999, 2000; Plum, 1998; Prior, 1998; Samraj, 2000, 2004; Swales, 1990). The requirement to take on different practices applies not only to tasks and text types, such as reports, essays and summaries (Bruce, 2010; Canseco and Byrd, 1989; Hale, Taylor, Bridgeman, Carson, Kroll and Kantor, 1996; Moore and Morton, 1995, 2005; Zhu, 2004b) and surface features of writing, including cohesive devices, discipline-specific terminology and format (Gollin, 1998) but also to underlying linguistic features, such as nominalisation and the establishment of coherence through reference (Martin, 1993, 2002). Moreover different subjects will require a range of cognitive skills, such as the expression of abstraction, and the capacity to analyse, synthesise and evaluate (Carter, 2007, cited in Johns, 2008, §6.2; Christie, 2002). In essence, the student may be asked to take a rapid step forwards from merely descriptive and narrative knowledge-telling tasks to knowledge transformatory approaches (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987).
These requirements will take place for the first-year student in a setting where transparency and explicitness are lacking and much of this tacit knowledge is taken for granted (Johnson, 2008; Lillis, 2000; Macbeth, 2006; Li, 2006).

If students are to meet the expectations of their discourse community through the varied academic literacies they must apply in their writing and classroom work, they will look for guidance in this undertaking. Since very few students, whatever their background, arrive in university with an adequate grasp of the practices they should demonstrate in their approach to writing (Gollin, 1998; Krause et al., 2005; Plum, 1998; Yorke and Longden, 2007), they will expect guidance in this respect from their subject lecturers. This kind of input can be highly varied, depending on the lecturers’ view of their own role, their expertise, their expectation of writing and their preference or need to deliver the curriculum content of their subject. In the project undertaken by several teams in Australian universities (Candlin and Plum, 1998), studies of writing contexts showed significant differences between departments such as Computing and Psychology, in the amount and length of writing expected, the range of text types and especially the department’s framing of their discourse expectations (Gollin, 1998; Plum, 1998; Spinks, 1998). Consequently, there was also a clear disparity between staff views within and between the two departments on whether literacy issues were part of the curriculum or should be dealt with through support services, on how much feedback on writing should be given and whether such feedback was even necessary. Smith’s (2005) study in a New Zealand setting similarly showed such disparities over a range of faculties, with some factors such as age and experience of the teaching staff determining the position adopted on writing practices. Staff understandings of what they expected in the way of ‘good writing’ also varied considerably and were at times articulated only with difficulty.

Disciplinary staff views on the teaching of academic writing itself often portray the process as a set of quickly taught and readily transferable skills, to be dealt with through institutional support services and writing classes (Elliott and Kilduff, 1991; Gollin, 1998; Smith, 2005; Zhu, 2004a). This conceptualisation is disputable in its stereotypical view of academic writing instruction as a set of simple generic writing skills or the rapid ‘remediation’ of international students’ language. Researchers point out the complex nature of academic writing within an academic literacies context (Hyland, 2002; Lea and Street, 1999, 2000), the extent of the acquisition process for second language writers (Cummins, 1979; Larsen-Freeman, 2006), and challenge the notion of transferable skills (Dudley-Evans, 1995; Flower, 1990; James, 2009, 2010; Johns, 1988) as part of a wider debate over course approaches, discussed below.
Voice and identity

The weight of discourse expectations may be especially problematic when it comes to establishing at the same time an individual voice and a scholarly identity in the academic community, for skilled and unskilled writers alike bring to their university study their own views on how to express themselves in writing. Hyland (2009b, pp.70-71) claims that a distinction between the two concepts of voice and identity should be maintained, seeing voice as the writer’s distinctive signature, a concept arising from the expressivist approach to writing, while identity refers to the constantly changing, socially constructed roles we take on moving through different contexts. However, as students make the shift from a more personal, expressive and concrete approach to writing to one that is more abstract and detached, as the academic context demands (Christie, 2002; Cummins, 1997, 1983; Schleppegrell, 2002), the personal voice may be swallowed up within their discoursal identity (Ivanic, 1998) and students may feel a sense of loss, bewilderment or resistance at this change. A related issue is the implicit power relationship between the writer-as-student and the reader-as-marker/assessor, (Benesch, 2001; Hyland, 2002; Leki, 2007; Starfield, 2001, 2004) since the preferred discourse features of the novice writer may not be those of the reader who holds the responsibility for grades and ultimately achievement in study. This applies not only to second-language writers (Canagarajah, 2001, 2002; Hinkel 2002; Silva, 1993) but also to first language speakers of English from non-traditional backgrounds where other discourses are valued as expressions of one’s identity (Ivanic, 1998). Conformity without commitment may bring about the ‘game-playing’ behaviours discussed by Casanave (2002) above.

Source use and plagiarism

An aspect of the first-year experience which may carry over into subsequent years is students’ practices in using source material in their writing, and differing views amongst staff on what constitutes plagiarism. Technological advances, concepts of intertextuality and distinct disciplinary approaches (Bakhtin, 1986; Fairclough, 1992) together with students’ own language proficiency, cultural values, workload, and understandings of the purpose of source use and genre conventions may all play a part in making this a stressful and disputed area for students and teaching staff (Canagarajah, 2002; Howard, 1995; Hull and Rose, 1989; Liu, 2005; Pecorari, 2001; Pennycook, 1996). Nonetheless, clearer and more explicit staff input would remove much of the confusion and give students a better understanding of staff expectations (Hayes and Introna, 2005).
For second language students, the question of using sources may represent a cultural and linguistic challenge. The distinction between public knowledge and ‘attributable’ knowledge, is often blurred, even for first-language writers, and second-language students with little cultural knowledge of their new society will be even more uncertain of the boundaries. Furthermore, researchers have pointed out that valued texts in many Asian cultures are treated with great respect: they are so widely recognised so that acknowledgement is unnecessary, any attempt to reword would be seen as disrespectful and to reword in an inferior style particularly offensive. Moreover, the reproduction of iconic texts in one’s own work may be a valued cultural feature of academic writing (Ballard, 1996; Cortazzi and Jin, 1997; Shi, 2008; Sowden, 2005).

However, this view has been challenged from within and without the Asian cultural community by Liu (2005) and by Wheeler (2009). Liu asserts that plagiarism is not acceptable in China, despite its widespread occurrence. He attributes the misconception to deliberately false information from Chinese students abroad, caught in the act of copying. Wheeler similarly claims that in Japan, most university students are familiar with Western approaches to plagiarism from high school learning and, where plagiarism occurs, it is likely to be intentional.

In linguistic terms, two common reasons cited for plagiarism are English language proficiency and misinterpretation of source use and its purposes. In the first case, limited language choices may be the motivation behind some students’ verbatim reproduction of source texts (Pecorari, 2001; Pennycook, 1996; Shi, 2008). However, Pecorari’s research also indicated that in some science subjects, the language is highly formulaic and reference to other research findings in the words of the original is tolerated, and perhaps inevitable, by reason of the limited choices available. Thus plagiarism may be an acceptable disciplinary as well as cultural convention.

Many researchers and teachers, however, prefer to adopt a different standpoint on the topic, asserting that plagiarism, especially patchwriting (which incorporates short chunks of original text into one’s own sentence structures) is a stage in the complex developmental process of understanding the use and purpose of sources in building academic exposition or argument (Bazerman, 2004; Harris, 1997; Hayes and Introna, 2005; Howard, 1995; Hull and Rose, 1989).
A broader perspective is presented by Sowden (2005), who reminds us that the western academic tradition is built on the use of earlier knowledge: ‘Producing an academic text, like producing everyday language, is never an original process” (p.230), echoing Scollon (1995) in a similar context.

Teachers of academic writing and teachers of disciplinary content play different roles in promoting academic literacy in the classroom or lecture theatre, but the ideological debate relating to the teaching of academic writing and literacy is largely carried out in the Applied Linguistics arena and tends to focus on the role of the writing teacher.

**Debate around instruction in academic writing**

The importance of academic discourse lies in its capacity to realise the dissemination of knowledge which the university has created, thereby linking its two important functions; and the teaching of academic discourses, including academic writing, would seem to be a desirable and beneficial activity. However, academic discourse instruction is, as Paltridge (2004, p.91) notes, ‘not ideology-free [and] objective’. It is, in fact, a somewhat contested area, depending on whether the socialisation of students into a discourse community through its language and literacy conventions is viewed as a form of empowerment opening future opportunities (the pragmatic approach) or a process which limits language and identity choices by requiring acceptance of the community’s beliefs and values (the critical approach).

Opponents of the ‘pragmatic’ approach, such as Benesch (2001) and Pennycook (1994, 1997), support a critical approach to academic conventions and dispute its implicit neutrality, labelling it accommodationist. They claim that it encourages students to accept unquestioningly the principles and values of the discourse community and so become complicit in reinforcing them and limiting their own freedom to make alternative choices. Other critiques of genre discourse instruction have also suggested that it ignores the hidden agendas of these discourses, their hierarchical structures and unequal power relations (Ivanic and Simpson, 1992) and their exclusionary and privileged nature (Canagarajah, 2002; Ivanic, 1998; Kubota, 2003; Lillis, 1997; Luke, 1988).

Allison (1996) responds to this criticism with the claim the pragmatic approach allows room for negotiation of the discourse expectations with the teacher and for the use of a critical perspective of its content. This view has been supported by academics such as Johns (1997) and Canagarajah (2001) who suggest approaches and strategies that can overcome these situations, and there is an increasing
awareness of critical approaches which informed teachers may incorporate into their curricula on an individual basis.

Advocates of academic writing and its instruction have also put forward arguments on the basis of its capacity to fulfil the aims of the academy, summed up by Hyland: ‘... it is through language that academics and students conceptualise their subjects and argue their claims persuasively’ (2011, p.1).

Turner, in support of this view, argues against the content/language dichotomy, which values content above language: she asserts that the two are intrinsically linked through their common purpose in explicating knowledge. Moreover, the teaching of academic language which adopts a critical awareness approach not only cuts through the discourse of transparency which assumes the neutrality of language but also acts as a powerful force for critiquing wider institutional knowledge assumptions (Turner, 2000, 2004). Hyland (2011) follows a similar line, disputing the widespread ‘autonomous’ view of academic language as simply a set of skills. He asserts the importance of literacy practices to the academic community, and sees their study and teaching as a discipline rather than a peripheral activity.

The apprenticeship metaphor

The delicate political position of the academic writing teacher has been suggested in the discussion above but the disciplinary content teacher is likely to approach academic literacy from a different perspective. The inclusion of academic writing and other discourse expectations in the curriculum is not routine, and instruction from subject teachers is highly variable and tends to be defined by the individual practitioner or by disciplinary attitudes, rather than any widely accepted guidelines. Thus the acquisition of academic writing knowledge by students is likely to be problematic, despite the appeal of the ‘apprenticeship’ model and its implication of the expert professional in the form of the content teacher, working collaboratively to provide the necessary disciplinary understanding to the novice writer (Freedman, 1987).

The metaphor of the ‘cognitive’ apprenticeship (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995) has been challenged on practical and ideological grounds. Belcher (1994) raises questions about the appropriateness of the staged ‘model, coach and fade’ view (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, cited in Belcher, 1994, p.24), for NNS students, and points out that in any case teachers rarely seem to take on this role intuitively, so that it may not operate effectively in practice (Bartholomae, 1985; Woodward-Kron, 2004). Furthermore, in practice it does not apply to novice undergraduate writers but rather at the graduate
level (Belcher, 1994; Gollin, 1998; Plum, 1998). Ideological criticisms have been raised by Bizzell (1993), Cooper (1989) and Starfield (2001) as to whether entry into an exclusionary and inward-looking hierarchical discourse community is a desirable aim for students or their instructional mentors.

Course type and content

Debate over the respective roles and responsibilities of subject specialist teachers and writing teachers referred to above has opened up a wider discussion about the design and content of courses. Recent thinking has seen specialist courses incorporate writing into the subject curriculum in some form and Hyland (2006, pp.87-88) identifies these as co-operative, collaborative and team teaching, representing a progression of subject consultant involvement into the teaching programme. In the first two, the writing teacher works with a subject consultant who offers advice related to the subject content but has no direct contact with the writing classroom, whereas the third option places the two teachers on an equal footing within the same classroom.

However, many institutions favour stand-alone writing courses, which deal with students from a range of disciplines. The content of courses of this kind has stimulated debate between those who favour a broadly-based, generic programme covering what are seen as common skills applicable to any discipline or subject (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, Spack, 1988; Zamel, 1993) and those who call for a more specific, discipline-based approach. The proponents of generic courses, English for General Academic Purposes or EGAP, view them as providing a broad academic approach to literacy demands onto which awareness and understanding of specific disciplinary requirements may be built. Research findings on the way in which disciplinary language is differentiated and discourse expectations vary, together with questions about transferability of writing practices across disciplines, have influenced others (Hyland, 2002) to call for ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes) course design. Arguments against this approach cite lack of disciplinary expertise and the privileging of content over writing, which reinforces the marginalising of literacies teaching.

One incentive for encouraging more use of discipline-based programmes from an institutional viewpoint is the suggestion that support services, such as writing centres, do not provide the more focused approach that the changing student populations need, and that institutions are seeking more effective ways to support students in their understandings of disciplinary discourse acquisition (Baik and Greig, 2009; Durkin and Main, 2002; Healey, 2000; Purser, Skillen, Deane, Donohue and Peake, 2008; Wingate, 2006).
2.4.4 Summary
Reflecting the emergent theoretical perspectives on academic literacies and the social and financial contexts within which universities must operate, recent qualitative research on academic writing has directed attention to two essential areas: understanding the wide range of learning experiences which students undergo as they progress through tertiary study, and examining the role of the writing teacher in this process. Much research demonstrates how closely these two areas are intertwined, and suggest that the writing teacher has an important role, independent of and additional to the content specialist, in ensuring that students’ progress is not hampered through misunderstanding or undervaluing the place of the academic writing discourse in their discipline.

2.5 Conclusion
As this review of the literature on academic writing has shown, apart from vigorous discussion on theoretical and ideological issues, there is extensive research on both linguistic aspects of students’ academic writing and their experiences. However, there are areas where further research would be of value. Few studies exist in a New Zealand setting, although tertiary student populations in this country are growing and becoming more diverse in nature. The expanding New Zealand research into the First Year Experience has provided interesting insights through surveys and questionnaires but case studies of individual students as they enter and adapt to the new environment are less often found, as are those which highlight students’ writing experiences. Furthermore, many overseas studies provide findings on L2 writers’ practices, but the writing of mixed language groups, which are increasingly the norm in many university classrooms, is much less frequently analysed.

The review of the literature suggests that certain aspects of academic writing have been relatively neglected, and that a study in a New Zealand context which combines linguistic and sociocultural findings on a typical mixed language cohort of students and their writing, would make a useful and original contribution to the current body of research.

The research questions to guide such an exploration of student academic writing may be framed in the following way:

Research Question #1
What are the features of the written academic English of first-year Business students and to what extent do they reflect the accepted features of academic writing in general?
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

*Research Question #2*

What changes in students’ acquisition of academic writing features and understanding of academic writing requirements can be seen over the first two years of their course?

*Research Question #3*

What understandings and insights into attitudes to academic writing and its development can be gained from the experiences of students as they progress through their course?

By investigating these research questions, and interpreting and evaluating the results, this thesis aims to contribute to teachers’ understanding of student academic writing practices in the university and the development of relevant and insightful approaches to curriculum design and academic writing instruction.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter deals with the methodology used in the research process, focusing initially on the pilot study analyses and results. It then addresses the design of the main study, beginning by describing its purpose and the way in which the outcomes of the pilot have informed the research questions and the main study design.

The next section of the chapter discusses the following stages of the design process: the issues that were considered in the design; the components of the study, including the methodological approaches and research strategies selected, the setting and participants, the collection and recording of data, security procedures, and the steps followed in the data analysis.

The chapter ends with a summary of points covered in the discussion of the pilot study and the principal elements in the design of the main study.

3.2 Purpose of the study

This sequential mixed-methods study sets out to examine the academic writing of a cohort of university undergraduates. In the first section, a linguistic-oriented text analysis (the Baseline Survey) provides a broad description of the main lexical and syntactic features of student first-semester examination writing in relation to features of academic writing style identified in the relevant, corpus-based research literature. Included in this section is an investigation of students’ source material use, as well as a series of exploratory correlational analyses into relationships between their writing patterns and various demographic factors. The results of this initial survey of the cohort provide a descriptive snapshot of their writing at tertiary-entry level and furnish complementary quantitative data for the more intensive study of individual students that follows.

The wide-ranging description of students’ academic writing given in the Baseline Survey is further informed in the qualitative longitudinal phase by a set of case studies with more focused insights from students and teaching staff, which bring depth and a human voice to the study. The comment from the student writers recorded during their second and final years of study allows the development of their
writing to be seen in the light of their learning experiences and understanding of the academic context in which they produce their written texts. Comparative analyses of the students’ first and second-year examination writing are set alongside their interview comments to provide a means of triangulation. In this way, both sections of the study are designed to elicit findings which could be incorporated into future academic writing programmes, reflecting the underlying pedagogical aim of the study.

Thus the mixed-methods approach of this study, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodology, has been chosen with the aim of providing a broad picture of the topic through linguistic description and a deeper exploration of aspects of academic writing use among the student writers.

3.3 Pilot study

3.3.1 Background

This section presents preliminary research into how students of Business use language in an academic setting, based on the following research question:

What are the features of the written academic English of first-year Business students and how can this information be used in the teaching of academic writing?

In order to prepare for the main study investigating this question, an informal pilot study was first undertaken, involving the examination essay writing of a small group of first-year tertiary-level students enrolled in the Business faculty of a New Zealand university.

The purposes of this pilot study were threefold: firstly to determine whether the methodological approach used by Hinkel (2002) in her analysis of native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) tertiary students’ writing would provide a suitable basis for the proposed main study of tertiary student writing; next to identify which aspects of the Hinkel analysis should be retained for the main study; and finally to discover what other lines of inquiry, in particular, research carried out by Biber (1988) on features of academic writing including conciseness, might usefully be included in the main study.

A broad theoretical basis for the pilot study can be found in the work by Swales (1990) on genre and the language conventions of the discourse community; and a basis for the methodological approach for the pilot study was taken from work by Biber (op. cit.) on variation in patterns of use of spoken and written English in a range of genres and the use of language in academic settings (Biber, 1988, 2006); by Biber
and his colleagues (Biber, Conrad and Reppen, 1998; Biber, Johanssen, Leech, Conrad and Finegan, 1999) on corpus-based investigations of language use in a variety of settings; and by Hinkel (2002) on linguistic features of student academic writing. The data analysis in the pilot study largely follows that of Hinkel’s investigation into nearly 1500 NS and NNS first-year student essays, written as part of placement and diagnostic tests in a number of American private and public universities. Much of Hinkel’s analysis examined similar features to Biber’s 1988 work, though her study was more limited in the range of features examined and focused on differences between NS and NNS writing while Biber’s interest lay in the differences between spoken and written language.

3.3.2 Data analyses

The pilot study examined six scripts from a previous cohort for the course, selected by the subject lecturer to represent the range of writing proficiency typical of a normal course intake. To avoid possible identification by the researcher (who had taught students from this cohort), the lecturer provided no further information on these students, apart from emphasizing their representativeness of the cohort overall. The pilot study carried out the following analyses based on Hinkel’s (2002) findings: the 15 most common syntactic, lexical and rhetorical features (from 70 in total) across all the student writing texts; the features of NNS writing found to be significantly above or below the NS median in the student writing texts; and clause patterns and modal verb use (which had not been a separate analysis in the Hinkel study). A fourth analysis, based on Biber’s (1988, p.104) study, examined the five main measures which together contribute to ‘economy in writing’, that is, the conciseness and precision which are characteristic of academic texts. These four analyses are shown in Table 8 (Pilot study analyses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANALYSES</th>
<th>BASED ON STUDIES BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 most common features of writing across texts</td>
<td>Hinkel (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features in NNS texts significantly above or below the median of NS texts</td>
<td>Hinkel (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clause patterns and modal use</td>
<td>Covered in Hinkel (2002) but not as a separate area of analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures of economy in writing</td>
<td>Biber (1988)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Pilot study analyses
3.3.3 Results of analyses

An initial examination of the results for the first two analyses (Table 8) suggested that there was no obvious pattern to be discerned because of the considerable variation in feature use amongst the student writers and the small sample. Moreover, no one writer appeared to make markedly more or less use of this group of features than another, suggesting that all the writers shared some understanding of the basic principles of academic writing. The examination of patterns of use by NS and NNS writers also revealed no obvious contrast in the figures. One might, for example, expect native speakers to have made more use of features such as gerunds, nominalisations and fixed strings. The last are, in Hinkel’s terms (2002, p.159), ‘typically language-specific and culture-bound’, which might have been expected to make them more difficult to acquire, but the figures did not support this expectation.

While the findings of the first two analyses produced no conclusive evidence of patterns of similarity or difference, whether within the group as a whole, between the NS and NNS writers within the pilot group, or between the pilot study and the Hinkel study, the results of the third analysis suggested some differentiation between NS and NNS writers in their approach to sentence structures. However, in the fourth analysis, again the six writers showed no distinctive patterns of usage either within the groups or between writers of different language backgrounds.

The outcomes of the four analyses should be seen in the light of the following constraints: the limited sample size of six students; the consequent difficulty of establishing clear differences between NS and NNS writers, and between the pilot study and the Hinkel results; the influence of the case study (supplied with the examination paper) on vocabulary range and sentence structuring; and the difference between the personal writing required by the American question prompts used by Hinkel and the academic style of answer expected in the New Zealand tertiary setting.

3.3.4 Conclusions and implications for the main study design

The following tentative conclusions emerging from the findings of the pilot study analyses should also be considered in the light of the limitations discussed above. Firstly, there appears to be no major distinction to be made between the writing of NS and NNS students in an academic context. Rather, between the work of the least proficient of the NNS writers and the most proficient of the native speakers who represented the extreme ends of the continuum, there was a certain amount of common ground where the two groups overlapped. However, in regard to syntactic features, there was the possibility that distinctions could be drawn and this was seen as a useful further line of inquiry. A third
consideration which emerged from the pilot study was that access to the case study provided with the examination questions could have influenced the findings for the first two conclusions, and an examination of the way in which all students made use of material from this kind of source could throw some light on this question in the main study.

As a result of these conclusions, the following possible lines of inquiry for the main study emerged: linguistic features of academic writing (Biber, 2006), clause and sentence structure patterns of use, conciseness or economy in writing (Biber, 1988), and the use of patchwriting techniques (Hull and Rose, 1989; Howard, 1995).

The pilot study also suggested a number of implications for the methodological approach adopted in the main study. Firstly, the focus of the Hinkel study was in all likelihood too narrow in that the features which emerged reflected the type of personal and reflective writing demanded by the prompts in that study. The majority of academic writing, however, tends to adopt a more impersonal and less discursive approach. For this reason the established features of academic writing, of the kind discussed in Biber et al. (1999) and Biber (2006), suggested themselves as more appropriate criteria for the main study analyses and were taken into account in the design of the main study (Table 9: Features incorporated into the main study design from the pilot study results).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>METHODOLOGY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clause and sentence structure patterns</td>
<td>Computer-based analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of economy in writing</td>
<td>Statistical procedures for correlational inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of academic prose</td>
<td>Use of qualitative methods, such as interviews and group discussions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9: Features incorporated into main study design from the pilot study results*

Another consideration was the use of computer-based analysis as much as possible, both to save time and to enable more in-depth exploration of linguistic issues. Much of the pilot study material had been coded and categorised manually which proved a time-consuming and often inefficient process. The rich quantity of data provided by computer-based analyses could then be subjected to correlational procedures to further explore emerging issues.
Finally, while the pilot study was a purely quantitative one based on statistical data alone, it was felt that the inclusion of qualitative methodology would expand and enhance the main study and add insights to the statistical data results. Accordingly, the decision was made to incorporate interviews and group discussions in the main study to provide material for a set of individual student case studies. These features suggested by the outcomes of the pilot study, would perhaps help to add breadth, interest and credibility to the investigation of student tertiary writing in the main study.

3.4 Design of the main study

The broad aim of the main study is to identify characteristic academic features of tertiary Business students’ first-year writing, and to follow the development of their understanding of academic writing through the second and third years of their programme.

3.4.1 Preliminary issues in the design of the study

Participants’ linguistic status

In designing a study which would serve these purposes, there were a number of methodological issues to be considered, which are described below. However, the immediate dilemma for the researcher before adopting any methodological stance was to identify a theoretical position that would allow the definition of the linguistic status of the participants, some of whom described themselves as first language English speakers and writers, while others saw themselves as second language speakers and writers of English.

Researchers point out that in the Chomskyan Linguistic tradition one cannot compare the written language of these two groups with any validity (Yan Huang, personal communication, July 2008; Jordan, 2004; Seliger and Shohamy, 1989, p.38) since one is comparing performance (how one uses their knowledge in producing and understanding language) with competence (how much one knows about a language). However, in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) there is considerable debate in relation to these two terms and to the measurement of learners’ knowledge of the target language (Jordan, op.cit.; Mitchell and Myles, 1998) and this question is as yet far from a definitive resolution.
Another perspective on this question is that, in a sense all the students in the cohort are in the process of acquiring a second language or at least another dimension of language, that of their academic discipline. Their linguistic background in such circumstances may not provide any easily-defined advantage or disadvantage; nonetheless L1 writers may find this acquisition less problematic than their ESL peers.

On a more practical level, given the wide range of backgrounds of the participants involved, it is debatable whether they could be neatly divided into separate categories as first and second language writers. As the details of the participants in Table 13 (Baseline Survey, participants’ demographic data) suggest, the cohort was made up of students at varying levels of writing proficiency, levels which were not always related to whether they were first or second language speakers of English.

Moreover, the reality of the current situation in English-medium universities worldwide is that classes and courses are made up of students of varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds, who have had a range of exposure to English-medium schooling, so that comparisons and judgements on students’ academic achievement are frequently made without taking into account their linguistic backgrounds.

On such practical grounds, then, one may argue that the present study should view its participants as novice academic writers, not separated into two distinct groups but functioning on a single linguistic continuum, ranging from speakers of other languages with a limited knowledge of English through to those who have reached a high level of proficiency (whether English is their first language or not) and, in between, a large group of competent writers from differing language backgrounds.

This approach, if not entirely resolving the dilemma on theoretical grounds, was adopted for most of the analyses carried out. In certain case studies, however, limited English-medium schooling (LEMS) appeared to have restricted the students’ levels of English proficiency to a point where they stood out from the rest of the cohort. Such instances are clearly signalled in the relevant case studies.

**Time dimension**

Consideration was given in the preliminary design of the study to the incorporation of a substantial longitudinal perspective by following the development of the Focus Group students’ exam writing into their second and third years. While this was possible for the second year, it was not feasible for the third-year writing because the majority of this group chose to take Accounting as their major subject.
Examination questions in this discipline focused principally on numeric answers and short-phrase or single-paragraph responses, so that it would not be possible to make valid comparisons with the longer first- and second-year essay writing samples. Accordingly the longitudinal perspective has been limited to the case studies, which discuss students’ writing from the first two years, and perceptions of their study experiences over the full three years.

The slight reduction of the longitudinal dimension to the study may have benefited the research process in the long term by allowing more time to be devoted to other aspects of the study, such as the analyses of the Tesco Case Study which was supplied to students as part of their MGMT191 examination paper in Year 1. It was also a useful example of the importance of a flexible approach on the part of the researcher as projects need to be developed or modified in response to changing circumstances (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

3.4.2 Design of the study

Methodological approach

As areas of knowledge have broadened and given rise to new fields of inquiry over the past five or six decades, there has been a corresponding widening of methodological approaches and a movement away from the positivist/post-positivist position with its emphasis on hypothesis testing and empirical evidence in the form of numeric data, that is, a quantitative research approach (Creswell, 2003). This is particularly applicable in the British context where an acceptance of the qualitative approach has long been apparent. In contrast, as Lazaraton (1995, 2000) has shown, much research in Applied Linguistics in the North American context continued to be dominated by quantitative methods with only limited attention to qualitative aspects well into the 1990s.

While some educational and social science research commentators see a clear-cut choice between a quantitative or a qualitative methodology as a critical decision in research design and an integral part of the planning (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Johnson and Christensen, 2004), the design of a study may benefit from both of these approaches, and an even more recent development has been the increased popularity of the mixed-methods approach. Also known as integrative or synthetic, the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods in this way in fact goes back some 50 years, to its first use in research in Psychology. Despite this long history, the mixed-methods approach has only been taken up to any significant extent in the last ten years or so (Creswell,
Evidence of this increasing acceptance can be seen in the current research methodology literature where the term ‘mixed-methods’ (or its equivalent) may be routinely included in titles.

It is of course possible to collect qualitative data in text form and then translate it into numeric form for data analysis, but the mixed-method approach involves more than this relatively straightforward technique, putting an emphasis on exploiting the advantages of both methods, as Table 10 (*Features of different research procedures, Creswell, 2003*) suggests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUANTITATIVE METHODS</th>
<th>QUALITATIVE METHODS</th>
<th>MIXED METHODS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predetermined</td>
<td>Emerging methods</td>
<td>Both predetermined and emerging methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments based on questions</td>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>Both open- and closed-ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance data, attitude data, observation data and census data</td>
<td>Interview data, observation data, document data and audiovisual data</td>
<td>Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical analysis</td>
<td>Text and image analysis</td>
<td>Statistical and text analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10: Features of different research procedures (Creswell, 2003)*

The mixed-method approach offers some clear advantages to the researcher, one of the foremost being the ability to triangulate data, by using several methods of data collection in order to view human behaviour from different perspectives (Cohen, Marrion & Morrison, 2000). The triangulation may involve multiple data, methods, investigators and theories (Johnson and Christensen, 2004) In this way, the limitations of one method (or set of methods) may be cancelled out, avoiding a possible distorting influence from a single method and providing greater reliability of results. Another advantage is that the sequential use of the different methods permits one kind of approach, such as the use of quantitative data in the Baseline Survey, the first part of the present study, to inform and enhance the second part, the Longitudinal Studies, which employ a mainly qualitative approach to the interview data. It is the diversity of this approach to data gathering that lends breadth and flexibility to a research project and offers the reader both the validity and reliability of statistical procedures with the capacity to present human responses to the situation under review, and this was seen as an important consideration in the choice of a mixed-methods approach to the present study. Just as the study as a whole has adopted a
mix of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics orientations, so the methodology reflects a desire to view the research process through the twin lenses of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The contrast between the two methodologies is also apparent in approaches to the question of rigour in research. Evidence of rigour is essential if the readers of a research report are to accept its findings and, even more importantly, if they plan to base aspects of their own theory-making or research on earlier scholars’ work. However, the manner in which efforts to show rigour are put into practice is very different in quantitative and qualitative research because of the differing philosophical bases and purposes of the inquiry, and the type of data generated.

Approaches to rigour in quantitative research are generally speaking well-established and do not tend to provoke controversy. Validity in quantitative research is conceptualised in the following four main forms (Creswell, 2003), although given the widespread use of quantitative approaches, it should be pointed out that other approaches may extend, subdivide or relabel these forms.

*Statistical conclusion validity* concerns the accurate inferencing of a relationship between variables in correlational research while *internal validity* refers to the accuracy of inferencing a specifically causal relationship between variables. *External validity*, which as its name suggests looks outward from the study, focuses on the ability to accurately generalise from its results. *Construct validity* considers the way in which an abstract idea (or hypothetical construct) can be operationalised or accurately represented so as to allow it to be measured.

In general terms the threats to these types of validity can be dealt with in two ways. Firstly, the process for conducting the study must be explained in such detail that it is transparent enough to be readily replicated by other researchers. A second way of dealing with threats to validity (or ensuring that validity is intact) is through statistical analyses which report descriptive statistics for observations and measures used in empirical studies, and a range of more complex statistical procedures for experimental research where validity is proportionately more difficult to establish.

In addition, the question of the reliability of the instruments being used is important in quantitative research, particularly where an existing instrument is used in testing. This involves a close scrutiny of the previous research and its procedures and results so as to ensure that the results produced by the research procedures are valid and that the process can be readily understood and accurately replicated.
When we turn to qualitative methodology, the notion of validation however is highly contested and has undergone considerable revision at the hands of a number of research methodologists (Creswell, 2007). Initially, perhaps guided by the benefits of an association with traditional approaches, researchers such as LeCompte and Goetz (1982) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) looked for alternative terms which still reflected the four aspects of quantitative methodology, in Lazaraton’s terms ‘neat and tidy correlates’ (2002, p. 43). But with time, conceptualisations of validity became much more removed from earlier traditions as qualitative researchers like Lather (1993), Angen (2000), and Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) became concerned to find a conceptualisation based much more directly on the underlying principles and aims of the qualitative paradigm. Indeed Wolcott (1994), by substituting understanding in his approach, effectively made the concept of validity in research methodology an irrelevant issue. (See Table 11, Perspectives and terms used in qualitative validation, Creswell, 2007.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY</th>
<th>PERSPECTIVE</th>
<th>TERMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LeCompte &amp; Goetz (1982)</td>
<td>Use of parallel, qualitative equivalents to their quantitative counterparts in experimental and survey research</td>
<td>Internal validity, External validity, Reliability, Objectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln &amp; Guba (1985)</td>
<td>Use of alternative terms that apply to more naturalistic axioms</td>
<td>Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, Confirmability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisner (1991)</td>
<td>Use of alternative terms that provide reasonable standards for judging the credibility of qualitative research</td>
<td>Structural corroboration, Consensual validation, Referential adequacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lather (1993)</td>
<td>Use of reconceptualised validity in four types</td>
<td>Ironic validity, Paralogic validity, Rhizomatic validity, Situated/embedded voluptuous validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolcott (1994)</td>
<td>Use of terms other than ‘validity’, because it neither guides nor informs qualitative research</td>
<td>Understanding better than validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angen (2000)</td>
<td>Use of validation within the context of interpretive inquiry</td>
<td>Two types: ethical and substantive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whittemore, Chase &amp; Mandle (2001)</td>
<td>Use of synthesised perspectives of validity, organized into primary criteria and secondary criteria</td>
<td>Primary criteria: credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity, Secondary criteria: explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson &amp; St.Pierre (2005)</td>
<td>Use of a metaphorical, reconceptualised form of validity, as a crystal</td>
<td>Crystals: grow, change, alter, reflect externalities, refract within themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Perspectives and terms used in qualitative validation (Creswell, 2007)
Creswell himself, after considering these various approaches, presents his own view of the validation issue (2007, p.207). His focus is on the ‘accuracy’ of the study in the eyes of both observer and observed. This quality is represented through those strengths particular to qualitative research: extensive time in the field, the resulting detailed description, and the rapport which grows up between researcher and participants, and is implemented through a choice of validation strategies (Figure C, *Achieving validation through accuracy, adapted from Creswell, 2007*). Amongst the validation strategies cited by Creswell, persistent observation (through a series of interviews), clarifying researcher bias, rich thick description and triangulation have been employed in the current study.

![Figure C: Achieving validation through accuracy (adapted from Creswell, 2007)](image)

In terms of reliability in a qualitative study, Creswell places emphasis on effective recording and accurate transcribing of material, as well as a high level of intercoder agreement where multiple coders are used. In addition to these, the current study also made use of close checking and rechecking to ensure accuracy of transcription and transfer of results.

The multiple orientations and methodologies discussed in the preceding pages, together with other aspects of the research design, are shown in Table 12 (*Design characteristics of the study, after Creswell, 2003*). The table also shows how different aspects of the design, outlined in 4.2 above, apply to the different phases of the study, and this is discussed in greater detail below.
The first section of the study, the Baseline Survey, presents an overview of the features of the writing of the students in the cohort and so a sequential descriptive strategy, expressing the data in quantitative terms, was selected for this purpose. In quantitative research, surveys are often based on a sample of the population and the descriptive results are used to generalise or make claims about the wider population (Creswell, 2003, p.153). In this case however the cohort in itself represented a whole population and claims would not be generalisable outside that population, although the information gained could be used as a basis for further research or to provide a reference point in studies with similar groups, and to this extent, it has a value outside the study itself. In addition, the descriptive data emerging from this first analysis would provide a clear and detailed picture of how that population expressed itself in patterns of linguistic usage and these general patterns could then be applied to groups within the cohort or to individuals, firstly as a basis for comparison in the correlational procedures, and then for the comparative analyses accompanying the qualitative interview data which informed the Longitudinal Studies.

**Table 12: Design characteristics of the study (after Creswell, 2003)**

**Methodological approaches for each section**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESIGN ASPECTS</th>
<th>BASELINE SURVEY</th>
<th>LONGITUDINAL STUDIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Quantitative, sequential, descriptive and exploratory</td>
<td>Qualitative, sequential and exploratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mixed-method)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research strategy</td>
<td>Linguistic description and correlational inquiry</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection strategy,</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>setting and participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Written texts(examination essay scripts), biographical data and rating scores</td>
<td>Semi-structured personal interviews; group discussions; written texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data recording</td>
<td>Photocopies of scripts; electronic transcriptions and tabulation of data analysis results</td>
<td>Tape and digital audio-recordings; electronic text transcriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Manual and digital classification of data, tabulated numerically as frequencies; correlational and multivariate statistical analyses; text matching analyses</td>
<td>Text analyses; data transformation by coding by themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity procedures</td>
<td>Independent check of coding and transcriptions, statistical procedures; moderation of rating scores</td>
<td>Member checking of transcripts; external auditing of coding; thick description; comparison with academic results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students
It is the capacity to be applied in later phases of the research that determines the use of the term sequential to describe this strategy, and its benefits have been explained more fully earlier in the discussion of the methodology. In this case, for example, the linguistic analyses provided the data for the correlational procedures and so these two aspects of the first section could not run concurrently.

The correlational procedures were exploratory in nature; that is, they sought to find possible relationships between certain variables, based on the linguistic analyses, the biographical data which the students provided with their consent forms, and the rating of academic writing proficiency allotted to the examination scripts. Exploratory research, while testing theories or hypotheses in order to investigate how a phenomenon operates and so develop our understanding, is basically non-experimental in nature.

The sequential nature of the Longitudinal Studies section follows from its integration of quantitative data from the first section, but it is qualitative in its use of interview and group discussion material, and exploratory in that no predetermined position has been taken on what the data might reveal. This exploratory approach is reflected in the purposive sampling strategy employed in this phase, which allowed the researcher to take advantage of interesting, problematic or unexpected results emerging from previous analyses and submit them to further investigation. The ability to take decisions of this kind is one of the benefits of qualitative research which becomes an ‘ongoing and emergent process’ (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, p.222), not following a predetermined course but able to respond to data as they emerge.

These decisions about methodology are crucial to the design process and once they are made, other aspects of the design may fall into place more readily, as they are determined to some extent by the methodology as well as the aims of the study as defined in the research questions.

Research strategy
The choice of linguistic description as a research strategy for the Baseline Survey is a natural one given the aim of providing a picture of the written language of these first-year university students. The choice of features to be described was based on a corpus linguistic investigation by Biber et al. (1999) into the grammar of both written and spoken forms of English. In addition, the pilot study had indicated clause and sentence structures as an interesting point for investigation for the main research study. These two areas in turn determined the form of the description for this study.
Also in the Baseline Survey, a correlational strategy was used to explore how the data generated from the linguistic analyses might link with certain demographic factors. The particular advantage of a correlational strategy is its use of a multivariate approach to investigate relationships amongst a number of variables and possibly discover underlying common patterns.

The change to a qualitative approach in the longitudinal section allows the focus of the investigation to narrow and to bring in a procedural component in the form of case studies. The case study may be broadly described as a detailed description of a single unit, be it an individual, a group, an organisation or an event, which seeks to present in qualitative terms a holistic portrait of the phenomenon under scrutiny with ‘a high degree of explanatory richness’ through an intensive, in-depth examination (George and Bennett, 2005, p.31), eventually providing a greater understanding of the phenomenon. These qualities make it an appropriate complement to the product-oriented perspective of the previous section.

**Setting**

The setting of this study is the University of Auckland, a large and well-established New Zealand university, located in one of the country’s most important commercial, financial and cultural centres. The original settlement by Maori has been extended by successive waves of immigration over the past 150 years, resulting in an ethnically diverse urban population. The university has in addition experienced a large influx of overseas students, especially from Asian countries, and this is reflected in the student population on campus.

As an English-medium institution, therefore, in addition to local students from English-speaking backgrounds, the university accepts large numbers of second language students, enrolled either as domestic students with permanent residency or New Zealand citizenship, or as international students who wish to acquire a degree in the medium of English. This situation is familiar to most universities in English-speaking countries worldwide, and there have been considerable efforts to accommodate those students who arrive with varying degrees of English proficiency and frequently little cultural knowledge of their host country or the Western university environment.

In the University of Auckland, for example, there is a range of facilities designed to support students in their academic studies. On entry to the university, all students have their academic language proficiency
assessed through DELNA (Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment) and where scores indicate a need for language support of some kind, students are directed by the DELNA Language Advisor towards the appropriate facility. The English Language Enrichment facility or ELE, formerly known as ELSAC (English Language Self-Access Centre), offers help for second language students with an emphasis on the provision of online programmes to improve all areas of English academic language. Another facility, the Student Learning Centre, offers programmes and workshops for students of all language backgrounds and levels, with the aim of familiarising them with the conventions and expectations of the academic environment through workshops on study skills and other important aspects of university study, from undergraduate to post-graduate level. In addition, faculties and departments offer a range of linguistic and general academic support through ESOL and discipline-specific courses and workshops, as well as orientation and mentoring programmes.

Among the faculties that make up the university, the Business School represents one of the fastest-developing, offering undergraduate and post-graduate programmes, and attracting considerable numbers of local and overseas students. At the time of this study, two undergraduate pathways to a Business degree were available to students. On the one hand, the Bachelor of Commerce programme, a conventional Business degree constructed along fairly traditional lines, offered a wide range of subjects to choose from and several different majors. The second pathway, the Bachelor of Business and Information Management, which is the setting for the current study, was constructed along rather different lines. The students enrolled had a more restricted set of papers which they took as a cohort; specialisation into one of two majors began in the second year but otherwise the group worked on the same set of papers for their first two years and also came together for a team project in their final semester. There was also a strong emphasis on the integration of Information Technology (IT) into the programme at all levels, so that students graduated with not only a wide knowledge of Business subjects but also a deep understanding and practical experience of IT.

A predictable feature of all the courses in the Business School is their mix of students from a range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and this kind of mix can be seen in the participants in this study.

Participants: Baseline Survey, MGMT191 Cohort

The 39 students who took part in this study were part of a group of 46, the total cohort for the first semester in their second year. The class members had been together as a group from their first semester, apart from three students who had begun the programme in an earlier intake or had joined
the mid-year intake beginning in the second semester. There was accordingly a very noticeable group spirit among the students, a high level of morale and a visible pride in being part of what was a unique programme.

The high proportion of the cohort who agreed to take part was to a large degree due to the active encouragement of their lecturer in Management who generously and enthusiastically gave support to the study. Another factor affecting the excellent uptake was the willingness of the students to take on new and different challenges, which was one of the values promoted in the course.

The resulting group of participants was divided more or less equally (19:20) into first language speakers of English and second-language English speakers. These categorisations were provided by self-report from the participants on their Personal Information Form. The group was also divided almost equally into those educated in New Zealand and those who had done their schooling overseas but the two sets of criteria (first language and medium of schooling) by no means overlapped. An interesting feature of the group was the number who saw English as their first language while speaking one or more other languages including a home language. Equally there were several highly proficient ESL (English as a second language) students who saw their home language, rather than English, as their first language.

The students gave their permission for the researcher to access their Management (MGMT191) examination papers from the first semester of their first year and analyse them in a broad study of entry-level student writing. This was done on condition that the study would take a group approach, without investigating work on an individual basis, and that participants would be identified only through the information given in their brief personal details form. This information is tabulated in Table 13 (Baseline Survey, participants’ demographic data).
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

Table 13: Baseline Survey, participants’ demographic data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER IN BASELINE SURVEY</th>
<th>39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST LANGUAGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino/Tagalog</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino/Bisaya</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEARS OF ENGLISH-MEDIUM SCHOOLING</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No primary or secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary only</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years secondary only, no primary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 years secondary only, no primary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary and 4-5 years secondary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants: Longitudinal Studies, Focus Group

The members of the Focus Group which provided data for the case studies were drawn from these 39 students. In addition to taking part in the earlier phases on an anonymous basis, students were also invited to commit themselves on a personal and individual basis to a Focus Group, which would inform the Baseline Survey and provide richer data for the case studies. Participation involved agreement to be part of an initial group discussion, followed by personal interviews in their second and third years on their progress and their attitudes to the role of writing in their studies. They also agreed to allow access to their exam papers and results in first-year Management (MGMT191) and second-year Business (BUS292), together with their major, for each semester of their course over three years. Fourteen students, nearly one-third of the class, volunteered to take part in this phase. The more detailed information about these participants is given in Table 14 (Longitudinal Studies, participants’ demographic data). Participants are identified by false names, which were allotted on a random basis.
The members of the Focus Group were largely representative of the cohort as a whole in terms of gender (M 9:F 5) and first language (English 6:Other 8) and nine of the 14 had had full English-medium schooling. As their subsequent interviews and writing samples showed, at least three of those who came from non-English speaking backgrounds were in fact highly proficient in written English, as assessed by the writing raters, and were close to native speakers in their spoken English, as informally assessed by the researcher.

While the material from the group discussions and personal interviews provided qualitative data for the Longitudinal Studies, the actual case studies were restricted to seven (shown in Table14 by *). As a
result, while all Focus Group members were represented in the group discussions, not all were discussed on an individual basis.

**Data collection and recording**

**Baseline Survey, MGMT191 Cohort**

**Personal Information Form**

The Personal Information Form completed by all participants was a questionnaire which sought details on the students’ first and other languages and years of English-medium primary and secondary schooling. The student was identified, not by name but by student ID, in order to emphasise the important principle of anonymity. These sheets were later coded with the randomly selected examination script number to further distance the researcher from the individuals concerned.

The questionnaire as a data-collecting method can be classified as a highly explicit procedure (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989: 157) and, while imposing constraints on the participant’s ability to provide full responses, in this instance provided a quick and brief record of essential demographic data. A more detailed information-gathering procedure would have been likely to discourage potential participants, and would have brought a higher risk of participants being identified. So for the purposes of enlisting as many of the cohort as possible and eliminating identification problems, the information required was kept to a minimum. Another consideration was that the study was looking at the writing of the group as a whole, or possible sub-groups classified on the basis of language and/or schooling, so extra information was not relevant. Any more probing investigation of the participants’ backgrounds would be limited to the interviews with the Focus Group members.

**Examination scripts**

The choice of examination essay scripts as appropriate data for the research study was an important consideration. There were admittedly disadvantages in dealing with the relatively unplanned writing which occurs in the examination setting but the benefits of using authentic student writing in an authentic academic situation (the examination being a typical end-of-semester assessment procedure) were seen to outweigh this factor. After consideration of the range of scripts available for the linguistic analysis in the Baseline Survey, those from the Year 1 first semester Management paper were regarded as the most suitable for investigation because Management was studied by all students in some depth.
during the first year of the programme, and because the examination questions were relatively demanding of student writing skills, especially with their emphasis on the academic essay form and the need to incorporate source material drawn from readings. (It should be noted that the Year 2 final Business examination scripts were also used for linguistic analysis but only in respect of the Focus Group comparative study.)

For the reasons outlined above, it was decided to focus on the essay as the written text, and the examination essay as a means of ensuring the reliability of the data. The possibility of setting up an essay writing task specific to the research study was considered but rejected early on the grounds of difficulties with organisation and recruitment of participants, lack of authenticity and the problem of reactivity, where participants are influenced in their test performance simply by knowing they are taking part in a study (Ary et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2000; Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). While course assignments were also available for data collection, these were less likely to fully represent the students’ own writing, in that help with assignment work may often be sought from lecturers and university-based language support services, quite apart from any informal help that might be forthcoming from friends or private tutors.

The choice of the academic essay raised the question of the representativeness of this genre, but certain considerations favoured this decision. Given its use in a number of papers as the principal assessment method in Years 1 and 2, there was a strong emphasis on mastering this type of writing from early in the course. Admittedly, in the two majors of Information Management and Accounting, the academic essay was not widely used, especially in Year 3. However it continued to be an essential tool for assessing student learning in the other two majors, Human Resource Management and Marketing, throughout the programme.

The preference for examination over assignment essays raised a number of issues. Firstly, examination essays are produced under pressure and do not necessarily represent the students’ most polished writing, that is, their best writing performance. In particular, it has been argued (Kroll, 1990; Raimes, 1983; Zamel, 1983) that timed examination essays do not allow time for planning, drafting and revising in the way that assignments do. However, the evidence on this point is mixed and inconclusive (Elder et al., 2009). Secondly, in the specific case of the participants in this study, the writing might have been influenced to some extent by their access to the case study attached to the examination question paper. The risk of the writers incorporating memorised material also had to be taken into account in weighing
up the type of written text selected. On the other hand, rigorous examination security meant that there was little possibility of the final text being directly affected by help from external sources, and the examination essay represented a very important and common assessment tool, which provided a measure of validity for its choice. Furthermore, writing from sources is an important element of academic writing and has always been a substantial component in the course programme. On balance then, the examination essay was an appropriate written text for the purpose of the study. Since the papers were retained by the course lecturers for several months after the examinations, there was no immediate problem with their collection for the study.

The decision to use the examination papers having been made and the necessary consent given by the participants in their Consent Form, the examination answer booklets for the Management paper were collected from the examiner and photocopied and coded by an independent office administrator in the Management department. All identification of the papers by name or university ID, together with the marks awarded for the examination answers, was removed and a manuscript coding substituted on each script, in accordance with the undertaking for anonymity made by the researcher to the participants in the cohort study.

At this time, the administrator recorded the writers’ names and the coding given to each on a separate list kept in the department office. An exception to the preservation of anonymity was made in the case of the Focus Group participants, whose names and codes were noted down on a separate list so that the researcher could extract and examine these scripts as part of the qualitative investigation in the Longitudinal Studies. The photocopied scripts and Focus Group identification list were then collected by the researcher, so that the process of transcribing the handwritten scripts to a digital version could begin.

Thirty-seven handwritten scripts, comprising the three essay answers from the Year One first semester three-hour Management examination made up the bulk of the corpus for the first phase of this study. In addition, two students had joined the 2005 cohort after having sat their first Management examination in the previous year; hence, two 2004 Management scripts were also included in the corpus. The length of scripts for each writer ranged between 960 and 3230 words, with an average of 1443 words for each script and of 481 words for each of the three answers that made up the scripts. The length of the corpus created from these scripts was over 56,000 words. The content of the scripts was recorded on computer
by the researcher using Microsoft Word, and the electronic versions generated in this way became the corpus and data source for the quantitative section of the study.

Copies of the relevant examination question papers are given in the Appendix.

Longitudinal Studies: Focus Group

Focus Group discussion

The choice of a Focus Group approach for the group discussion was made after reference to the literature on this topic (Ary et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2000; Johnson and Christensen, 2004) and was an appropriate choice for this cohort as the Focus Group was a familiar concept to the group members through their Business studies. The purpose of such a group is to elicit opinions and attitudes on a selected topic, which might then be generalised to a larger group, and it is a widely-used marketing strategy. It differs from a more general group discussion in the sense that, to a large extent, it is the participants who determine the progress of the discussion since they react to one another, rather than to the interviewer: hence it is this interaction that produces the data (Cohen et al.). The term ‘focus’ also conveniently included the notion of a more in-depth approach in this part of the study.

The advantages of this method are that it is easier to organise than separate personal interviews, the small-group setting can provide a relatively informal atmosphere, members can respond to and be stimulated by the contributions of others in the group, and its semi-structured format allows the researcher to extend the discussion and probe more deeply into comments made by members of the group. However, the skill of the moderator (in this case, the researcher) is important to ensure that discussion is kept on track but not closed down, and that the questions provided to participants are carefully composed to elicit useful information. One should also keep in mind that the Focus Group views may not be completely representative of the larger group (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). In the case of this study, it should be noted that, although the composition of the Focus Group was not purposive (a normal requirement), in fact the students who volunteered to take part did form a surprisingly representative group, relative to the whole cohort.

The discussion with members of the Focus Group was a useful initial step in the qualitative data collection and, following on from the Personal Information questionnaire, helped to introduce the researcher to the issues that were of concern to the students. This would in turn throw some light on
the factors that influenced their examination essay writing for the Year 1, Semester 1 Management paper. In addition, and as noted above, their opinions and attitudes might well reflect those of many in the cohort, especially since, as the demographic data shows, the group members were representative of the larger cohort in gender, range of proficiency and cultural background. The discussion also served to introduce the researcher to the members of the Focus Group on a more informal and relaxed basis, and provided a way of encouraging the members to consider the question of their writing and the role it played in their studies, in preparation for the more detailed personal interviews that would follow.

The group discussions were divided up into three separate hour-long sessions, both to accommodate the students’ very full study and part-time employment demands and to ensure that the groups were small (three to six members), informal and unintimidating. They were held in a pleasant departmental conference room on campus, and the discussion was preceded by refreshments and some general conversation. A fourth group discussion was held at a separate campus because in the first two years of study for this cohort the programme lectures were presented in two separate venues. The Focus Group from this second campus consisted of only two students. Since they were part of a quite small number on this campus, they were well acquainted with each other, which produced a very positive atmosphere. The participants had previously received by email the list of five broad questions to consider before the discussion took place. The transcribed discussions were returned to Focus Group members for checking and amending as required but no changes were requested.

Personal interviews

The personal interviews with the Focus Group members were included in the study to provide an opportunity to talk to participants on a one-to-one basis, to draw out opinions and attitudes on the role of writing in their studies and academic achievement, to hear of personal experiences which had affected their writing and study, and to encourage a wide-ranging discussion from which unforeseen but relevant points might emerge.

Personal interviews are a useful data-gathering activity, as a source of background and contextual information, and of the participant’s opinions and experiences on the topic, presented in their own words. Interviews make a valuable substitute for, and supplement to, direct observation and, like a Focus Group session, may elicit unanticipated useful data. An important aspect to consider in the choice of a personal interviews as a research strategy, however, is the risk of reactivity where the participant restricts or falsifies the information given (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). To some extent, this is
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

reduced where the interviews are of a reasonable length and where they are repeated over a period of time, in this case two years, as the researcher can refer back to earlier discussion on the topic. Another factor mitigating this problem is the researcher’s evolving judgement of the interviewees’ truthfulness and fair representation of their opinions and experiences, and the interviewees’ knowledge and trust in the researcher. Finally, the use of multiple data sources, both qualitative and quantitative, may provide a form of cross-reference and triangulation.

An important aspect of the personal interviews was to follow up on comments and references from the initial group discussion and earlier interviews, and in preparation for each interview, the researcher went back to previous transcripts to seek out such comments and references. The final list of questions, which the participant was able to study for between five and ten minutes prior to the interview, therefore normally included questions specific to each interviewee as well as standard questions for all, such as whether participants had observed changes and developments in their writing or their perspectives on writing since the previous interview. All of the data obtained in this way would serve to add depth to the picture gained from the results of the quantitative analyses. The venue for the interviews was either the researcher’s office or an interview room on the main campus, and each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes.

The same process as for the group discussions of recording, transcribing and checking was followed for the personal interviews, and similarly there were no significant amendments requested. At the conclusion of each interview the participant received a small payment in acknowledgement of the time taken and the contribution made to the inquiry.

Staff interviews

The approach of staff themselves to their students’ writing was an important element in the programme. Lecturing staff on the programme had already been very helpful and forthcoming in informal discussions leading up to the beginning of the study, and it is doubtful whether the project could have gone ahead without their support, encouragement and insights into the writing practices of the students. Accordingly, in addition to these informal meetings, the decision was made in the third year of the study to formalise the discussions by scheduling an interview with two of the lecturers closely involved with students in the Management papers, together with a third lecturer representing Marketing studies, and fourthly the overall administrator of the programme. One factor that made this timing particularly appropriate was that the programme had over the previous three years undergone
considerable changes: in venue, in staff and in the programme design as a whole, and these changes and the circumstances that gave rise to them could be taken into consideration in the interview discussions. The staff interviews are a useful example of how the study may evolve over the course of time as ‘emerging issues’ (Creswell, 2003, p.17), that is, new or unforeseen considerations, become more important.

The staff interviews took place in the staff member’s office at the end of the semester and at a time convenient to each. Each interview took between 45 minutes and an hour and was recorded, transcribed and checked in the manner described for student interviews and the Focus Group discussions. One interviewee had requested, in the course of the interview, that a small section be removed, and this was done in the transcript version and brought to his attention. Otherwise no amendments were requested.

In addition to the four staff interviews, an informal discussion was carried out with the programme librarian, who had played a significant part in developing an innovative online course for students in referencing from sources. She described her role in ensuring that students on the programme had the understanding of the role of using source material in their work, and the requisite knowledge to access both material prepared for them and whatever they wished to discover for themselves, by informed and skilled use of the relevant databases. This interview was not recorded, though informal notes were made, some of which have been incorporated into the case study.

**Triangulation**

As was earlier discussed under Methodological approach, triangulation is a more complex procedure in a qualitative study. Qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews, necessarily present a subjective view of events that may be distorted by time, deficiencies in an interviewee’s memory, selective memory of events or individual perceptions of what actually occurred (Mackey and Gass, 2005, p.174). For this reason, qualitative studies may use quantitative data to expand the material from interviews and provide greater accuracy and credibility to the findings. As well, this method may also point out apparent contradictions between the interviewee’s perceptions and the actual events. In this study, in order to increase the ‘accuracy’ (Creswell, 2007) of interpretation of the Focus Group discussions and personal interviews, the data pool was extended to incorporate the following quantitative data: the raters’ scores for academic writing skills; the marks for the MGMT191
examination papers; and the analysis of linguistic features in the Year 1 (MGMT191) and Year 2 (BUS292) exam writing.

Security procedures

The session where the researcher spoke to the class members, explained the purpose of the study and invited their participation was the single contact she had with the whole group, and the study was set up in this way in order to demonstrate the principles of anonymity and a group approach in the study. Students were protected from identification by the use of manuscript IDs, so that once data had been coded, there would be no need for the researcher to refer to back to the names of class members. The investigation of the written work in the quantitative analyses was to be of the group as a whole, or of certain sub-groups according to first language and educational background, but not of individuals. In order to reassure students, it was important to make this principle clear and the procedures transparent, as the anonymous nature of any involvement was seen to be an important factor in the successful recruitment of participants to the project.

At this session, several items were distributed to members of the class. These consisted of: Participant Information Sheets, explaining the purpose and procedures of the study and conditions of participation, and providing details of Ethics Committee approval, supervision for the study and contact details for the researcher; Consent Forms, which detailed the participants’ rights and conditions of participation in the study; and Personal Information Forms, asking for identification by student ID only, and demographic information on language background and years of English-medium schooling.

The signed Consent Forms and Personal Information Forms were collected by the researcher at the end of the lecture or returned to her later in her office on campus, and then passed on to an independent office administrator, who prepared a coding list for the whole cohort in order to code the photocopied examination scripts. The coding list was retained on files in the department administration office, while the Focus Group names and codes were forwarded directly to the researcher and retained securely on her work and home computer files. When the office administrator subsequently left her position in the department, the files were forwarded to the researcher for safe-keeping on her home computer.

Following electronic transcription, the consent and personal information forms, copies of the original examination scripts (or photocopies thereof) and their hard copy transcripts, the audiotapes and hard
copy transcripts of the Focus Group discussions and personal interviews, and emails confirming that they had been checked, were stored in a lockable filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office.

The digital recordings of the discussions and interviews, and the electronic versions of the examination essay scripts, discussions and interviews were stored on the researcher’s home computer and on her office computer. Access to both computers was by password only.

Quantitative data analyses: Baseline Survey

Sources and reference works
A substantial proportion of the data analysis listed in this section was based on work by Biber and his colleagues, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan who carried out, over a period of six years in the 1990s, a highly intensive corpus-based study of English, resulting in the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (1999). Using a 40 million-word corpus of spoken and written texts drawn from four principal subcorpora: British and American conversation, contemporary novels, newspapers articles, and academic books and research articles, the research team categorised grammatical features in the corpus texts by means of factor analysis, according to the four relevant registers of conversation, fiction, news and academic prose.

It is from the register of academic prose that Biber (2006, p.15-18) subsequently extracted a list of 54 grammatical features especially common in academic prose, covering syntactic, lexical and rhetorical items, whose identification forms the main purpose of the analyses in the Baseline Survey.

The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English also served as the main reference source in this study for the large number of grammatical decisions that had to be made in the process of categorising the data. Where there appeared to be no determination of the problem in the Longman volume, (though this was predictably rare), reference was then made to the Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartik (1985) Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language, which despite its different approach was generally able to shed light on some more obscure grammatical issues. The areas covered are shown in Table 15 (Analyses of MGMT191 Cohort examination scripts).
**OBJECT OF ANALYSIS** | **TYPE OF ANALYSIS**
--- | ---
LEXIS | Word frequencies
SYNTAX | Clause and sub-clause types
 | Sentence structures
 | Parts of speech
COMBINED | Features common to academic prose (Biber)

*Table 15: Analyses of MGMT191 Cohort examination scripts*

**Lexical analyses**

To obtain data for the lexical analyses, the student scripts were submitted to MP 2.2 (Barlow, 2003) so that frequencies for individual words and word classes could be calculated. In the pre-editing stage, the examination essay answers from the original handwritten scripts were transcribed into their electronic version as a set of Word documents. The texts were then cleared of all extraneous material, such as word length counts, script coding and other identification, and all spelling errors were corrected to standard forms. After being reduced to a single continuous text, the newly-created corpus was converted from a Word document to plain text ASCII encoding. Once this task was completed, it was possible to upload the corpus to MP 2.2 and then calculate frequencies for the whole corpus with relative ease and speed.

**Syntactic analyses**

**Clause and sentence structure analyses**

Following the transcription of the examination essay answers to electronic format, as explained above, the students’ individual texts were printed out in hardcopy versions, to be classified according to clause groups and sub-groups (Table 16, *Classification of clause types*). The classification of clauses was both a necessary preliminary to isolating from the student corpus some of the features of academic prose that were mentioned earlier, and a requirement for the description of students’ use of clauses that became part of the correlational inquiry. The classification process was carried out manually because there appeared to be no electronic software available capable of undertaking this somewhat complex task. This process, then, was a critical step in preparation for the following syntactical analyses.
Once the classifications had been determined, colour-coded for ease of identification and recorded on hardcopy versions of the students’ scripts, they were transferred to the electronic versions. This two-stage recording process allowed a recursive approach to codings in the first stage, as reconsideration often illuminated previous decisions which could thus be easily amended. It also served as a convenient method for making a full check of the codings before their transfer to computer, and provided a back-up version for greater security of data. The coded electronic version could then be sent by email to a colleague with expertise in this field for the purpose of checking. No formal measures of interrater coding were seen as necessary for this process, as the check rater examined all the scripts. Final amendments were made on the basis of his corrections, and the corpus was ready for the frequency counts.

For this part of the process, figures were calculated for each student’s script and recorded both on hard copies and electronically for all the principal clause types and sub-types. The clause frequencies were calculated for students individually, so that at a later stage the two upper and lower groups could be identified for use in the correlation process. As with all the analyses in this phase, extensive checking took place and the final frequency totals were thoroughly checked against page-by-page totals to ensure accuracy.

At this point, the sentence structure analysis could be undertaken, using the data from the clause analysis. This analysis was not part of the Hinkel (2002) investigation nor of the Biber (2006) list of common grammatical features and no instance of a similar investigation could be found in the literature. However, it was seen as a potentially valuable addition to the research, providing an
opportunity to investigate whether less experienced and more experienced writers might show different sentence structure patterns. Information was recorded on these sentence patterns, broken down into T-units and then into clauses. This provided data on how many clauses were used to extend each T-unit beyond the main clause, whether the main clause was preceded by subordinate finite or non-finite clauses, and what mix of finite and non-finite clauses was used, as shown in the following example.

<c NFC>Having said this,

<c MC>Tesco’s new culture had been fashioned

<c AC>so that new employees feel welcomed,

and

<c AC>can be easily incorporated into the business strategy. [MS18]

After a thorough checking for accuracy, the raw data were totalled for each individual student on the hardcopy version of the script and transferred in electronic summary to an Excel spreadsheet.

With the completion of the sentence structure analysis, the classification of clause sub-types began. Two categorisations of non-finite clauses were carried out, one according to form which identified the four groups: infinitive with to, bare infinitive, -ing and –ed, and a second more complex categorisation by grammatical function (after Biber et al., 1999) which provided a greater depth of analysis. As in the previous analysis, each classification was colour-coded on the hard copy of the script, the frequencies of each classification calculated and then, after rechecking, recorded on the appropriate summary section of the electronic version, and on the Excel spreadsheet.

Part of speech analysis

The next analysis turned from clauses and sentence structures to word classes, categorising the words of the text according to their part of speech (PoS). For this process, software was available through the Wmatrix website at Lancaster University. The programme offers several corpus analysis tools in addition to PoS tagging: frequency lists, concordancing, tagging for semantic domains and extraction of n-grams. All of these were used on occasion to complement other analyses; however the principal use of this analysis tool was the tagging of word classes in this first phase of the study.

The ASCII version of the corpus, prepared for the lexical analyses, was also used for this procedure. Once submitted to the Lancaster Wmatrix website for processing, the automatic tagging was relatively swift
and the text was returned with each word classified by part of speech according to the CLAWS tagset C7. However automatic taggers do not claim complete accuracy, and manual checking is needed to ensure the results generated are completely accurate (Biber, Conrad and Reppen, 1998; Grant and Ginther, 2000; Hunston, 2002).

Working with the tagged corpus revealed a number of errors and some deficiencies in the classification system which led to an intensive and somewhat time-consuming period of checking and rechecking the corpus over a number of weeks. Some of the major deficiencies, such as making no distinction between the interrogative and relative uses of who, whom, which etc; between that as complementizer and as relative pronoun; and between auxiliary and lexical forms of be, do and have were later remedied in the CLAWS tagset C8 but since the PoS tagging still operated with the C7 tagset, these distinctions had to be manually inserted into the corpus. Common errors in tagging included confusion between genitive ‘s and the contracted form of it is; tagging of preposition use as adverbial where the word had both functions; faulty tagging of verb tenses, especially with weak Past Simple and Perfect forms; confusion with to preceding a noun and as an infinitive marker; and difficulties recognising ellipted structures. In addition several new tags had to be created to distinguish different grammatical functions for words, for example, the –ing form, variously used as part of a verb, as a noun and as an adjective, as the features identified in the Biber list required this degree of refinement in the categorisation.

While this prolonged, reiterative and frequently tedious process of checking and manually correcting or amending caused unpredicted delays in completing the analyses, it had the advantage of ensuring a very close familiarity with the corpus. Moreover, while the time used on checking seemed unnecessarily long, manual tagging of the corpus would have been a great deal longer.

When the revision was completed, the file was put through MonoConc Pro 2.2 known as MP2.2 (Barlow, 2003) which is a corpus and concordancing software tool. This necessitated a change of operating systems from Mac to PC as MP2.2 runs only on Windows 95 (or higher). While the main purpose of this programme was to supply frequencies for PoS categories, an additional valuable feature was the combined word/tag and regular expression searches that could be carried out to explore collocations and phrases in combination with a specific grammatical function e.g. certain followed by a preposition. This was particularly useful in completing some of the items in Biber’s list of features of academic prose.
The large number of PoS categories generated by the refined version of the C7 tagset -- over 160 in all – meant that calculating frequencies was not entirely straightforward, as a check on the accuracy of tagging for each word in the frequency list had to be built into the calculation process. Cross-checking was carried out by taking the total figures for each word class and comparing them with the subtotals to ensure that both gave the same final figure. The PoS frequencies were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet, in preparation for use in the features list which gave a picture of the cohort’s use of language.

Features of academic writing

The earlier clause and PoS analyses supplied a substantial amount of the data needed to fill out the list of common features of academic prose. The main headings for this list are shown in Table 17 (Principal categories among the most common features of academic prose, Biber, 2006) below. The only items in the original list of 54 not included in the present study were anaphoric expressions and lexical bundles. It seemed likely that the use of anaphoric reference might be limited in such a short text and, in view of the examination demands for clarity and explicit reference, the identification and analysis of lexical bundles was likely to be time-consuming and deserved a more in-depth approach than this study allowed. These deletions reduced the total to 52 items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>SUB-CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns and noun phrases</td>
<td>15 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives and adjective phrases</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs and verb phrases</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs and adverbials</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent clause features</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other features</td>
<td>12 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total items</td>
<td>54 – 2 = 52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Principal categories among the most common features of academic prose (Biber, 2006)

There appears to be a stronger emphasis on syntactic aspects in the principal categories noted here but in fact the individual items within these categories show a high lexical content, so that the analysis is very much a combined syntactic-lexical one.
Where data from the clause and PoS analyses did not supply the information needed for the features in the list, recourse to MP2.2 provided a means of accessing what was required by means of word, PoS and regular expression searches. This was particularly helpful when looking for phrases, such as the possibility/value/problem of, where the search could be expressed as a/the + NOUN + of. If the results included some phrases outside the category, a manual check eliminated any unnecessary forms.

The data from the completed list represented the basis for the linguistic description of the cohort’s writing, together with comparisons made between and within categories of features.

To provide a broad indication of how experienced academic writers might use these features, the description of the MGMT191 data was supplemented, where possible, with results from the LSWE survey. It was clear from the outset of the design process that no statistical comparisons of significant differences between the two corpora would be possible, since the LGSWE results were often presented in graph form, and exact values could not always be determined. Moreover, the MGMT191 linguistic analyses were intended as the basis for a descriptive, not comparative, study.

**Correlation studies**

The groundwork carried out in the earlier quantitative analyses provided the data for the correlational analyses, which were relatively straightforward in comparison. Following the completion of the syntactic analyses, the average frequency data for each student was used to carry out two separate correlational studies, one for clause types and one for sentences structures.

In each case the syntactical data for each student was combined with his or her biographical data and a correlational analysis performed, producing results in the form of two separate correlational matrices. These were then further analysed to establish what significant correlations might be found, relating to language background and the use of individual clause types or sentence structures. The earlier analyses had also identified a group of students (the LEMS or Limited English-Medium Schooling group) with a lower level of language proficiency, relating to their exposure to English medium-schooling and particular attention was paid to their results. In addition, an exploratory aspect of the correlational study lay in the search for any interesting and unexpected results that might emerge from the analysis.
Measures of conciseness in writing

Biber (1988, p.193), in a multi-dimensional study of textual variation, found that certain features tend to co-occur where a text has a dense packaging of information, leading to a concise writing style. He identified these as: a high rate of use of nouns; a high rate of use of prepositional phrases; a high rate of use of attributive adjectives; a high average word length; a high percentage level in the type/token ratio (TTR).

The extent to which the examination essays of the students and the academic prose of the LSWE (Longman Spoken and Written English) corpus could be compared, however, was impacted by two methodological concerns. The first was the restricted opportunity for students to consider conciseness, by revising their work while writing under timed examination conditions. However, it could be equally argued that conciseness might be foremost in students’ minds as they wrote, precisely because they sought to present all the essential information to complete the task within the restricted time. Secondly, this study could not replicate the complex computer-based techniques of the original study. This was an issue which applied to the whole study and the decision had earlier been taken to follow the methodology of the original as closely as practicable with the intention of using the LSWE findings as a reference point but acknowledging the impossibility of drawing direct valid comparisons between the two. Accordingly, the limitations were acknowledged but not seen to outweigh more positive considerations.

Hence, an analysis was carried out on to identify the five features of conciseness in the scripts of the cohort and establish a rate per 1000 words for each feature. The lexical and syntactic analyses yielded data on the nouns, prepositional phrases and attributive adjectives, the average word length and the type-token ratio (TTR).

Generating valid findings from the TTR was problematic, since the corpus was, of its very nature, highly repetitive. Nearly forty students addressed the same three examination questions which were based on a single topic from the Tesco Case Study. Since the writing practices of individual writers also varied considerably, taking the first 400 words from the corpus, as Biber (1988, p.239) suggests, could not be applied since this might well have generated unrepresentative and extremely distorted results. An alternative method, such as D (Malvern, Richards, Chipere and Duran, 2004), might have produced a more meaningful result but this was not available to Biber at the time of the 1988 study which produced these measures, and was not used in this study. Instead, the TTR for each individual writer’s text was
calculated by taking the first 400 words of each students’ first essay in the MGMT191 corpus and submitting it to MP 2.2 which returned a calculation of the types and tokens in each short text. All 39 were then averaged out, to produce an average figure for the cohort as a single unit, to denote the extent of lexical variation.

Text-matching analyses

The role of the Tesco Case Study

The questions for the MGMT191 examination all related to the Tesco Case Study which the students had studied in class, and a copy of the Case Study was attached to the question paper itself so that students could access it for information in their examination answers.

In order to investigate whether the student writing style had been influenced by the Case Study, the text was subjected to the same lexical and syntactic analyses and identification of features of academic writing as the cohort corpus. In this way, comparisons could be made between patterns of writing in the two corpora.

The use of source material from the Tesco Case Study

The quantitative analysis which examined students’ use of source material applied the text-matching programme, Turnitin, to the student writing and to the Tesco Case Study. The student writing was submitted to Turnitin, which identified matches with the Case Study by isolating and highlighting any matching strings of three or more words. This facilitated a further manual review of the student texts for examples of ‘patchwriting’ (Howard, 1995), identifying where material from the Tesco Case Study had been incorporated, with minor changes, into the student writer’s own work. Following this process, the number of words borrowed from the Tesco material could be calculated as a percentage of the total word count for the student material. This analysis was applied both to the MGMT191 corpus as a whole, and to the individual texts of several Focus Group members.

Qualitative data analyses: Longitudinal Studies

Focus group discussions and personal interviews

While the statistical analyses described above made use of digital data analysis programmes, the qualitative analyses of texts followed another path. Digital analysis programmes such as nVivo which are
designed for use with qualitative data, make the process of comparing themes across different sets of data relatively straightforward. This kind of analysis for the Focus Group discussions and student interviews was rejected, however, in favour of a manual examination, as the purpose of the case studies was not so much to show commonalities of experience as the variety of individual responses and understandings. In addition, the discussion section following the Focus Group case studies offered an opportunity to note any common themes emerging from the interviews which had not already been touched upon in the group discussions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE AND TIMING OF DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS</th>
<th>DISCUSSION &amp; INTERVIEW CONTENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group discussions Year 2, Semester 2</td>
<td>Expectations on entry about writing at university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differences between school and university writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Features of academic writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sources for acquiring an academic style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problems with writing for university level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interviews Year 2, Semester 2</td>
<td>Family background and language experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prioritising academic writing acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Features of academic writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sources for acquiring an academic style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major problems experienced with writing for course tasks and solutions to these problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effectiveness of academic writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic writing knowledge gained so far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3, Semester 1</td>
<td>Changes in approach to writing from previous year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in academic writing style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of writing in academic success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Models of academic writing e.g. from reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process of writing an assignment/exam essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conciseness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3, Semester 2</td>
<td>Academic writing knowledge gained over degree course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sources of improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of own style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future use of academic writing knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Content of group discussion and interview questions

The final number of case studies was limited to seven so that, while not claiming to offer a representative range of student experience, they could effectively provide ‘insights into the complexities of particular cases in their particular contexts’ (Johnson, 1993, p.172). The timing of the interviews and the broad content of the questions are shown in Table 18 (Content of group discussion and interview questions).
The general intention of the interview questions was to draw out the students about their understanding of academic writing, the development of their writing skills and their perceptions of writing as a factor in their academic progress. The group discussion followed a semi-structured pattern where the same questions were asked for each group. Where interesting or significant points arose, they were followed up with supplementary questions and the LEMS group discussion included extra questions related to their experiences as second language students. Similarly the personal interviews presented a standard set of four to six questions, with follow-up questions referring back to comments in the current or previous interviews and the group discussion. In this way, emerging individual themes could be followed up and, at the same time, perceptions of progress could be monitored by including standard questions on the acquisition of writing skills in each interview.

Each set of student interviews was manually analysed for significant or repeated themes and transferred to a summary sheet according to the stage (Year 2, Semester 2, for example). Comments on related topics were organised together and then summarised under the chronological headings to show the progress of their academic writing experiences. These notes were then written up as case studies, using the structure shown in Table 19 (Structure of case studies) and completed with a brief discussion of key themes emerging from the analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURAL ELEMENT</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Summary of significant themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Family, language and schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of experiences by years</td>
<td>Problems and solutions, sources for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic data and writing analyses</td>
<td>Raters’ scores; analysis and comparison of Years 1 and 2 exam essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Key themes and summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: Structure of case studies

Focus Group comparative analyses

A comparative analysis of the changes between Focus Group members’ writing over their first two years was carried out by examining the first 1000 words from their MGMT191 examination scripts in their first semester of the first year, and the first 1000 words from their Business (BUS292) paper scripts in the
second semester of Year 2. The first part of the analysis looked at the broader aspects of structure and language, and a micro-analysis looked at the lexical, syntactic and conciseness features described in 4.2.6. In this way, some quantitative data could be combined with the qualitative observations on structure and language to give a more comprehensive coverage of changes in their writing development.

**Staff interviews**

As with the students’ group discussions and personal interviews, the staff interviews followed a semi-structured pattern in that each staff member was asked the same set of six questions but encouraged to expand on points of interest or significance. Where such points arose, they were often followed up with supplementary questions from the researcher. The questions for the staff were based on several of the main themes that had emerged from the analysis of the student material (Table 20: *Staff interview questions*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAFF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is a proficient writing style critical to the BBIM course? Does BBIM place more emphasis than most Business courses on writing style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What features and qualities do you look for in student writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is the best way of getting the desired writing skills from students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What seem to be students’ greatest problems in achieving an appropriate writing style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How do your expectations of writing style change when you are marking examination work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What features of the academic writing style would be useful in future employment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 20: Staff interview questions*
After transcription, the responses of the four staff members were transferred to a summary sheet, according to the question topics, and areas of consensus were identified. Where staff members diverged in their opinions or where specific points were noted by any one respondent, these were also noted on the summary sheet. These notes were then written up under the question topics, and a brief discussion of key themes completed the account of the staff responses.

3.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter discussed the methodology of the study. It began with a brief outline of the Pilot Study and the ways in which its findings influenced the design of the main study.

The subsequent description of the main study design covered the preliminary aspects of the choice of methodological approach and research strategy. The chapter then discussed the context for the study and continued by explaining the steps involved in collecting and analysing the data for the quantitative and qualitative sections of the study.
Chapter 4: Quantitative Results

4.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter discusses the results of linguistic analyses of the academic writing of the MGMT191 cohort and, where the relevant data is available, compares them with established features of the mature academic style identified by corpus-based research (Biber, 2006, p.14). These results are also compared with data from an analysis of the Tesco Case Study to which students had access while writing their examination answers.

Results are also given for several correlational analyses exploring the relationship between language status and English-medium schooling on the one hand, and students’ academic writing patterns and writing proficiency on the other.

4.2 Background to the Baseline Survey of student academic writing

Increasingly refined technology for linguistic analysis combined with the ability to access both broad and specialist corpora of academic writing has encouraged research over the past decade into ever more wide-ranging and detailed investigations into academic style. On a much smaller scale it has also allowed teacher-researchers to examine the writing of specific groups of student writers for pedagogical purposes, as this study sets out to do.

It may be argued that the most influential study of this kind so far in the field of English, because of its extensive scope and its attention to minute linguistic details of language use, is the corpus-based work undertaken by Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan. The findings of this project formed the basis for the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (1999), discussing data on texts from four registers: fiction, news, conversation and academic prose in a corpus of over 40 million words. This publication was followed by Biber’s (2006) discussion of the language of academia, across spoken and written registers. One especially relevant research outcome here was the identification of grammatical features characteristic of written academic prose, based on the 1999 Longman study of the academic writing register (Biber, 2006, pp.15-17).
The features identified in this way have been taken as the basis for the analyses in this section of the current study, the linguistic description of the cohort’s first-semester examination writing. A further analysis, extending Biber’s 2006 examination of clausal aspects of university writing, has provided more detailed data about clause use and sentence structures in the current study.

It is clear then that the current study leans heavily on the approach undertaken in the work of Biber and his colleagues, acknowledging their groundwork in the analysis of academic writing and, in particular, the identification of grammatical features of the written academic prose register that students might be expected to develop during their course of study. At the same time, it will also be clear that this study in no way attempts to replicate the breadth and depth of the Biber research but rather focuses on a small number of participants and a limited quantity of written material.

Hence, the results of the much larger corpus assembled by the Longman research team may provide an interesting and illuminating reference point for the MGMT191 data but the difference in size between the two corpora and the lack of specific figures (as a number of results were presented in graph form) necessarily limits the opportunity to undertake statistical comparisons between the two corpora, and would moreover defeat the descriptive purpose of this study.

A second important point to be borne in mind is the possible impact of the time factor on the writing produced in these two corpora. While the student writing represents the outcome of a timed process under examination conditions, the academic prose of the LSWE (Longman Spoken and Written English) corpus results from untimed writing carried out under markedly different circumstances. As the Review of the Literature has suggested, the relative influences of these two sets of temporal conditions has not yet been firmly established, although L2 writers appear more likely to be directly influenced by time limitations than their L1 counterparts. In the current study, variation established between the two corpora in their use of specific features, and in the construction of conciseness (§4.3 below) may reflect timing influences.

In this discussion the term LSWE (Longman Spoken and Written English) is applied to the corpus generated from the selected material, and the published volume of results (Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English, 1999) is referred to by the abbreviation LGSWE. In both cases, figures are provided for the academic prose register, apart from instances where only general figures were given.
and no distinction was made amongst the four registers studied. Such instances are explicitly signalled when they appear in the present study.

4.3 Conciseness in academic writing

The terms *economy in writing* and *information density* are often used to describe conciseness in written texts and achieving this quality may be one of the most problematic aspects of acquiring an academic style. The purpose of academic writing is to transmit information as accurately, precisely and explicitly as possible but within an acceptable length. This difficult balancing act may be resolved by careful selection of ideas, or by thoughtful structuring in the expression of those ideas, or ideally both. However, student interviews revealed that structuring strategies for producing conciseness were rarely considered. Instead, the students tended to focus on content by selecting ideas carefully, creating outlines and drafts, removing the more irrelevant or repetitive material and sometimes cutting out whole sections of work in order to keep within the set word limit.

Biber’s (1988) multi-factorial study of differences between speech and writing showed that certain features co-occurred at high frequencies to produce, in his terms, ‘... [the] high informational focus and careful integration of information in a text’ (p.104), which is characteristic of news reporting and even more so of academic texts. These five textual features were identified as a high rate of use of nouns, prepositional phrases and attributive adjectives, together with word length and the type/token ratio (TTR). However, the production of a concise style through such features may be more difficult to achieve in examination writing, where the time limit is likely to exert an influence on students’ composing practices. On the other hand, since those items are also specific features of academic writing noted by Biber (2006, pp.15-18), a tendency towards their use may already be apparent even in exam writing.

Students’ use of the five features is examined as part of the Baseline Survey in §5 (*Students’ use of features of conciseness*).

4.4 Results of the Baseline Survey

From the original list of 54 features established by Biber (2006), two features, anaphoric reference and lexical bundles, were eliminated early from the research design. As earlier noted, anaphoric reference was seen as likely to be too labour-intensive for the manual analysis required, while preliminary trials to identify lexical bundles produced figures too low to generate useful results. The possible use of material
reproduced verbatim from the Tesco Case Study was also a consideration in this latter instance. Both of these features constitute extremely interesting areas for inquiry, but the constraints mentioned above prevented their inclusion in this study.

As the analyses of the remaining 52 items progressed, it became clear that certain other features should also be removed from the analyses on the basis of their limited occurrence or their requirement for highly intensive scrutiny. These items are listed in Table 21 (Features not included in the MGMT191 analysis).

In addition, in evaluating students’ use of characteristic features of the academic register, difficulties arose because of the relative sizes of the two corpora and the manner in which results are given in the Longman Grammar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>ITEMS ANALYSED BUT NOT REPORTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns and noun phrases</td>
<td>Total number of noun phrases with modifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noun phrases with multiple post—modifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Binomial noun and/or noun phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs and adverbials</td>
<td>Purpose and concessive adverbials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent clause features</td>
<td>Abstract nouns + of + -ing clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other features</td>
<td>Stance nouns + of phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepositions + which in relative clauses with adverbial gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selected co-ordination tags – and so on, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anaphoric reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lexical bundles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Features not included in the MGMT191 analysis

A number of LGSWE results for word classes are presented in approximate, rather than precise, figures. That is, some word class results given in the Longman Grammar are shown in graphs or tables where the symbols relate to occurrences per million or millions. This form of representation of the LGSWE results also applied to all the dependent clause features, and a decision was consequently taken to report these clausal data simply through comparisons within the MGMT191 corpus.

In addition, the lack of precise statistical data consequent upon the presentation of some LGSWE results in graph form therefore removed the opportunity to carry out more advanced statistical analyses and in
particular, to calculate significant differences between aspects of writing in the two corpora. Hence, the tabulated comparisons that are presented in this section of the Baseline Survey results should be seen as broad indicators of differences only, and not suitable for more advanced statistical inquiry.

The main results for the academic features, analysed in the Baseline Survey and representing student writing in the early period of the cohort’s degree study, are presented below.

4.4.1 Content and function words

The term ‘content’ (or ‘lexical’) words refers to specific word classes (parts of speech): nouns, lexical verbs (but not auxiliary or modal verbs), adjectives and adverbs. Content words are important because they carry meaning and are therefore especially valuable in academic writing where the task of delivering large quantities of information often is constrained within a specified word limit. Students need to learn to use content words in their writing as a way of gaining conciseness, a quality which often eludes novice academic writers. The use of each content word class in relation to total content words was of particular interest, allowing a comparison with the LSWE survey. For content word use as a percentage of the total words, precise figures were often not available from the LGSWE text, although some approximation could be made. On this basis, comparative results are presented for each word class (Table 22: Content word classes as % of all content words).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD CLASS (POS)</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS (%)</th>
<th>LSWE CORPUS (approximate %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>c.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical verbs</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>c.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>c.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>c.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 22: Content word classes as % of all content words*

Function words, also known as grammar words, may appear to have only limited importance in writing, especially academic writing because of their purely grammatical function. However, function words are described by Biber et al. (p.55) as the mortar which binds together a text’s building blocks, in the form of its content words, a description which deftly captures their essential role in the construction of
meaning through phrases, clauses and sentences. The use of content words varies greatly across registers, while function words appear to have a much smaller degree of variation but the LGSWE findings show that function words may nonetheless also show a range of differentiation.

The summary of results which follows deals with nouns, verbs adjectives and adverbs in relation to other content word classes, and prepositions as function words, and discusses salient features in more detail with reference to the LSWE findings on the written academic prose register (unless otherwise specified). Also, where comparisons are made between the two corpora, numbers have been normalised to 1000 words to enable comparability, unless otherwise stated. It should be noted that a summary of the comparison between word class use in the student corpus and the Tesco Case Study is provided separately later in this chapter.

**Nouns**

**Nouns as content words**

Nouns in the student corpus accounted for a lower percentage of all content words than in the LSWE study: 58% in the LSWE writing (Biber, 2006, p.14) as opposed to just over 51% in the student corpus. This variation between noun frequencies in the two corpora renders more evident differences between them in the ratio of lexical verbs to nouns over all content words, as the figures in Table 22 (Content word classes as % of all content words) show. In the student corpus, at 27.1 (lexical verbs) to 51.4 (nouns), the ratio was somewhat more elevated than might be predicted for this register: the LSWE findings produced a ratio of approximately 16 to 58. Further when we examine the figures over the total words in each corpus, rather than just content words, the variation is even more marked: three to four nouns to one lexical verb in the LSWE corpus (Biber et al., 1999, p.65), while the student corpus generated one lexical verb for every two nouns, suggesting a much less academic style. A preference for the use of nouns over verbs in academic prose was apparently not a feature which the student writers had begun to practise.

**Number**

Turning to singular and plural noun use in the LSWE survey, we find that plural noun forms are more common in academic prose than in other registers (Biber et al., 1999, p.291). Nonetheless they make up only a small part of the total, approximately 25% of all nouns. The frequency of abstract nouns in
academic writing may contribute to this relatively low figure. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that in academic writing generalisations with plural nouns are common, helping to explain the higher proportion of plural forms overall in that register than in others. In the student corpus, the percentage was slightly lower at 23% but still reflected a common trend towards a high use of singular forms in both writing registers of fiction and academic written prose.

Noun classes/semantic domains

The LGSWE does not deal with the semantic domains of nouns as an aspect of register but this area was included in the student corpus analysis in order to complement the examination of semantic domains in other content word groups. The semantic domains follow those set out in Biber et al (2004), prepared for an analysis of word use in TOEFL. Abstract/process nouns such as culture and change were much in evidence in the student corpus, and accounted for at least half of all nouns, followed at a much lower rate by animate nouns (17.8%), for example, customers and employees, while group and institution nouns combined with proper nouns made up another 17%.

The figures for individual nouns and semantic domains overall reflected very clearly the nature of the topics set for the examination. The examination questions dealt with the management of change within a business organisation, where descriptions of process and frequent reference to organisational structure would have been required.

When we turn to frequencies for individual nouns within each domain, it becomes clear that most of the high-frequency words were also to be found either in the Tesco Case study supplied with the examination paper, or in the examination questions themselves. Moreover, a small number of nouns, representing key concepts in the questions, occurred at a very much higher rate than the remainder. There appears to have been a very strong reliance on this small group of nouns, while a large proportion rated fewer than 10 occurrences throughout the whole corpus, and there were numerous instances of only single or double occurrences of some particular items.

This issue of an apparent dependence on the vocabulary of the material supplied and a limited vocabulary pool is further examined in the section on the Tesco Case Study.
Nominalisations

In this discussion, the term ‘nominalisation’ (as a count noun) is used to refer to the formation of derived nouns through the addition of one of a group of suffixes to an existing word (Biber et al., pp.321-323). Although in other grammatical contexts the term may cover a much wider area, nominalisations in the student corpus were identified according to the LSWE practice. In academic contexts, the use of derived nouns is favoured, particularly when formed from verbs, because it permits the addition of a short phrase in place of a full clause and so enhances the conciseness of the writing. In the LSWE corpus, the use of nominalisations in academic writing stood out very clearly from other registers, with the use of the suffix ‘–tion’ far outweighing other forms (Table 4.29, p.322). Biber et al., 1999. (pp.324-5) suggest this notable rate of occurrence stems from the ability of the suffix to produce both high frequency nouns and rare coinages. The high frequency in academic writing of abstract nouns, which tend to use such suffixes, may also play a part here. In the student corpus, nominalisations made up 8.87% of all nouns used but was limited to a small group of frequently repeated keywords, such as ‘organisation’ and ‘communication’, together with discipline-specific words such as ‘differentiation’ and ‘productivity’. It seems likely that many of the student writers had not yet become aware of the value of using nominalised structures in their academic writing, and employed these words mainly because they formed part of their specific disciplinary vocabulary, rather than for structural reasons.

Noun modifiers

Noun modifiers, which attach descriptive detail to nouns, play an extremely important role in academic prose. Nearly 60% of nouns have a modifier, which can be used to present new information (Biber et al., 1999, pp.578-579). Modifier use consequently generates a very high information density, e.g. the striking change in staff attitudes towards customers. Pre-modifiers may take the form of adjectives, nouns or –ing and –ed participles, while post-modifiers have a variety of forms: relative finite clauses, participial and to non-finite clauses and prepositional phrases, as well as appositional noun phrases.

In the LSWE corpus, about one-quarter of all noun phrases in academic prose had a pre-modifier; post-modifiers were slightly less common, occurring with about one-fifth of all nouns (p.578). In the student corpus, modified noun phrases also appeared quite frequently. Well over a quarter of all nouns had pre-modifiers and more than one-fifth had post-modifiers, including a small number of nouns with multiple post-modifiers, producing some quite extended sentences. A feature of modification which is characteristic of academic writing is the use of nouns as pre-modifiers to the head noun, making up about one-third of pre-modifiers in the LSWE corpus (p.589). In the student corpus less than 15% of all
noun phrases had nouns as pre-modifiers, and these were often key phrases connected with the question topic, such as the *change management process* and *customer service excellence*. There were many repetitions of such modified expressions, with the result that their range was quite limited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>LSWE CORPUS %</th>
<th>FEATURES OF AW</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns as percentage of all content words</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Slightly lower than in LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of nouns to lexical verbs (over content words)</td>
<td>51.4:27.1</td>
<td>58:16</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Somewhat lower than in LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of nouns to lexical verbs (over all words)</td>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>3:4:1</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>Much lower than in LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of plural to singular nouns</td>
<td>23:77</td>
<td>25:75</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Similar to LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic domains</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>Principally abstract/process nouns. Not included in LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominalisations</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively low, though no firm figures available in LGSWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrases with pre-modifiers</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>Slightly higher than in LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrases with post-modifiers</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>Very similar to the LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrases with nouns as pre-modifiers</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Much lower than in the LSWE corpus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 23: Summary of academic features of nouns*

Table 23 (*Summary of academic features of nouns*) shows that while some features of academic noun use had been adopted by the student cohort, specifically the high rate of nouns and their frequent modification, the number of verbs used in relation to nouns was higher than expected, and more advanced noun forms, such as nominalisation, were not frequent in the corpus. As a result, an inconsistent pattern of noun use emerged from these results, emphasising the developmental aspects of the students’ academic writing. The comparison of timed writing in the student examination essays with the untimed writing of the LSWE academic prose corpus may also have some bearing on this result.
Lexical verbs

Verbs as content words
Among verbs, it is only the lexical verbs (those which carry meaning) which are classified as content words, while modal and auxiliary verbs are discounted since their main purpose is purely functional. The verbs be, do and have may be employed for both of these purposes; thus in the calculation of frequencies of lexical verbs overall, only lexical forms of these three verbs are included. Similarly all percentages given here are for lexical verbs only and not for verb forms overall (unless specifically stated otherwise).

A high frequency of lexical verbs is characteristic of conversation and of fiction rather than news and academic writing in the LGSWE corpus (p.65), reflecting in the case of the latter two registers, their purpose of conveying information as efficiently as possible through nouns, particularly with modifiers. In the student corpus, as was noted earlier, the relative percentages of verbs and nouns were more typical of conversational than academic style. Lexical verbs as a percentage of the total verb count also differed slightly from LSWE use: about 73% in the LGSWE (Fig. 5.1, p.359) as against 78.9% in the student writing.

Biber’s list included the use of a number of individual verbs, which this study has not done. The student corpus was smaller and frequencies of individual verbs so low that little useful data could be gleaned from them. Use of copula be/become, semantic domains, inanimate verb subjects, aspect, tense and passives did, however, provide some useful data.

Copula be/become
Following Biber (2006, p.16) among the copular verbs, only be and become were examined. These two copular forms can be used to express a quality or attribute by linking the subject to a predicative adjective, noun or adverb phrase, e.g. This practice is the result of ... . Copula be is very common in academic prose, but less so in conversation, and the representation of lexical verb use across the four registers (Biber et al., Fig.5.2, p.359) shows clearly that, although verbs overall are less frequent in academic prose, copular verb use in that register is higher than in others. For example, they occurred as nearly 20% of all lexical verbs in academic prose, compared with barely 8% in conversation in the LSWE findings. In the student corpus, the figures were lower (15.8%) but could be said to follow the same general trend though the two copular verbs were not frequently found with predicative adjectives.
Semantic domains

Semantic domains for verbs (unlike nouns) were covered in the LSWE survey, whose categories (pp.360-364) have been followed here. When the frequency figures for semantic domains are studied, preferences in domain choice become quite evident. The LSWE survey (pp.364-366) noted that activity verbs in general make up about 50% of all common verbs, so that one might expect to find them across all registers. Academic writing typically makes extensive use of activity verbs, such as implement and foreshadow, which represent actions and events (over 40% of most common verbs), and existence verbs, such as integrate, which denote relationships between entities (about one-fifth). In line with this trend, although somewhat more marked, the student corpus showed a high frequency of activity verbs (nearly half of all lexical verbs), followed by existence verbs (about one-fifth) and mental verbs, referring to cognitive, conceptual and emotional states (e.g. regard, disagree). The higher frequency of activity verbs however is more typical of registers other than academic writing. Copula be/become, whose regular presence in academic writing has already been discussed, was included in the existence domain. These comparisons are calculated according to slightly different classifications, however, since the student corpus took figures across all lexical verbs while the LSWE figures refer to the most common verbs (Fig. 5.6, p.366).

Verbs with inanimate subjects

Inanimate subjects, especially abstract nouns, are very common in academic prose where they add to the detached and impersonal nature of the register with its emphasis on the transmission of knowledge rather than human behaviour and actions. Across all registers, inanimate subjects are especially associated with certain semantic domains, notably activity, communication and mental verbs, e.g. provide, suggest, generating sentence structures such as These findings suggest that... Since these domains are strongly represented in academic writing, it is not unexpected that the LSWE research (p.378) showed 60% of causative, occurrence and existence verbs and 30% of activity verbs were used in this way. In the student corpus, on the other hand, their occurrence was quite low at 5.14% of all lexical verbs. One may speculate that this was an advanced stylistic practice that novice academic writers were not aware of or perhaps not confident of employing.

Tense

The present tense is strongly preferred in academic prose, particularly because of its ability to cover not only the immediate present but also past and future events and indeed to suggest that the propositions
will continue to apply over time (Biber et al., pp.457-8). Tense choice may depend, however, not only on the topic of the text but also the discipline, since self-evidently certain areas, such as history, will require a focus on past events. The LSWE findings (in Biber et al., Fig.6.1, p.456) showed nearly four times the rate of present to past tense use. In contrast, tense use in the student corpus showed an almost equal division between present and past tenses (49.4:45.9), possibly reflecting the need to make general and theoretical statements in the present, followed up by specific examples taken from the case study referring to past events. In addition, stages in a process which took place in the past, were frequently mentioned. Future tense occurrences with the modal form will or the going to structure were very low in the student corpus, less than 5%, and mainly restricted to summing-up comments in the essay conclusion, while combined modals in the LSWE made up about 17%. It should be noted here that comparisons between the two corpora are based on slightly different classifications of modals.

Aspect
Tense and aspect are closely tied together in academic writing and the LSWE survey showed a strong leaning towards present simple verbs. The simple aspect was overwhelmingly favoured in the LSWE corpus (p.461), accounting for about 90% of all verb phrases across all registers, with very little use of perfect forms and virtually none of progressives. The student corpus followed this trend at 90.4%. It is interesting, given the close connection between tense and aspect remarked upon by Biber, that the student corpus followed the aspect frequency so closely and yet diverged so markedly from the tense pattern of the LSWE findings.

Passives
In academic prose, the use of the passive is highly favoured in comparison with other registers and makes up one-quarter of all finite verb forms used (Biber et al., p.476). The passive voice allows the action rather than the agent to be highlighted, thus reinforcing the academic convention of a detached and impersonal style where it is the transmission of knowledge that is the main purpose of the writing, as in the example Where such instances were identified, they were found to be ... . Barely one-tenth of the verb forms produced by the student writers were in the passive voice, well below the LSWE figure and all the more marked since infinitive forms were included in the student count, while the LSWE results relate only to finite forms. A further point is that where passives were found in the student corpus, they occurred with a very limited group of verbs, most notably, used, made, given and seen. Some LEMS students, for example, may well have decided that the complexities of passive constructions
were best avoided in the pressures of an examination but the more proficient writers might have been expected to use the passive more often than they in fact did.

Table 24 (*Summary of academic features of verbs*) gathers together these findings on verb use.  
As was the case with nouns, academic verb patterns displayed signs of development in the student texts but notable discrepancies, such as the use of passive forms and the high use of verbs in relation to nouns, suggests that the writing may have been influenced by some conversational patterns of use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>LSWE CORPUS %</th>
<th>FEATURES OF AW</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical verbs as percentage of all content words</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>Much higher than LSWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical verbs as percentage of all verbs</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Somewhat higher than LSWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copula <em>be/become</em> as percentage of all lexical verbs</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Slightly below the LSWE figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic domains activity and existence</td>
<td>43.2;21.8</td>
<td>42; 19</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Similar to but slightly higher than LSWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inanimate subjects</td>
<td>5.1% of all 191 lexicals</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Very low compared with LSWE figures but no exact comparison possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenses, present:past</td>
<td>49.4:45.9</td>
<td>65:18</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>Very different from LSWE findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect, simple</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Follows the LSWE corpus very closely (modals not included in student count)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passives</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>Considerably below the LSWE figure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 24: Summary of academic features of verbs*

**Adjectives**

**Adjectives as content words**
The function of adjectives is to add further information to a noun phrase and, given the task of academic writing to transmit information as economically as possible, it is not surprising that the high use of adjectives correlates with a high noun rate. This feature is also commonly found in the news register, so
that both registers are characterised by a high information density in comparison with conversation (Biber et al., p.65). The data from the student research, 51.4% nouns and 14% adjectives, showed a roughly similar noun-adjective ratio to the LGSWE corpus of 58% nouns and 18% adjectives as a percentage of all content words, contributing to conciseness.

Attributive and predicative adjectives
A salient feature of adjective use in the LSWE corpus is the presence of adjectives in the attributive position, often as multiple pre-modifiers, and the student corpus also favoured this practice. An illustration of this is shown in the noun phrase The wide-ranging and efficient use of … . The LGSWE figure shows (Fig, 7.1, p.506) that there is only one predicative adjective for every seven attributive forms. In the student corpus this contrast, while evident, was not quite so marked. One predicative form occurred for every four attributive forms, which is still more characteristic of writing than speaking but closer to a fiction prose style. Attributive adjectives, along with nouns, phrases and clauses, fall within the broader category of pre- and post-modifiers, and are also discussed under Nouns.

Specific adjectives with copula be
Certain adjectives are commonly found with copula be in academic writing. However, given the relatively low occurrence overall of predicative adjectives in the student corpus, it is not surprising that of such adjectives as important, necessary, and possible specified in Biber (2006, p.16), only important occurred frequently enough in the student corpus to be noteworthy. In general, the student writers chose to use adjectives as pre-modifiers and this preference, together with the low use of inanimate subjects overall, left little opportunity for typically academic copula be structures such as It is clear/significant that …. .

Derived adjectives
Like many derived nouns discussed under nominalisation, the majority of derived adjectives are of Romance origin, with the ending –al (e.g. general, social) being overwhelmingly more common than any other suffix in the LSWE corpus, followed at some distance by forms such as different, effective and obvious from the -ive, -ous and -ent groups (p.531). The student corpus followed this trend: nearly half of all derived adjectives had the suffix -al, followed by -ent and –ive, -ate and -ous. The suffix -ate, which occurred only rarely in the LSWE corpus, was relatively common in the student corpus (9.1%) but this may be explained by the frequent recurrence of the word corporate in the key phrase corporate
culture. This circumstance serves to underline the influence of the topic on frequency in small, specialised corpora such as that in the current study.

Participles used adjectivally

Participle forms –ing and –ed when used adjectivally may be seen as a type of derived adjective since they are based on verb forms, for example, the resulting uproar. In the student corpus, they totalled just under 13% of all adjectives found and the frequency of the two forms, –ing and –ed, was somewhat similar at 43.8% and 56.1% respectively. No results were given for participles as a proportion of adjectives overall for the LSWE corpus.

As modifiers, where participial adjectives are part of a noun phrase, they may result in increased information density. In general they tend to appear more often in the attributive position, that is, as pre-modifiers (Biber et al., p.530) but the LSWE results for academic prose showed -ing and -ed forms made up a very small proportion of all pre-modifiers (p.589); in contrast their use as post-modifiers was much more marked (p.606, Fig. 8.13). However, no figures were generated for the student corpus in this regard as the actual placement of participial forms used adjectivally was not included in the computerised tagging of the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>LSWE CORPUS %</th>
<th>FEATURES OF AW</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives as a percentage of all content words</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>vV</td>
<td>Fairly similar to LGSWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun-adjective ratio as a proportion of content words</td>
<td>51.4:14</td>
<td>58.0:18.0</td>
<td>vV</td>
<td>Relatively high; similar to LGSWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive adjectives</td>
<td>4:1</td>
<td>7:1</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>More frequent than in predicative position; a similar trend to LGSWE academic data but lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific adjectives with copula be</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low occurrence: most adjectives used attributively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derived adjectives -al,-ent,-ive,-ous,-ate combined</td>
<td>50.7:49.2</td>
<td>64.1:35.8</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Endings -al,-ent,-ive follow LSGE findings but quite high rate of –ate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participles used adjectivally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A slight preference for –ed over –ing forms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25: Summary of academic features of adjectives
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

Table 25 (Summary of academic features of adjectives) summarises the findings on adjective use. The adjective frequency was consistent with the number of nouns used, increasing information detail, although their placing as pre-modifiers was lower than would be expected in academic writing. The low numbers of predicative adjectives remind us that some of the more advanced structures were not yet apparent in the student writing, although the more straightforward patterns were already being adopted.

Adverbs

Adverbs in the LGSWE academic register (p.65), like verbs, showed relatively low frequencies (less than 10%) when compared to nouns and adjectives. This is characteristic of academic writing; conversely a strong verb-adverb relationship is typically found in conversational and fictional styles. Another aspect of adverb use in academic prose, according to the LSWE results, is that adverb frequency overall is less significant than the occurrence of certain semantic domains and certain specific adverbs. In the student and the LSWE corpora, the frequencies for adverbs were very similar at around 8% of all content words. However since the lexical verb rates were noticeably different in each corpus (27.1% in the student corpus and about 16% in the LSWE study), the similarity of adverb frequency was somewhat unexpected, given the established connection between verb-adverb use. It may simply have signified that this kind of verb modification amongst students was not very common.

Semantic domains

Although no specific figures were given, the LSWE corpus identified a preference in academic prose (Table 7.11, pp. 561-562) for linking and additive forms, for instance, however and furthermore respectively; and the student corpus followed this pattern to a certain extent, with additive forms being used most often at 26.3%. This was principally due to the use of also in 226 instances, making up two-thirds of all additive adverbs. Degree occurrences (more, largely) were found at a rather lower rate (18.2%) and time and linking forms were even lower at 13.5% and 13.2% respectively. It is surprising that this latter domain was not more evident in the student writing as linking adverbs are especially important in academic prose, where a series of propositions or arguments is put forward and it is essential for the reader to grasp their relationships. These findings suggest that students’ knowledge of adverb vocabulary and its use in academic prose to increase coherence was at this early stage quite limited.
Specific adverbs
When specific adverbs identified in the LSWE corpus were investigated in the student corpus, there was little correlation with the domains mentioned above. Linking adverbs overall were less common than additive, degree and time forms but the specific linking adverbs therefore and however occurred more frequently than any other adverbs, apart from the degree adverb more. This may again lead one to assume that students were making repeated use of a certain limited number of lexical forms in their writing, rather than selecting from a broad variety of vocabulary choices.

![Table 26: Summary of academic features of adverbs](image)

Table 26 (Summary of academic features of adverbs) demonstrates that adverbs were not a common feature of the student writing and were, in any case, drawn from a relatively small pool of frequently repeated adverbs.

Prepositions as function words
While function words include a number of different classes, prepositions far outweigh other function words in frequency in academic writing because of their contribution towards increasing information density. They are in fact the only function words to play any notable role in helping to create an academic style, because of their ability to establish a relationship between two noun phrases, i.e. NN + PRP + NN, resulting in a type of post-modification e.g. Tesco’s recognition of customer service as a key determinant of continued success. In the same way, the news register, because of its similarly high information content, makes use of the NN + PRP + NN structure, although to a lesser extent.

In the LSWE corpus, prepositions represented just over one-third of all function words (p.92, Fig.2.9). Although no figures were given for the preposition of in relation to other prepositions in general, over all post-modifying prepositional phrases it accounted for between 60% and 65% across the four
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

individual registers. In addition, the six prepositions *of, in, for, on, to* and *with* taken together accounted for 90% of all prepositional phrases.

The student corpus, however, produced slightly different figures. There was a similar rate of preposition use as a percentage of all function words at 29.4%. The frequency of the preposition *of,* constituting nearly one-quarter of the prepositions of the student corpus, emphasised its pre-eminence ahead of other prepositions. However, it was found at a markedly lower rate than in the LGSWE results. *In* also followed the LSWE corpus trend, but at a higher frequency, while the preposition *within* did not rate any mention. The differing rates for *of* and *in* may relate to the fact that many of the post-modifiers in the students’ writing added location details rather than, for instance, a quality denoted by an abstract noun. On the other hand, the instances of a *to-*phrase, functioning as a post-modifier, include a number of expressions such as *attitude to customers, value to the organisation* and *approach to change,* which were often repeated and may help to explain the higher rate. The relatively high use of *within* in the student corpus occurred in a rather restricted range of collocations, mainly derived from the examination instructions and the Tesco Case Study. For example, *organisation* accounted for 30% of the nouns collocating with this preposition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>LSWE CORPUS %</th>
<th>FEATURES OF AW</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepositions as % of function words</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>vV</td>
<td>Similar to rates for LSWE but lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of in post-modifying phrases</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>60-65</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Lower than rates for LSWE but similar trend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27: Summary of academic features of prepositions

It may be noted at this point that the use of s-genitives, which are not favoured in academic writing, can be avoided by using the NN + *of + NN* structure, making it a useful technique for academic writers.

In regard to prepositions, the student writers seem to have followed a relatively academic pattern of use and this is further explored below in relation to prepositional phrases.
Dependent clause sub-types

Biber (2006) notes several specific finite and non-finite clause sub-types which are characteristic of the written academic prose register, and these were investigated in the student corpus analyses. However, their occurrence rates were so limited in distribution as to make meaningful comparison with the LGSWE results problematic.

In relation to the total finite clauses used in the student corpus, relative clauses + *which* had the highest frequency (4.7% of all finite clauses), and constituted almost half of relative clauses overall, but the remaining three sub-clause types listed by Biber (2006, p.17) appeared at an extremely low rate. Of the total non-finite clauses in the student corpus, extraposed *to* clauses (5.2% of all non-finite clauses) and participle clauses as post-modifiers in noun phrases (4.6% of all non-finite clauses) occurred most often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEPENDENT CLAUSE SUB-TYPES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Finite clause types</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative clauses + <em>which</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement clauses as post-modifiers in NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessive adverb clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraposed <em>that</em> clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Non-finite clause types</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement clauses as post-modifiers in NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participle clauses as post-modifiers in NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraposed <em>to</em> clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject predicative <em>to</em> clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective predicates + <em>-ing</em> clauses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 28: Dependent clause sub-types in MGMT191 corpus*

These clause sub-types (Table 28: *Dependent clause sub-types in the MGMT191 corpus*) may be divided into two groupings according to their function in the academic register: firstly, forms of post-modification (relative clauses with *which*, complement clauses as post-modifiers and participle clauses as post-modifiers) which serve to express information more concisely; and secondly, predicative structures, (extraposed *that* and *to* clauses, subject predicative *to* clauses and *-ing* clauses controlled by adjectives), which are somewhat complex forms of extending and completing clauses. (Concessive adverb clauses, admittedly, cannot be generalised in this way, since they are relatively common and easy to construct, and found across a range of registers.)
It is interesting to observe that students made some use of modification forms, which served to increase conciseness, but were still not making frequent use of other sub-clause types which would add to the academic tone of their work although, as has been discussed earlier, the influence of timing cannot be discounted in considering the results of the MGMT191 examination essays.

Specific individual lexical features

A third group of academic features, the specific lexical and lexico-grammatical items cited by Biber (2006, pp.17-18) and listed in Table 29 (Specific individual lexical features), below, resembled the dependent clause types in that they did not appear in high numbers. The verb use was the most prominent of the specific lexical verbs as well as the most common passive; more was the most frequent specific adverb found and therefore and however the most frequent linking adverbs. Other forms listed below occurred at very low rates or did not appear at all. Hence they are not discussed.

Again, such features contribute towards establishing an academic tone but the students at the MGMT191 stage may not have been aware of the lesser-used forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIFIC LEXICAL FEATURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific lexical verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific prepositional (phrasal) verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derived verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific passive verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific adverbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific amplifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific degree adverbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking adverbials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-determiners (some, other, certain, such)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantifier each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual gender reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That/those + of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 29: Specific individual lexical features*
4.4.2 Sentence structures
The analyses that follow are independent of the features identified by Biber (2006, pp.15-18), and constitute an additional investigation which is not based on any other previous study. Hence, no comparison can be made with other research findings. The analyses examine the role of sentence construction in novice academic writing development, including the ability to write concisely.

Clause construction and complexity
Individual words, working according to their grammatical function, combine as clauses to convey information through sentences. The way in which clauses are used varies in relation to the register, and for this reason it is of interest to discuss clause use in the analysis of a text.

In academic prose, sentences are constructed around one or more main clauses; more informative detail can then be added and the sentence extended by attaching further phrases (including single words) and subordinate (dependent) and non-finite clauses. This higher density of information in turn creates a more complex but also more compact sentence.

Complexity of sentence structure is characteristic not only of high information density registers, such as academic prose and news, or of written registers in general. Conversational style has also been shown to have a very high degree of grammatical and syntactic complexity (Miller and Weinert, 1998; Biber, 1988; Biber et al., 1999). Moreover the nature of the complexity varies greatly amongst registers. For example, the frequency of nouns, adjectives and prepositions in academic prose is high, a factor of the frequent occurrence of noun phrases with multiple pre- and post-modifiers; in contrast, verb and adverb use is relatively limited. The converse is true of spoken registers where complexity may arise from the high use of verbs, permitting clause subordination, especially complementation (Biber, 1988, pp. 30-31) and the ‘add-on’ structure (Biber et al., 1999, p.1068).

Because of its limited verb use, academic prose is characterised by fewer clauses than are found in conversation but the clauses are likely to be longer, in particular because of the addition of noun and preposition phrases (Biber et al., p.360). Such phrases, especially as post-modifiers, permit an expansion of the information load in a even more economical manner than the clausal alternatives. In the view of the LGSWE researchers, it is in fact phrases, not clauses, which are the crucial factor in producing the complexity typical of written expository texts (p.93).
Finite clauses

Finite clauses are divided into two categories: main (independent) clauses; and subordinate (dependent) clauses. Subordinate clauses may be further sub-divided into three groups: adverb, complement or noun, and relative or adjective clauses. The distinction between main and subordinate clauses reflects the comparative value of the information they contain, so that the main clause expresses the most important proposition while information contained in subordinate clauses can be taken as having somewhat lesser significance in the sentence. Structurally, subordinate clauses, particularly relative clauses, are not always straightforward to use for less proficient students because they may need to be embedded within another clause.

The discussion of clause use in the LGSWE findings offers much detailed information on subordinate clause use but does not address the relative distribution of main and subordinate clauses across registers. There is therefore no basis for comparing students’ use of clauses, as shown in Table 30 (Percentages and ranges for all clause use) above, with independently established academic features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MAIN</th>
<th>ADVERB</th>
<th>COMPLEMENT</th>
<th>RELATIVE</th>
<th>NON-FINITE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of clauses overall</td>
<td>38.52</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8307)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (raw scores)</td>
<td>52-163</td>
<td>3-50</td>
<td>5-44</td>
<td>1-70</td>
<td>45-154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range standardised</td>
<td>37.0-82.1</td>
<td>2.6-23.0</td>
<td>4.6-25.1</td>
<td>0.9-25.6</td>
<td>35.6-79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 1000 words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30: Percentages and ranges for all clause types

The student corpus shows that the proportion of main clauses in relation to total clauses was well over one-third; that all subordinate clauses together made up little more than one-quarter of total clauses; and that non-finite clauses were employed almost as often as main clauses. These patterns had some bearing on T-unit length, which is discussed under §T-units and sentence length below. Those students who did make use of finite subordination tended to favour relative and complement clauses slightly over adverb clauses.

The results for individual writers’ clause use when compared with their essay proficiency ratings show little relationship since clause rates, although fluctuating among individuals, followed a broadly similar
pattern across the group. One might have predicted that more skilled writers (as identified by rater scores) would have an obviously higher ratio of subordinate to main clauses, for example, but this was not the case. In addition, a preference for simple main clause sentences without any subordinate clauses did not seem to be related to ratings except for the very weakest students (Figure D: \textit{Ratings \% compared with main and subordinate clause use}).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ratings_compared_with_main_and_subordinate_clause_use.png}
\caption{Ratings \% compared with main and subordinate clause use}
\end{figure}

Biber points out (2009, p.17) that certain sub-types of subordinate clauses, such as relative clauses with \textit{which} or concessive adverb clauses, are particularly characteristic of academic prose, and so their occurrence might have been expected to be somewhat higher than the student corpus shows. Given the low use of subordinate clauses in general, however, it would be hard to discern any marked pattern of use for these sub-types and in fact their occurrence was rare. Mastering such structures may not be easy for any novice writers, and even the more proficient seemed to shy away from these rather more demanding forms.

\textit{Non-finite clauses}

When the high use of main clauses, shown in Table 31 (\textit{Percentages and ranges for all clause types}) is taken in conjunction with a similar trend for non-finite clauses, it becomes clear that there was a preference for extending sentences by non-finite clause forms, rather than finite subordinate clauses,
e.g. ‘... the attitude [which was] shown by the staff. This has the advantage of promoting greater conciseness, an important feature in academic writing, though equally it may reduce the opportunities for preciseness and explicitness. The major appeal of non-finite forms for beginning writers, however, and especially LEMS writers, may be the relative simplicity of their construction in comparison with the full tense forms of finite verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENTAGES AND RANGES</th>
<th>to INFIN.</th>
<th>-ing</th>
<th>-ed</th>
<th>BARE INFIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of all non-finite clauses (2868)</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (raw scores)</td>
<td>24-67</td>
<td>6-69</td>
<td>0-18</td>
<td>0-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range standardised over 1000 words</td>
<td>15.2-41.5</td>
<td>3.7-35.2</td>
<td>0.0-11.6</td>
<td>0.8-8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 31: Percentages and ranges for all clause use*

Four types of non-finite clauses were available to students in their writing and the form to + infinitive accounted for over half of all non-finite forms. Apart from its use after a number of common lexical verbs (e.g. need to and want to), the to + infinitive construction is also often used to express purpose, especially in the phrase *in order to*, and so its frequency in this corpus is relatively predictable. Non-finite participial –ing forms were rather less common but still made up over one-third of all non-finite clauses, while the post-modifying participial -ed was not frequently found. The –ing participial has several functions and a range of grammatical patterns, and in academic prose it is especially found after nouns and adjectives in prepositional phrases, e.g. *the problem of changing the culture* or *important in maintaining market leadership*. The bare infinitive, as in *to help improve a situation* is not often found because of the limited number of verbs which take this construction but the verb *help* was found a number of times in the corpus and accounts for the majority of bare infinitive occurrences. The preference for to over –ing forms is underlined by the average range which indicates that, while the range is similar for both, the minimum use is not, and a few students made very limited use of -ing non-finite clauses.

A comparison of non-finite clause use according to proficiency rating follows a similar trend to finite clause use (Figure E: *Ratings % compared with non-finite clause use per 1000 words*). That is, it is difficult
to identify proficiency as an important factor in the area of clause choice, and on the whole individual writers establish their own personal patterns of use, irrespective of their rated proficiency.

Figure E: Ratings % compared with non-finite clause occurrences per 1000 words

T-units and sentence length

The way in which students extended their sentences from main clauses has already been touched on in the discussion of clause use; and the analysis of T-units (Figure F: Range of T-units by clause length) casts further light on this area. The concept of the T-unit is particularly useful in the context of academic written prose since it consists of each main clause and any subordinate clauses attached to it. So it is more precise than the term sentence, because it takes into account each of the main clauses within a compound or complex sentence. Thus, the investigation of main clause use can be more accurately carried out if we refer to T-units.

Figure F: Range of T-units by clause length
The findings showed that single and 2-clause T-units were the most frequent with similar figures of 927 and 890 respectively; that is, the average sentence was made up of a single main clause or a main clause with one subordinate finite or non-finite clause. The results of the clause analyses in Tables 30 and 31 (Percentages and ranges for all clause types and Percentages and ranges for all non-finite clause types) discussed earlier show that the clause attached to the main clause in the 2-clause T-unit was more likely to be a non-finite clause. Three-clause T-units followed but at a lower figure of 666, while 4- and 5-clause T-units were less than half that figure. Predictably then, as the number of clauses per T-unit increased, their actual frequency declined rapidly.

What may be surprising here is that more writers did not venture beyond a single-clause or 2-clause T-unit. These two structures together accounted for 56.7% of all T-units and the figures for main and subordinate clause frequencies discussed above bear this out. When 3-clause units are taken into consideration, these three relatively short structures account for 77.5% of all T-units, suggesting that some students were either not familiar with more extended constructions or not confident in using them. However shorter T-units tend to be characteristic of academic writing, although this is normally in conjunction with a high frequency of prepositional phrases, so that the number of sentences may be relatively low but the sentences themselves may be quite extended.

The picture that emerges of the average T-unit shows that not only was the length relatively restricted in terms of clauses but the clauses themselves were also quite short (Table 32: Average words and clauses per T-unit). At an average of 17.92 words and 2.66 clauses per T-unit, each clause contained fewer than seven words. (It should be noted here that prepositional phrases were included in the word count for the clause to which they were attached, and not distinguished as a separate unit.) While individual writers varied considerably in their construction of T-units, as is illustrated by the range of words and of clauses, it appears that, in general, they did not seek to extend their sentences unduly, whether by finite or non-finite clauses, leaving the option, common in academic writing, of increasing the information packaged in the sentence by adding phrases. In addition, students did not make great use of embedded clauses (apart from a limited use of embedded relative clauses) or of parallel structured clauses, both of which may demand some skill in formation and a certain sense of writing style.

The construction of sentences from T-units shows a wide range of patterns, indicating how individual students chose different combinations to produce their own characteristic style. Such patterns were
generated by the type and frequency of the clauses they chose and the order in which they placed them in relation to the main clause or clauses. These individualised patterns are discussed in the sentence styles of Focus Group members in the Case Studies which are part of the Qualitative Results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-UNIT FEATURES</th>
<th>AVERAGES AND RANGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of words per clause</td>
<td>6.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average range of words per clause</td>
<td>5.71-8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of clauses per T-unit</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average range of clauses per T-unit</td>
<td>1.85-3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of words per T-unit</td>
<td>17.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average range of words per T-unit</td>
<td>12.18-27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of parallel structures per student</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual range of parallel structures per student</td>
<td>0-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of embedded clauses per student</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual range of embedded clauses per student</td>
<td>4-41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32: Average words and clauses per T-unit

When the data for the cohort are generalised, however, (see Table 33: Average sentence patterns), we find the following points. Students wrote an average of just on 70 sentences over their three essays in the exam, and these were overwhelmingly complex sentences which employed some form of finite or non-finite subordination. Some students seem to have expressly chosen a single main clause sentence in order to introduce or conclude their essay or to emphasise a key point. Others, less proficient, used almost all simple sentences, often taken from the Tesco Case Study and strung together to form paragraphs, though this was admittedly a small group.

The ranges predictably tell a slightly different story, not only in the number of sentences according to individual writers but also in the range of complex sentences, showing that some writers were well able to create longer sentences with multiple subordinations, while compound sentences were extremely rare, even when their distribution among individual writers is calculated.
A further feature was the reluctance of many writers to begin with a finite subordinate clause (though the use of initial prepositional phrases, especially in –ing, occurred quite often). Where a clause appeared in initial position, it tended to be a non-finite clause; if an initial finite subordinate clause occurred, it was generally a concessive or time adverb clause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES PER STUDENT</th>
<th>AVERAGE</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
<th>ACTUAL RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sentences</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>40-128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple sentences</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>2-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound sentences</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex sentences</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>33-155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-units per sentence</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial clauses both types as % of all extending clauses</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial non-finite clauses as % of all extending clauses</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>0-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial finite subordinate clauses as % of all extending clauses</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 33: Average sentence patterns*

**Prepositional phrases**

Five principal types of phrases, noun, verb, adjective, adverb and prepositional phrases, are commonly distinguished but this discussion of phrases will focus on prepositional phrases because of their significant role in increasing information density in academic writing. Prepositions can join two noun phrases together so that the second supplies more detailed information about the first and increases the compactness of the sentence. Moreover, a head noun may be followed by a number of post-modifying phrases, producing a complex structure which is, nonetheless, relatively easy for the reader to follow.

The calculation of sentence extension by means of preposition phrases (other than to as an infinitive marker) shows that this strategy was used in three out of four clauses. In turn this generated a distribution of just over two prepositional phrases per T-unit (since T-units contained an average of 2.59 clauses). Such a result implies that many students did not routinely add extra phrases and clauses to their sentences in order to package information more concisely into their text, but preferred to embark on a new sentence or to employ the infinitive marker to with a verb in order to extend their sentences.
The latter practice, which also increases conciseness, has been addressed under non-finite clause use above.

**Correlational analyses**

In the correlational phase following the initial analyses described above, demographic and syntactic data were submitted to a multivariate analysis to establish what correlations might exist, firstly, amongst the demographic factors of language background, English-medium schooling (EMS) and writing proficiency ratings; secondly, between these demographic factors and syntactic variables, namely, use of clause types and sub-types, T-units and sentence construction; and lastly, the use of these syntactic variables and upper and lower proficiency ratings.

In the first of these investigations, no significant relationship between first language and writing rating was found, and there was in fact a very low negative correlation ($r = -0.1659$), reinforcing earlier suggestions that the distinction between first and second language speakers in the cohort was blurred and likely to have only a slight effect on proficiency or achievement. In the same way, analyses also found low negative correlations between rating and EMS ($r = -0.4804$), and rating and LoEMS ($r = -0.4187$) when language background and EMS were combined into a single variable. All these results appeared to emphasise the importance of taking a variety of factors into account when looking at the writing achievement of such a multicultural, multilingual group.

When syntactic factors were examined, equally no evidence of any significant relationship between the use of specific clause types/sub-types and any of the two demographic factors was shown, nor between ratings and clause types. There was a tendency for the less proficient writers to make some use of the minor sub-clause type, the sentential relative *which* ($r = -0.3341$), where *which* refers not to a specific noun phrase but to a clause or sentence as a whole; and a moderate correlation ($r = 0.6559$) was established between adverbial clauses of cause and non-finite clauses, although there is no obvious explanation for this co-occurrence. There was also a substantial correlation between non-finite clauses (NFCs) and subordinate clauses overall ($r = 0.7131$), which appears to emphasise the favouring of NFCs over individual subordinate clause types.

In relation to sentence structures, there were predictable relationships between the number of words and both total clauses ($r = 0.9625$) and total T-units ($r = 0.7375$); and, perhaps less predictably, between total words and the range of different structures of T-units used ($r = 0.8315$). Similarly the number of
words correlated moderately with parallel structures \( (r = 0.7042) \), possibly suggesting that more fluent writers were relatively adventurous in their choice of structures, although no correlations of any kind were found between these sentence construction variables and the demographic factors.

The third group of correlational analyses related to proficiency ratings between the upper and lower groups of writers in the Focus Group, and the limited sample (two groups of three writers in each) necessarily meant that the results could not be taken far. In fact, no results of any significance or interest were produced in this third analysis.

### 4.4.3 The use of features of academic writing

In summarising students’ use of characteristic features of the academic register from the Biber list, we can broadly divide the results into features related to word class, and those related to the use of dependent clauses (Table 34, *Use of word class and dependent clause academic features in relation to the LSWE corpus*).

Across word classes a similar pattern of use of academic writing features was apparent, in that students were displaying most features at, or even occasionally above, the levels cited for the LSWE corpus, in turn suggesting that they were indeed on the path to acquiring elements of the academic style. This is further supported by the more detailed analyses of the Focus Group members’ writing, set out in the Qualitative Results.

However, atypical register features were also present. Noun use showed some important aspects of academic writing, such as a high rate as a percentage of content words, but nouns were also characterised by their limited range, leading to frequent repetition of certain items. Verb frequencies were unusually high for an academic context and more typical of a conversational style and, while their semantic domains were typical of the academic register, other features, such as the passive voice and high rates of present tenses, were not in evidence. Adjectives followed a mainly academic pattern of use but adverbs, while similar in frequency and domain, also suffered from a limited range and consequent excessive repetition. Preposition choice, although differing in the distribution of less frequent prepositions, displayed some academic patterns of use.

Dependent clause feature use cannot be judged against LSWE figures, as was explained earlier, but the findings from the MGMT191 corpus tend to imply that students favoured the more straightforward
features, such as the use of to non-finite clauses. However, the figures given here may still reflect a relatively limited use, even of the more frequent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OCCURRING CLOSE TO LSWE FRQ</th>
<th>BELOW LSWE FRQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content word classes as % of all content words</td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>Lexical verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns and noun phrases</td>
<td>Nouns overall</td>
<td>Noun : lexical verb ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nouns as % of all content words</td>
<td>Nominalisations ??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nouns vs. pronouns</td>
<td>Nouns as pre-modifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absence of pronouns</td>
<td>Specific PRNs: this, one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural : singular noun ratio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definite article the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dem. Determiners this, these</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noun phrases with pre-modifiers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noun phrases with post-modifiers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb and verb phrases</td>
<td>Copula be/become</td>
<td>Lexical verbs as % of all content words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existence verbs</td>
<td>Tenses, present : past ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspect, simple</td>
<td>Passive voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives and adjective phrases</td>
<td>Adjectives overall</td>
<td>Specific predicative adjectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjective : noun ratio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjectives as % of all content words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attributive : predicative adjectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Derived adjectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs and adverbials</td>
<td>Adverbs overall</td>
<td>Comparison not possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adverbs as % of all content word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other specific lexical features</td>
<td>Prepositions</td>
<td>Comparison not possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-of phrases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepositional phrases as post-modifiers in NPs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent clause features</td>
<td>Occurring at high rates in student corpus:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relative clauses with which</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participle clauses as post-modifiers in NP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extrapolated to clauses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 34: Use of word class and dependent clause academic features in relation to the LSWE corpus

The findings of the analyses of sentence construction seem to show that this aspect of writing did not display many features typical of academic writing, particularly those which generate a more economical style. The average student appeared to have produced quite short and straightforward main clause.
sentences, generally extended by one or two subordinate clauses following the main clause. In particular, there was only restricted use of prepositional phrases, indicating that students at the end of their first semester were constructing sentences which tended to add to the word count rather than produce economical writing.

On the whole, it appears that lexical items characteristic of the academic register were more readily employed in the student writing than the syntactic and sentence structure items of the academic register (although the range of lexical items was also at times restricted and repetitious). It is possible that lexical items were more visible to student writers and, being relatively straightforward to incorporate into writing, were therefore more likely to be adopted earlier. Syntactic forms, on the other hand, may have been less obvious to the novice academic writer and similarly less easily incorporated into one’s writing.

All this suggests that, while students were beginning to access the features of the academic register, their writing development may have been influenced by the constraints of their lexical and especially syntactic choices, and their restricted awareness of academic writing features through lack of exposure to a more academic type of reading. This was their first semester at university and they were still working through the transition from secondary school writing and reading practices.

Furthermore, in considering these findings, we should bear in mind that this baseline survey provides only a very generalised picture of the cohort as a whole. Individual members might be expected to be gaining an awareness of academic style, and adopting its features into their writing in a very individual and even idiosyncratic way, as the analyses of Focus Group members’ writing in the following chapter tend to imply.

4.4.4 Measures of conciseness

The findings of the previous section on sentence construction appear to indicate that students were not yet writing as concisely as might be required in the academic setting. The issue was investigated further through a comparison of the five attributes identifying conciseness in writing as identified by Biber (1988, p.104-5), in his multi-dimensional, multi-factorial study of variation in speech and writing. The less sophisticated investigation of the current study, however, simply compares individual measures of conciseness, using Biber’s results for academic prose (p.255).
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASURES (over 1000 words)</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS</th>
<th>ACADEMIC PROSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns (includes gerunds and nominalisations)</td>
<td>293.1</td>
<td>232.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositions</td>
<td>142.0</td>
<td>139.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive adjectives</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word length</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type-token ratio (TTR)</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 35: Measures of conciseness (after Biber, 1988, p.255)

The comparison points to a certain degree of conciseness in the MGMT191 corpus in comparison with the norm figures for academic prose, including markedly higher scores for nouns and word length, approximately equivalent scores for prepositions, although there are lower scores for attributive adjectives and type-token ratio (TTR). Of these the most significant appear to be the word length result and the type-token ratio because of their apparent contradiction. TTR measures lexical variety and can indicate a greater precision in lexical choices because of the wide range of vocabulary to be drawn upon. Word length also implies an advanced and precise lexicon (Zipf, 1949, cited in Biber, 1988, pp.104-105), since longer words tend to be less general and more specialist in meaning. In the MGMT191 corpus, the scores for word length were higher but for TTR were lower than in the academic prose sub-genre investigated by Biber.

Overall, the data present a slightly confusing picture, and the frequent use of phrasing and wording from the Tesco Case Study (discussed below) may have contributed to this contradictory result.

4.4.5 The Tesco Case Study

The material in the Tesco Case Study formed the basis for all three compulsory questions in the examination paper. Students were required to consider the implementation of a change process within the Tesco company by applying specific theories to three aspects of the process: its strategy for maintaining its current strong position in the marketplace; the evaluation of HRM functions in successfully implementing the change programme; and the embedding of previously espoused values in the new culture (See Appendix). The students were already familiar with the contents of the Case Study.
from class discussions and had access to the text during the examination, as it was supplied as an attachment to their paper.

The Case Study, having been written for a business audience, combined elements of both journalistic and academic style. It incorporated aspects of theory but the change process it described was explained in a fairly simple and straightforward way, with a number of direct quotations from participants in the change programme. These qualities made it an interesting example of one kind of writing that students were exposed to in the early stages of their tertiary studies. The following section examines two aspects of the Tesco Case Study: lexical and syntactic features of its writing style compared with the students’ writing patterns, and its use as source material.

**Lexical and syntactic features and sentence structures**

**Lexical and syntactic features**

The results of a 1000-word analysis of the Tesco Case Study give a general notion of the comparative frequencies of academic writing features when set beside the results from the student corpus, although an exact comparison is not to be expected because of the differing lengths of the two texts. In several cases the limited length of the Case Study sample of 1000 words meant that comparisons could not be followed up as the Case Study figures were too low to be meaningful. Nonetheless, it was surprising to see some degree of similarity in many areas.

In terms of the proportions of content word classes (Table 36: Content word classes as % of all content words), the Case Study had slightly higher figures for nouns and verbs and slightly lower figures for adjectives and adverbs but overall there was little marked difference between the two sets of figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD CLASS (PoS)</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>TESCO CASE STUDY %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical verbs</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 36: Content word classes as % of all content words*
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

The trend of basic similarity between the two corpora extended to the more specific detail of noun features where the results did not greatly vary between the two. Neither made any notable use of nominalisations. In the occurrence of post-modifiers with nouns, on the other hand, there was a clear distinction, with the student corpus revealing a much higher rate. Although Biber (2006, p.15) mentions this feature as being much more common in newspapers as well as academic prose, it may be argued that the student corpus was closer in style to an academic text than was the Case Study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOUN FEATURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>TESCO CASE STUDY %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns to lexical verbs (over content words)</td>
<td>51.4:27.1</td>
<td>53.0:30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns to lexical verbs (over all words)</td>
<td>29.3:15.4</td>
<td>30.9:17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural nouns as % of all nouns</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominalisations</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrases with pre-modifiers</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrases with nouns as pre-modifiers</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrases with post-modifiers</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 37: Noun features of the two corpora

Verb use followed the same pattern, that is, generally similar figures for most features. In the student files, present and past tenses were broadly comparable in occurrence while the Case Study showed a slightly higher rate of present tenses. This may be explained by several passages of generalising present tense statements in the Case Study. The nature of the Case Study extract of 1000 words may account for the difference between the results for the future tense. Instances of the future appeared principally in the concluding paragraph of essays, whereas the Case Study sample was taken from the body of the article, thus offering little opportunity to speculate on future events, and this is likely to have skewed the results. The one feature where there was any clear difference between the two texts was in the percentage of passives, markedly higher in the Case Study text. It appears that students may not yet have identified the passive as a desirable form to select for its impersonal tone. Another reason may be, as speculated earlier, that students prefer the more familiar and straightforward active voice, even in writing. (See Table 38: Verb features of the two corpora).
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

Table 38: Verb features of the two corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB FEATURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>TESCO CASE STUDY %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copula be/become</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passives</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Case Study use of present and past participles used adjectivally as pre- and post-modifiers is the only feature of adjective use which shows a clear divergence from the student corpus, since there are close to double the occurrences of this feature in the Case Study. Modification in this way is typical of both academic and journalistic style but the students do not seem to have been influenced by the Case Study in this practice. Apart from this instance, adjectives appeared in relatively similar proportions. (See Table 39: Adjective features of the two corpora).

Table 39: Adjective features of the two corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADJECTIVE FEATURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS %</th>
<th>TESCO CASE STUDY %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun-adjective ratio as a proportion of content words</td>
<td>51:14</td>
<td>53:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive adjectives</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>87.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derived adjectives</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participles used adjectivally</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adverb use was not followed up in any great detail in the comparison between the two corpora because both had low frequencies of adverb use, though it should be noted that instances of also and more, frequently repeated in the student corpus, were quite limited in the Case Study. While adverb use in the student corpus was considerably lower than the figures quoted for the LWSE corpus, the Case Study
contained even fewer. This produced a rather disconnected style on occasions where the use of linking adverbs would have added coherence to the Tesco text and avoided the ‘choppy’ effect (see example below). The same lack of linking adverbs has already been noted in regard to the student corpus.

The Tesco/Trilogy team has been careful to measure the outcomes produced by the Living Service Programme. The full national roll-out was planned to be completed in the autumn of 2004. Key Performance Indicators tracked for the first 30 trial stores gave clear initial indicators of the project’s beneficial impact. These early results set a trend for the national picture (*Living the Brand – For Real, 2005*).

In reviewing the rates for academic features it is clear that they were broadly similar between the two texts, and marked discrepancies were relatively rare. It appears that the student writing may have been influenced by the Case Study writing style. It could, on the other hand, equally be argued that both the students and the Case Study writer preferred to write in a simpler and more accessible style, for either personal or professional reasons. The analyses of lexical frequencies and syntactic features that follow sought to shed further light on this question.

The examination of lexical frequencies was a limited one but even in its complete form, the Tesco corpus contained only a little over 3000 words, so that any detailed in-depth analysis would have been unlikely to produce a great deal of usable data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS RANKINGS</th>
<th>TESCO CASE STUDY RANKINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 the</td>
<td>1 the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 and</td>
<td>2 of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to (infin.)</td>
<td>3 to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 of</td>
<td>4 and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 a</td>
<td>5 a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 in</td>
<td>6 in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 their</td>
<td>9 ‘s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 they</td>
<td>10 that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 to (prep.)</td>
<td>12 for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 by</td>
<td>16 as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 for</td>
<td>17 by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 that</td>
<td>18 its</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 40: Rankings of the first 12 function words in total corpus*
Lexical frequencies overall suggest that there was much common ground between the contents of the two sets of text. Unsurprisingly, each corpus had the same function words in the first few rankings and although the rankings differed slightly, as did the percentages, there was no marked dissimilarity to be seen (Table 40: Rankings of the first 12 function words in total corpus). It is possible that the emphasis in the student corpus was more on the employee aspect of the change programme, in contrast to the Case Study, which might have given greater attention to the change programme as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS RANKING</th>
<th>TESCO CASE STUDY RANKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Tesco</td>
<td>7 is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 staff</td>
<td>8 service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 service</td>
<td>11 Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 change</td>
<td>13 programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 employees</td>
<td>14 change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 is</td>
<td>15 staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 customer</td>
<td>21 be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 culture</td>
<td>22 project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 customers</td>
<td>24 are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 be</td>
<td>25 living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 values</td>
<td>26 customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 were</td>
<td>27 organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 41: Rankings of the first 12 content words in total corpus*

However the most striking aspect of the overlap in word choice between the two corpora was that 91 out of the 100 highest frequency content words in the student file were to be found among the 150 highest ranking Case Study items or in the examination questions (Table 41: Rankings of the first 12 content words in total corpus). This can be expected because of the common topic of the two corpora but it also raises the question of whether students actively looked for synonyms for recurring words and whether they even had such a resource at their disposal.

Both corpora showed an entirely predictable higher frequency of function words over content words, and a greater parallel between their rankings. This can be explained in part by the fact that function words are members of a closed class; that is, they are limited in number but have as a result a very high degree of recurrence. In contrast, content words, being open class words, are far more productive so that new words are being constantly generated, offering a much wider range of synonyms for selection but a consequent low frequency (Biber et al., 1999, p.55).
The comparison of lexical frequencies does not establish any causal relationship between the two corpora, other than the obvious one of the shared topic. Nonetheless the rate of common vocabulary choices is quite striking.

**Sentence structures**

There were some points of difference between the sentence structures of the two corpora but on the whole the comparisons revealed more correspondence than variance.

The rate of main and non-finite clause use was generally comparable and, since these two clause types together made up between 70% and 80% of all clause use, this was a substantial degree of closeness. The students used a slightly higher number of clauses and words in their sentence extension but the differences were of little importance overall. In contrast, their use of prepositional phrases to extend sentences revealed a clear disparity (50 to 39) in the use of prepositional post-modifiers, suggesting that in this particular respect the Case Study might not have exerted any great influence: in fact it was the students who were adopting a more academic style. This was the only important syntactic feature distinguishing the two sets of writing (Table 42: *Syntactic features and structures of the two corpora*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES AND STRUCTURES</th>
<th>STUDENT CORPUS</th>
<th>TESCO CASE STUDY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clause types (as % of all clauses)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main causes</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb clauses</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement clauses</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative clauses</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-finite clauses</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T-units and sentence extension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of words per clause</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of clauses per T-unit</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of words per T-unit</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prepositional phrases (standardised to 1000 words)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositional phrases</td>
<td>114.3</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositional post-modifiers</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Of</em> in prepositional post-modifiers</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 42: Syntactic features and structures of the two corpora*
While there is no strong argument to be made for the Case Study influencing the lexical choices of the student writers, the syntactic and structural aspects showed some surprising relationships which could arguably be accounted for by access to the Case Study in the exam, and the extent to which students were able to copy strings of words verbatim. However, no firm causal relationship can be determined with the current data and methodology, although the data which follows on the use of Case Study material may add weight to this correlational possibility.

**The Tesco Case Study as source material**

Students’ use of material from the Tesco Case Study was analysed by submitting the student corpus to Turnitin, a text-matching programme. The purpose of this part of the analysis was to discover to what extent and for what purpose the students incorporated directly copied source material from the Case Study into their own writing. By examining the common use of text between the two files, the programme identified matches from four words upwards, including strings where up to three words had been inserted, omitted or changed in form. In this way, cases of modifications to the text could be identified and included in the analysis, generating data on how students drew on the Case Study for content.

The use of source material is an essential aspect of academic writing development but one which is poorly understood, frequently misapplied and a cause of considerable frustration to novice academic writers, as the interviews with Focus Group members show. Deviation from established guidelines on source use may invoke academic penalties when judged to be plagiarism, and is therefore a serious issue. In the case of the students’ exam writing in this study, attribution of the source material to the Case Study was not at issue since the exam question required students to use the Case Study as their practical example in the application of theory. However, the way that students use source material and the amount they borrow directly from the text is an issue which could affect the assessment of their work by course examiners in the future.

**Selection and placement of source material**

The text of the Tesco Case Study consisted of just over 3000 words and was broken up into four conventional sections. The first section, the background to the firm and its decision to embark on a change process (about 700 words), was drawn upon quite extensively in the student corpus. The second section contained a detailed description of the programme’s principles of design and the methodology
for implementing the change process (well over 1400 words). This section was also used quite often. Material from the outcomes section (somewhat under 500 words) appeared less frequently, and the summary and concluding comments on the programme, taking up about 400 words, were least used in direct quotation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION CONTENT</th>
<th>% OF CASE STUDY</th>
<th>OCCURRENCES IN 191 CORPUS</th>
<th>% OF ALL 191 CITATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Introduction and background to company and need for change (707 words)</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Change programme design principles and main elements (1441 words)</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Outcomes of change process (471 words)</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Conclusion: summary and evaluation of process (404 words)</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 43: Analysis of section content

Table 43 (Analysis of section content) compares sections of the Case Study and the number of times that section was cited in the student corpus. It also shows what percentage of all the student citations those occurrences represent. It can be seen that students referred to these sections at different rates, depending on the content of each section. The first section, depicting the status and profitability of the firm as a market leader, illustrates this point. While Section A was a relatively short section in word length (707 words, accounting for 23.3% of the total Case Study text), it contained important and useful information and so was cited on 101 occasions, making up a third of the total occurrences. It should be noted that shorter phrases within passage were counted as an occurrence of the passage. For instance, in the extract, ‘The team maintained that in order to develop the emotional loyalty of customers through a rich experience of personal service, Tesco must maintain an environment that made staff feel motivated and valued’, some students quoted only the underlined words and not the full passage. This shorter string was still counted as a citation occurrence for that extract.

There were many cases of single-instance use of an item from the second section of the Case Study, which was the longest section of the text. However it was also the source for the highest number of occurrences. This was true in particular of the slogans which expressed the previous and new versions of
the firm’s espoused values: ‘No one tries harder for customers’ and ‘Treat people how you want to be treated’; and ‘Know your stuff’, ‘Show you care’ and ‘Share a smile’.

The section also contained descriptions of the different stages and elements of the programme, often in the precise technical language used to describe theory. Along with a detailed description of how the process of change was applied, the section included explanations of the tasks for the main leaders of change, which a number of writers exactly reproduced in their essays.

The last two sections were less commonly used than the first two. Descriptions of specific outcomes of the change process were probably not as useful as the general statements from the third section, such as those about the new company approach to staff and customer reactions to the improved service which were both quoted by a number of writers. As for the concluding section, a small number quoted the general summing-up as the conclusion for their own essay.

Overall, such close similarities between the two corpora suggest that the students perhaps relied to a degree on the vocabulary resource of the Case Study for their own texts, or indeed copied directly from it, and were influenced in their syntactic choices by the slightly more informal journalistic style. It may also be the case that many of these novice academic writers still naturally wrote in a slightly informal manner more akin to conversation than an academic register. Certainly a preference for this more informal, less academic style in their reading and their writing was mentioned by several students interviewed, whereas there was very limited support for the notion that the scholarly academic style of written prose was an effective form of communication.

**Text-matching analysis**

The extent to which writers took material directly from the Case Study varied considerably. On the one hand, a few writers took virtually no material directly from the text, apart from the slogans and titles for elements of the change programme. At the other extreme, nearly half (over 43%) of one student essay was made up of directly copied brief chunks incorporated into stretches of his own wording, a practice known as ‘patchwriting’. It was possible to discern a trend for the more proficient writers to use material from the Case Study very sparingly and indirectly, and almost always in their own words; others, less proficient, tended to make excessive use of direct quotation, in some cases perhaps to bypass their own language limitations.
On the whole, though, the nature of the material most frequently used suggests that, even if students did not express it in their own terms, many were beginning to develop a grasp of how to choose source material appropriately to support their own writing. The context in which the direct use of source material was incorporated often suggested the reasoning behind the choice and placing of the quotation.

For example, the most commonly repeated expressions from the Case Study were the slogans which expressed the company’s values. They were relevant to all three essay answers as culture change was a dominant theme of the Case Study and the examination questions. Not only were these an essential item in discussing the general topic of customer service but they also had to be presented in their exact wording. Thus they were quite appropriate to the context, and acceptable as legitimate use of direct quotation.

Managing the change to improve the customer service followed a specific programme with particular elements and stages, and here again students quoted from the Case Study, most liberally in discussing the initial impetus for the changes: the results of customer and staff surveys.

The results of the first project showed that customers were not experiencing consistently warm, friendly service from Tesco. The second project’s results indicated that internal levels of staff morale were suffering in reaction to increasingly ambitious cost and efficiency targets in stores (Living the Brand – For Real, 2005).

They may have felt that this was virtually factual material, and only direct quotation allowed them to describe such stages accurately. Direct quotation was also used to explain the reasoning behind certain aspects of the programme, and as support for students’ own arguments, thus making the choice of material entirely appropriate for its context. Again the question of accuracy may have provided a justification for not expressing these ideas more indirectly but it is equally possible that students regarded such information as being factual in the way that statistics were, and they included them as a form of hard evidence for their own claims.

Finally, two of the direct quotations seem to have been included simply because they expressed concisely and elegantly a general statement. This applies in particular to the final section, the summary of the process which linked its success to the principles of its design and implementation.
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

By importing an approach, and taking complete ownership of its expression within the organisation, Tesco managed to redirect the evolution of its culture in a way that keyed into its employees’ beliefs and motivations while focusing faithfully on the needs of its customers. (Living the Brand – For Real, 2005).

A well-crafted passage like this may have seemed a very fitting conclusion to the student’s own answer, as it neatly encapsulated the reasons for the success of the culture change.

As a footnote to these results, it is interesting to note the almost formulaic use of direct quotation from the examination question instructions. A large number of essays began with expressions along the lines of ‘In this essay I will …’, to which was added the appropriate section from the examination question, as in, ‘… analyse and evaluate Tesco’s business strategy for sustaining its position of a market leader in the UK retail industry’. Generally, the theory to be applied, e.g. ‘Barney’s Resource-Based View’, as specified in the instructions would be attached to this opening statement. This appeared to serve not only as a way of expressing the purpose of the essay but also as an entry into the structuring of the main points in the body. Less frequently, these elements of the question were part of the conclusion, beginning with ‘This essay has discussed …’.

4.5 Key findings of the Baseline Survey

This section looked at aspects of the students’ academic writing from an analysis of their first semester examination texts. Three key quantitative findings have been identified.

**Key Finding #1**: The acquisition of an academic register was still in the early stages of development but a number of features were already being produced at a level consistent with established academic writing norms.

**Key Finding #2**: Students did not appear to be making use of the range of sentence structuring available to them, affecting their ability to produce a varied academic style.

**Key Finding #3**: Students’ use of source material suggests that many had grasped the principles behind the appropriate choice and positioning of citations but had little understanding of paraphrasing and summarising techniques.
4.6 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has examined the quantitative data derived from a corpus of examination writing from the end of the students’ first semester. Three aspects of their academic writing use were analysed, namely, features of academic writing, clause and sentence structures and use of source material, in order to build up a picture of the development of the cohort’s academic writing. The key findings of the analyses were then presented, and their implications are explored in the Discussion chapter.
Chapter 5: Qualitative Results

5.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter presents the primarily qualitative findings from the Longitudinal Studies of the writing development and experiences of seven Focus Group members. In doing so, the chapter establishes the connection between the two parts of this thesis: it complements and fleshes out the purely linguistic and generalised quantitative descriptions of the Baseline Survey by presenting a picture of several individual writers and the social context in which they produced their written academic work.

The chapter begins with a summary of the main themes emerging from the group discussions, held prior to the individual interviews. Then follow the case studies of seven members of the Focus Group, based on a series of personal interviews carried out with the researcher during their second and third years of study. The perspectives of four staff members engaged in the teaching of the BBIM programme are given next, and the chapter ends with the key findings of the qualitative analyses.

Each case study follows a similar structure. It firstly briefly describes the family and language backgrounds of the students and then draws on group discussion and interview material to furnish a comprehensive account of their perceptions of their writing experiences during the degree programme. This material is supplemented by the findings from analyses of their writing. Brief comments from the researcher complete each case study.
5.2 Background to the Longitudinal Studies of student academic writing

As the Methodology chapter points out, both the extent and the role of the Longitudinal Studies changed over the duration of the research process.

Initially, a purely quantitative longitudinal investigation was planned, examining the development of linguistic aspects of individual Focus Group members’ written work over three years, with a somewhat peripheral role given to the qualitative data emerging from personal interviews with the students during this period. However, this qualitative aspect took on an increasing significance as the interviews progressed because of the detailed, varied and engaging insights they provided into the writers’ academic lives. As a result, a decision was made to retain the quantitative analyses but give a more prominent position to the qualitative material.

The ongoing research process also revealed limitations to the design of the study, such as the earlier plan to compare examination essays from Management in Year One, Business in Year Two, and each student’s elective major (Human Resource Management, Marketing or Accounting) in Year Three. It became evident over time that comparing the varying types of text demanded by the different third-year majors was unrealistic, as the majority of students had chosen Accounting, which made few demands on essay writing skills. As a result, the writing development aspect was limited to a comparison of linguistic features between the first- and second-year Management and Business papers. To ensure standardisation, only the first 1000 words from each year’s examination responses were selected for analysis.

A further point to note is the interpretation of results from the linguistic analyses. While increases in specific feature use suggest development in certain areas, the comparison is a restricted one, with only two ‘snapshots’ of writing, one each from the first and second years. A fuller comparison might well have included a series of samples over the two-year period, providing a fuller and more detailed picture. Where changes and developments are discussed, therefore, this limitation should be borne in mind.
5.3 Results of the Longitudinal Studies

5.3.1 Group discussions

Introduction

Fourteen students from the 2005 intake volunteered to take part in an intensive study. In this smaller group study, the participants were interviewed three or four times during 2006 and 2007, through group discussion and personal interviews, about their recollections of writing in the first year (2005) and their experiences and changing responses towards writing as they worked through the middle and final years of their degree.

The first of these interviews was in the form of a Focus Group discussion, involving only thirteen participants since the last member joined the study too late to take part in this first session. It was initially planned to have only two groups of participants but timetabling, study constraints and the demands of part-time jobs made this impossible, so a series of smaller discussion groups was held. One of these smaller groups consisted of two students with limited experience of English-medium schooling, who preferred to be interviewed away from the mainstream groups. As a result, the other three discussion groups were composed of native speakers or relatively proficient second language speakers.

The main aim of preceding the individual interviews with the group discussion was to provide a broad background for the later personal interviews by gaining some sense of general class attitudes towards their writing experiences. Using the discussion group format, which was an established practice in the BBIM culture, appeared likely to stimulate participants to express their points of view more readily and to spark off recollections and the comparison of events and reactions that might have otherwise not been brought to light. The Focus Group discussion covered the following five themes: expectations on entry, differences between school and university writing, perceived features of academic writing, sources for acquiring an academic style, problems with writing at university level, but it also provided the opportunity for students to explore other ideas which arose in the course of their discussion.

The cultural and language backgrounds of the group members were diverse. As Table 14 (Focus Group demographic data) from Chapter Three shows, only two participants were New Zealand-born native speakers. The other group members came from a range of language and learning backgrounds. For instance, six had been completely educated through English-medium schooling (EMS) from primary through to secondary level in New Zealand or overseas, and were highly proficient in English, which they
regarded as their first language. Three others, while not identifying English as their first language, had carried out all of their schooling in English, and were also close to NS level in their language proficiency. Thus the majority of the Focus Group were practised and confident users of English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF BIRTH</th>
<th>HOME LANGUAGE/S</th>
<th>FIRST LANGUAGE</th>
<th>EMS PRIMARY</th>
<th>EMS SECONDARY</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
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<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Bisaya</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 44: Focus Group demographic data (reproduced from Chapter 3)

The remaining three participants, in contrast, had learnt English in Chinese-medium schools and had had only one or two years of EMS experience, so that they fitted more readily into the traditional view of an EAL (English as an Additional Language) student. They formed a very distinct group in relation to the rest of the Focus Group by reason of their limited language skills, and in this study are referred to as the LEMS (limited English-medium schooling) group, a term denoting their relatively short exposure to studying through the medium of English.
In general, however, the composition of the Focus Group reflects a situation which is increasingly common in tertiary institutions, where the range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds may bear little relation to the students’ proficiency in English. Even where students see English as their second language, this will not necessarily imply a restricted knowledge of the language. Rather, amongst so-called EAL students there is a continuum of proficiency which, at the upper level, overlaps with native speakers and renders a clear-cut distinction between NS (Native Speaker) and NNS (Non-Native Speaker), or EAL and ESB (English-Speaking Background), highly problematic and possibly quite meaningless.

**Expectations**

Few students had any clear expectation of what kind of writing they would be doing in their first year of study. Some were the first in the family to attend university and had very little notion of what the demands might entail. Length of writing was mentioned several times. The prospect of writing 5000 words was an awesome and daunting prospect, since writing at school rarely exceeded 500 words. Similarly, those who had prepared for the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) examinations or completed a university preparation course had little experience of writing more than 250 words. Thus where requirements about writing had been crystallised, they seem to have created a certain nervous apprehension about what lay ahead.

**Differences between school and university**

Given that the group’s notions of academic writing at university were at the very least unclear, their first-year experiences of writing brought a number of unexpected differences requiring a new approach to writing tasks.

There was a general, though not uniform, view that school had not prepared them adequately for the writing demands of university in several ways. Those who had studied subjects which required a more academic approach to essays, such as History or Economics, had some advantage perhaps. Students who had studied English at senior level, however, were faced with a different type of essay writing. In high school the English syllabus had had a more creative focus, involving reflection or a personal response to literature, so an essential difference related to the nature of the content. Another problem lay in the emphasis on research and referenced essay writing students encountered in their first year of study and its consequent impact on other aspects of assignment writing.
source material with their own opinions posed particular problems of understanding and implementation. The high school approach to the question of essay structure was likely to have been very straightforward, summed up in the SEX approach (statement, explanation, example or evidence), while the LEMS students had found previous requirements for structure were very simple: ‘... just introduction, body, conclusion, two hundred and fifty words. That’s it, enough’ [LEMS:77-78].

Word limits were an important difference, especially for the LEMS students, who repeatedly discovered that their essays were well below the minimum word level, but most of the group found that after the first few weeks the difficulty was to avoid exceeding the limit, even for 5000-word essays. Their concerns had moved to learning how to write concisely, which had not previously been an issue. Researching the topic acted as a stimulus for new ideas and a basis for opinions which needed to be explained and justified, a very word-intensive process. In this way, for most students the nature of the anticipated problem of word length changed completely and ironically their concern was now to write less, not more.

So selecting relevant ideas, using them as a basis for one’s own thinking and expressing them economically became considerations that all had to deal with in their transition from school to university and some did this with more success than others. The majority of the group, however, saw conciseness as an essential element of academic writing which required care and attention for most of their study years.

**Essential features of academic writing**

Student opinion on what features were essential to academic writing covered a wide range, but one feature that emerged from most sessions was the term ‘integration’, which covered a number of different items and appeared to have varying interpretations. When used in its broadest sense, ‘integration’ referred to transferring knowledge across courses and papers. Other participants saw integration as bringing together content knowledge and theory with text structure and language, so that each informed the others in the writing process. A narrower definition of ‘integration’, as explained to one student by her lecturer, appeared to equate with the notion of cohesion and flow. The term ‘flow’ itself occurred in several discussions, and was evidently a feature which lecturers often stressed in their discussion of structure and the organisation of ideas in assignment writing. It appears to have been generally used to refer to the notion of setting out points in a logical order and using cohesive devices to link ideas between sentences or between paragraphs.
One group saw research as the key to good academic writing. It generated ideas and defined concepts, helping to expand one’s knowledge and understanding. Research produced theory to support one’s own arguments and ideas, and allowed writers to expand and develop their topic in a knowledgeable and authoritative way. Research also implied good referencing skills and its attendant challenges.

Audience was another notion often stressed in class and referred to in the group discussions. While audience is no doubt important in all aspects of academic writing, it would seem to be especially so in Business papers, where stakeholders vary considerably, and approach, content, structure and language must consequently be tailored to a particular group. For these participants, the range of possible stakeholders meant that audience had to be considered and identified carefully before embarking on any kind of writing task in any of their papers.

In the context of academic style, vocabulary and sentence structures were only briefly referred to, though clarity of expression was widely seen as an important issue. This was achieved not only through formal and technical vocabulary but also through paragraphing and punctuation, as well as the use of headings and sub-headings. Headings and sub-headings are not necessarily seen as an aspect of academic style but were nonetheless regarded as vital for making texts reader-friendly and coherent, and so related to the important notion of audience.

The LEMS group took a somewhat more practical approach to the question of essential features, focussing on the two qualities which would allow them to express themselves adequately: the required text structure and the development of ideas at sufficient length. Text structure seemed an especially important issue for these students, as though having an idea of the necessary format for their writing task allowed them to approach the expression of their ideas with more confidence.

Conciseness, on the other hand, although a big issue in the discussions overall, was mentioned only once and then very briefly in the context of essential features of writing. Perhaps students had worked so hard on it that conciseness had become something taken for granted. Its omission in this context is nonetheless striking.

Much of the comment in the group discussions directly or indirectly emphasised the belief that, in the end, style was less important than content, that it was meaning and the understanding and incorporation of theoretical concepts that were essential to good academic writing.
Acquisition of an academic writing style

A consistent theme in all the groups was a dependence on feedback in acquiring an appropriate academic style, particularly in their first year. There was an underlying implication in their discussions that academic writing was a skill they had to work at consistently throughout their first year and sometimes well beyond. This knowledge was gained through personal contact with staff and other students, in preference to writing manuals and other sources of information on academic writing.

The task instructions and marking rubrics, though, were usually the first port of call when writing tasks were set, and in the first year some lecturers went over the assignment requirements in quite a lot of depth in class, providing an opportunity to clarify the marker’s expectations.

This information was supplemented by two kinds of input, from peers and from lecturers, with the feedback process occurring while the assignment was still in draft form or after it had been marked. Feedback tended to cover structuring and flow, that is, it referred mainly to content and organisation of ideas, rather than style and language, although lack of attention to conciseness might also be mentioned.

Of these two sources, students appeared to make less use of advice and comments from lecturer feedback, which might be limited. Some students mentioned seeking out comments from lecturers prior to submitting their assignments in their first year but later desisting from this practice. However, LEMS writers, in particular, found lecturer assistance a productive experience and used it on an ongoing basis. Students also used lecturers’ written comments on their marked work to improve the next assignment, with a few approaching the markers for more specific advice in addition to this written feedback. As there were instances of conflicting messages, students came to understand that the writing style required in one subject might not necessarily apply to another, and that standards and expectations varied between papers.

Perhaps even more widely used than lecturers’ input was informal peer feedback, by asking friends to read and critique drafts and by exchanging highly graded assignments with other class members. The informality of this system, however, may have meant that LEMS students missed out, being too shy to approach non-Chinese classmates. Online discussion forums set up for the course members were extensively used outside class time, promoting further thought and the fruitful exchange of experiences.
and opinions. This approach was placed in a broader context by one student, who commented on the student-centred nature of the course.

The LEMS students made particular use of study groups where they discussed the task ahead of them, meeting again later to give one other feedback on their drafts. In a more formal context, the team project, greater cultural interaction was possible and the LEMS students noted that they were able to pick up ideas about planning outlines and writing concisely, as well as learning from the correction of grammar or vocabulary errors.

Support services, such as the Student Learning Centre, the LanCom language support programme set up within BBIM and the library, gave them further relatively personalised advice on their writing. On the whole though, these services seemed to be infrequently used by participants in the study.

Actively seeking out models of good academic writing from their course-related reading was also not widespread, according to the participant responses. A couple of students also consulted library books on Business writing which provided a format for unfamiliar text types, but this practice was not common. For one student, however useful such input might be, there was one basic answer to acquiring a good writing style: ‘It’s a skill if you ask me, academic writing. I think you can only learn it by practising it. […] That’s the only way I think you can learn, to be honest’ [TAM I: 228-231].

Problems and challenges

The wide-ranging responses in the earlier parts of the discussion have already covered explicitly or by implication many of the problems and challenges the students faced. Not all the differences between school and university writing were necessarily problematic, and a few reacted positively and with enjoyment to the new approach to writing, seeing it as the acquisition of a new and valuable skill. Others, taking a more pragmatic viewpoint, saw an acceptable style of writing as a pathway to getting good grades and purposefully embarked on the task of mastering it. But as a number remarked, it was a big jump between school and university writing and most encountered struggles with one aspect or another.

The main challenge seems to have been conceptual, that is, grasping what was meant by terms such as integration and flow; understanding the role of theory and research material in academic writing; and using their knowledge to generate their own ideas and opinions. Another conceptual demand was to
accept a range of approaches and requirements depending on the type of writing and the audience and, despite the efforts of lecturers to explain their expectations through task instructions and marking rubrics, there was still a considerable burden for the student in identifying the nature of the various, often implicit, distinctions among papers and styles, from IT reports to executive summaries in business proposals to management essays. It was clear that intellectual demands at this level had not been part of their previous writing experience.

A second major area of concern was providing and organising content. Once the idea of integration had been understood, it should be displayed through the way that writers identified relevant ideas, related them to theory and organised them within the chosen structure. Flow entered the picture here as some students struggled to bring cohesion to their writing and create a sense of coherence in their arguments and discussions. The skills of using electronic sources to seek out useful research material and then incorporating it appropriately and with accurate citation data were new to most of the participants, and the LEMS students found particular difficulty in this respect.

So understanding the concepts of what was being asked for in their writing and then identifying how to produce it through structure and content appear to have overshadowed demands of a purely linguistic nature. Indirectly, though, language was an important factor. In their efforts to achieve conciseness, students would need to find lexical and syntactic strategies which would structure sentences economically and avoid circumlocution.

The situation for the three LEMS students in the group, was markedly different. In their case, although they saw researching material and understanding the structuring conventions of various writing tasks as perhaps more important, basic linguistic considerations impacted on these issues because of the limitations of their language. In addition, the time needed for completing current work affected their ability to access the language support provided by the university. So, dealing with the content demands of their course, such as required reading, and then finding ways to display their knowledge and understanding of assignment topics in English took up a considerable amount of their time.

As the participants in the Focus Groups approached the middle of their second year, the LEMS writers, despite some progress, saw their difficulties with writing continuing into the following year, whereas the rest of the group were reasonably confident that they were acquiring a grasp of the genre conventions for writing in their discipline and could use them effectively. A few, feeling perhaps that they should
hedge their bets, acknowledged that there was still room for improvement but the majority no longer suggested they experienced any sense of strain about the course writing demands. The second year had been much less daunting for them, not only because they had learnt so much from the previous year’s experiences but also because in fact writing requirements were often much simpler and marker attitudes more relaxed. Essays were still a likely vehicle for assessment but other kinds of writing in their discipline tended to be a great deal less complex. In the worst situation, a clumsy writing style might not produce an A grade but as long as the content was comprehensible and to the point, students could assume that markers would value content over style.

5.3.2 Individual interviews

Introduction

Considerations of space limited the selection of participants for the case studies. While it was evident that all fourteen Focus Group members had distinct and enlightening experiences to be recounted, the preference for greater depth in the exploration of the participants’ narratives was a determining factor, and in the end, the selection was limited to seven on the basis of the diversity and pedagogical value of their recounts. Of these seven, Lucy and Dylan were written up as a single case study, taking into account their preference to be interviewed together and the resulting picture of shared experience and learning that emerged.

The students were interviewed three times for half an hour to an hour over their second and third years of study, with each interview following a similar structure. Four to seven standard questions were prepared for each set of interviews, covering the students’ experiences with assignment writing, their attitudes to academic writing and their developing understandings of their own writing style, and the challenges that they faced in the composing process. (See Chapter 3, Table 18 for more detail).

To supplement the interview material, a brief quantitative overview of each student’s academic writing is also provided, firstly by an assessment of their MGMT191 examination writing in Year 1, Semester 1, rated by two experienced raters of first-year students’ writing at the University of Auckland; and secondly through a comparison of the main features of the students’ examination essay responses in their MGMT191 examination, and the following year in their Semester 3, Year Two BUS292 examination.

It should be noted that all figures presented in these comparisons have been normalised over 1000 words to ensure standardisation. Equally it should be borne in mind that the comparison of the features between Year 1 and Year 2 writing is made on the basis of ‘snapshots’ at the two points, and any findings apply to these two writing situations only and should be viewed only as indicators of possible
trends in acquisition. Further, the influence of external factors, such as topic and genre, on the selection of writing features cannot be discounted.

Each case study follows a similar pattern, with sections providing information on the students’ background and schooling; their experience with writing over the three years of their degree programme; the writing analyses; and finally a discussion of points emerging from the study.
5.3.2.1 Case Study: Ben

Introduction
In the initial call for participants for the intensive study, the researcher emphasised the need for a range of writing proficiency and attitudes towards writing and appealed to less enthusiastic writers, whether practised English users or not, to participate. In this way, the study would be able to present a range of reactions and insights into tertiary writing demands and not just focus on more able writers. Of the participants who joined the group, Ben might be said to represent the more reluctant writers.

Background
Unlike a number in the group who were from urban and professional families, Ben came from a rural background and his approach to writing and expectations of university demands had not been shaped by tertiary experiences of family members. So much of what he encountered at university, especially in his first year, had not been predicted and at times found him unprepared.

At high school the senior English syllabus failed to interest him: his response to the analysis of literature and to creative writing in the form of fictional narrative was essentially pragmatic: ‘I got over writing about Romeo and Juliet and analysing stories and ... things that just really didn’t interest me. I wasn’t going to be a writer in the future’ [BEN 1:4-7]. So the suggestion from the Careers Advisor that he didn’t need to take Form 7 (Year 13) English was welcome news at the time. In his senior high school years, essay writing was required in Geography where, in contrast to the creative writing of English classes, the content was mainly factual and writing a two-page geography essay was a fairly undemanding task. Accordingly, he had the confidence on entering university that he would be able to cope quite well with its writing demands.

Overview of experiences by years
Ben began his first year of university study expecting that he might have to do quite a lot of sustained writing and was agreeably surprised to find that, in some papers at least, much of the assessment was through multi-choice answers. However the first few grades from his essay assignments in MGMT191, where a good awareness of academic style was expected, were a shock. After receiving several Cs, he revised his earlier opinion about the value of writing and felt that he had been poorly advised at high school [BEN.1: 1-7]. One problem he found was his habit of modelling the expression of ideas on his
speaking style, most noticeably in his tendency to ramble. ‘I mumble and stuff when I speak ... [and] when I write, I do the same thing’ [BEN.1: 106-108].

He now determined to take his writing more seriously, because he believed that his writing style and errors in grammar and spelling were pulling down his marks. This resolution was helped by the discovery that, where simple narrative or opinion writing from high school had been relatively unstructured, at university the content for the assignment and the appropriate structure were set out for students in a straightforward manner. ‘In university, there’s a clear way, this is right. If I talk about these things, I’ll get the right answer, so I can write about that and now I can write. Instead of struggling to write 500 words for an essay, I struggle to fit in a thousand’ [TAM.II: 79-81]

Ben’s awareness of the role of structure in particular in his writing generated a sense of progress and by the second year, he was able to express a qualified confidence about his ability to cope with the writing of his course: ‘I’m better at it but, I don’t know – sometimes I’m better at it’ [TAM.II: 286]. He saw the process in fairly simplistic terms: ‘[Y]ou look on your experiences, you use facts and stuff like that, and, sure, you use some creative big words but it’s ... just easier for me now’ [BEN.1:27-29]. While he still had no great enthusiasm for writing, he found that following basic guidelines of this kind helped him towards a better understanding of what was expected from him.

The need to write to guidelines could also be seen in Ben’s interpretation of audience. He had to have some notion of what each marker might expect so that he could tailor his writing accordingly and he made a point of identifying what the marker’s interests and expectations were and writing to this representation. Such a strategy did not always work out, however. When in Year 2, one lecturer (X) was replaced at the very last minute by another (Y) after assignments had been handed in, Ben was quite upset: ‘I was really gutted because if I’d written it for Y, I’d have put a lot less theory in and a lot more communication’ [BEN.1:42-43]. Other students in the group mentioned this experience in their second-year interviews but for most this narrow focus was eventually replaced by a broader interpretation of audience, whereas Ben continued to write for a specific marker throughout his course, despite the problems it might cause. One such incident was an Accounting project in his third year about which he commented: ‘[T]he problem with keeping the marker in mind was I’d never met him’. When the marker came to class to provide feedback on the completed projects, Ben realised that, given the marker’s background and interests, he had completely missed the angle to focus on in the task and had consequently lost marks. [BEN.2: 204-214]
Ben’s learning approach was practical and literal. He held the opinion that feedback on a completed assignment was of no great value when the next assignment topic would be different, and so his transfer of general principles of writing from one assignment to the next was quite limited. On the other hand, he found his learning experience through the Careers’ Centre and in Media Studies extremely helpful. In both cases, a process approach was adopted whereby a draft was handed in, commented on and returned for amendment. This was repeated with second and possibly even third drafts, and its value for Ben lay in the immediacy of the response and revision process and the specific advice given. He was emphatic that this was the most effective way for him to improve his writing style.

... [D]oing something, having to mark it and then getting the chance to do it again and having to mark it, it’s so much better than just writing it. We did a media course once where it was pretty much the same as that, where she’d see our video and we handed in an assemble where all the slides were in, and she said: ‘That’s good, you could do this’, and we handed in a rough and she said: ‘I like what you did with this bit but you could change it there’, and then we handed in the final edit, and I thought that was really good. It was much better, even though... I don’t know, I thought that was a much better way to learn how to do something. [BEN.3: 40-47]

By the end of the third year, Ben was able to sum up what he had learnt about writing in the following way: ‘I’d say the structure I write in has changed a little bit and my grammar has improved in all of that, spelling, because I have to write quite often. [...] And I also seem to write in a lot of different formats.’ [BEN.3:3-5], meaning types such as PowerPoints, reports, executive summaries. He emphasised once again the importance of structure, sparked by a comment from his media lecturer: ‘[He] said ... if you want to convey something properly, you have to tell them what you are telling them, tell them it and then tell them what you told them. And if you think about it, that’s exactly what you do with essays. I write a thing and then I write about this, this and this, and [...] then I summarise it. So it was quite a eureka moment when I realised’. [BEN.3: 69-72]

However, this did not significantly change Ben’s overall attitude to writing. Even into his third year, he continued to assert that he approached his written tasks reluctantly because of their apparent lack of real purpose:
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

I don’t really enjoy writing in relation to my course that much, I find it quite boring. I don’t know, I was thinking about it. I don’t mind writing when I’m working in a job but there’s something that doesn’t quite click while I’m studying. [BEN.2: 284-290]

From his early comments on English at high school [TAM.II: 257-258] through to his final interview, this perspective was maintained, that the indirect and often discursive style of academic writing obscured the essential message.

B.: [M]y last boss said: ‘Ben, stop talking around the issue. […] Just tell me what’s wrong …’. 
INTERVIEWER: Does that appeal to you?
B.: It does! It does! And that’s why I really hate university. […] because the papers in this Management stuff where I may not get as good a mark because of the writing stuff, I can talk a lot better than a lot of my classmates. You know, talk to people and manage them … . […] I don’t understand because business management, it’s all about being direct, but writing a long wordy essay, it’s not. [BEN.3: 191-204]

Writing analyses

Raters’ score for academic writing
The raters’ score for Ben’s writing, based on his MGMT191 examination essay in the first semester, is considerably higher than the overall grade given by his lecturer for that paper but both suggest that Ben’s writing style on entry to the university was more proficient than he himself believed. The fact that the raters’ score did not take account of content, while the lecturer’s grading was much more weighted towards content than writing style, reinforces the possibility that it may have been content as much as writing style which reduced Ben’s marks.

Analysis of Management 191 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing
Despite certain weaknesses, Ben’s writing in his MGMT191 paper contained several academic features that set him above the class norms. Admittedly, the ratio of nouns to lexical verbs (295:194) was similar to the class average (293.1:154.7), as was his pronoun use (42, cohort average 49.8), and there was a lack of nominalisation and an overuse of plurals (74; cohort average 67.4) even by the class standards. In other important respects, however, namely modification and verb use, Ben achieved a more academic
writing style than many of his peers. All aspects of modification were above the average rate, especially in the quantity of nouns as pre-modifiers (91; cohort average 80.7) and multiple post-modifiers. High rates of multiple post-modification were, incidentally, very much a feature of first-language as opposed to LEMS writers amongst this small Focus Group.

Adjectives were below the cohort figures of 80 but their use was mainly attributive (59), in line with academic practice, the low rate of predicatives (5) suggesting a relationship with the equally low rate of copula be. Adverb use was relatively restricted, also in line with academic norms, while the slightly higher preposition figures may have been associated with the number of multiple post-modifiers. The verb count was very much in line with class figures (195; cohort average, 196) but a greater number of auxiliaries permitted a wider use of the progressive and perfect verb aspects and of passives. Against the class practice, Ben favoured the present tense over the past (50 and 33 respectively; cohort average, 37.6 and 35), suggesting there may have been some discussion of theory as well as the narration of the Tesco Case Study events.

The study of sentence structures shows that Ben’s word count for his MGMT191 exam essay was relatively low (1195; cohort average, 1442.5), resulting in fewer clauses and T-units. Nonetheless his writing produced a higher number of words per clause (7.33; cohort average, 6.77) and per T-unit (20.96; cohort average, 17.5), so that sentences, although much fewer, were longer than average. This greater length was achieved by the wider use of subordinate clauses (34.5% of all clauses; cohort average, 26.8%), and a consequent reduced reliance on main and non-finite clauses for sentence-building. Although he included to and –ing among non-finite clauses, there was little evidence of the –ed forms with which proficient writers added to the academic tone.

These findings suggest that Ben had already acquired many of the skills needed for an acceptable writing style and he often achieved that standard. However, he also tended to include features more typical of an oral text so that the extension of sentences could come at the cost of clarity, and the vocabulary would have elements of the colloquial. In addition, he made over-generous use of Case Study wording and allowed a number of minor mechanical errors to reduce the impression of careful, thoughtful writing required at this level. This mixture of positive and negative features can be seen in the extract below.

To get a competitive advantage looking at the external Environment facing Tesco through Porters Framework you can see that companies in the industry were all jockeying for the number one
position and were looking for ways to enter. Tesco had blocked most substitutes by diversifying in every retail item until it sold pretty much every thing ‘from dental floss to computers’ (case study). Being the number one retail store in the country where 1 in every 8 english pounds is spent means that Tesco would have substantial control over many of its suppliers. These external forces would have made it hard for new entrants and would have decreased that threat also. [BEN: MGMT191]

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Table 45: BEN - Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words)

Analysis of Business 292 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

There were a few instances of similarities with the earlier MGMT191 writing but most of the academic features examined showed increases, for example: nominalisations (191: 17; 292: 36), definite articles (191: 59; 292: 68) and all forms of noun modification (191: 163; 292: 196). Additionally, adverb rates had decreased (191: 38; 292: 30) although linkers (191: 2; 292: 7) were more in evidence. With reduced numbers of lexical verbs, the noun proportion of all content words also rose, if only slightly. The balanced range of tense and aspect forms shown in the first year writing, on the other hand, had given
place to a marked focus on simple past forms, reducing the range of tense and aspect use. However, this change was to a large extent determined by the requirement to discuss the class experience of actually working in a Liberation Management organisation as part of their paper. Modal, passive and copula be rates were maintained and there was a rise in infinitive use (191: 36; 292: 48), partly accounted for by an increase in bare infinitives, all likely to increase the academic tone.

The growth in word count compared with the MGMT191 writing (191: 1195; 292: 2319) suggests an increased fluency, perhaps as a result of the more personal nature of the topic. As word rates for both clauses (191: 7.33; 292: 6.72) and T-units (191: 20.96; 292: 20.5) were down from the previous year’s sample, this growth appeared to have created more, rather than longer, T-units, although, in fact, shorter sentences were at times contrasted with quite long ones. Equal distribution amongst the three clause groups of main, finite subordinate and non-finite subordinate clauses had been a feature of the writer’s work in his first semester and this was maintained. Among the non-finite types, the main difference was fewer –ing forms, offset by the growth in the use of –ed and bare infinitive phrases, the –ed forms especially enhancing the academic tone.

At the beginning of his course, Ben had the lexical and syntactic resources to produce a very competent academic style and this capacity had grown over the intervening semesters. His study experiences had brought Ben an improved understanding of an acceptable style, though he continued to vacillate between confidence and doubt in his own writing ability. In addition, he still failed to distinguish between conversational and academic styles in his writing, and perhaps favoured a colloquial approach thinking that it was more direct. In fact this feature was more likely to affect his academic writing proficiency than any perceived lack of writing ability. The example below shows how Ben was able to express his ideas in a clear and acceptable manner.

The Business 292 learning project was a new and interactive learning environment that used theory and more importantly experience to teach project management. Liberation management influenced the classes structure, the way we reacted to risks and change and liberation management has changed the way we approach learning.

Most organisational structures are based on a tree structure that divides up departments and has layers of management. The Business 292 structure is different it is a product of BBIM’s core values of how integration promotes learning. We as students of a class were broken up from a big stagnant class and made to form small, complex, diverse and interactive groups. We formed those groups so
that we could use communication and collaboration to take the huge task of negotiating BBIM’s move to the city campus allowing it to adapt to its new environment but still retaining the knowledge and uniqueness that was fostered in the satellite campus. We formed a liberation management structure. [BEN: BUS292]

Discussion

It is clear from the interviews that Ben was not an enthusiastic writer in the academic setting. At high school he preferred to deal with facts rather than compose fiction, favouring a more direct, relatively simple style and short answers over the extended essay response and, for this reason, he was successful in producing the kind of straightforward, factual short essays expected for Geography. On the basis of this experience in senior secondary school, he arrived at university unsure about what might await him but relatively confident about his writing ability.

At university, writing for essay-based papers such as Management was initially something of a challenge, however. He had not predicted the low marks he would receive for his first semester assignments and he struggled at times over the next two years to understand the conceptual and linguistic requirements of such papers. As a result, he decided to address the issue of writing more strategically, concluding that style was not as important as content in the eyes of the markers. Ben himself did not believe in the value of the more discursive style of academic writing. He disliked indirectness and believed the basic principle of all types of communication was to be simple, clear and to the point but he made some effort to adapt to marker expectations. Once he had worked out guidelines and techniques for essay writing which appeared to fit in with assignment requirements, the process became easier, though never very enjoyable. He had a rather simplistic and formulaic approach to selecting and organising his material for his audience but on the whole it worked.

He was consequently reluctant to actively undertake steps to improve his writing, despite his perceived lack of competence. For instance, he judged feedback to be of limited value, since the principles which applied to one piece of work would not necessarily transfer to the next. The exception to this was the sequenced learning practised by the Careers’ Centre and Media Studies. But even this guidance needed to be quite specific for Ben to be able to work on improving what he had written. The BBIM aim of bringing students to the point of becoming independent writers who had found their own style and voice was unlikely to hold much appeal for Ben.
The contradiction in all this is that Ben was in fact quite a competent writer, as several observations show. The independent raters, assessing his MGMT191 exam answers, ranked him quite highly at 88%. The linguistic analysis of that writing and the MGMT191 essays identify a number of features preferred in academic writing, such as extension of the main clause by a series of phrases and clauses, the use of prepositional post-modifiers and a range of verb forms. Over the semesters his vocabulary base expanded and he achieved greater fluency in expressing ideas at length and coherently. Most interestingly, his grades show that Ben’s higher marks tended to be for Management and Business papers which required a higher level of language than others, such as Accounting.

Ben’s continuing conviction that his writing was not really up to standard may have arisen from several factors. He had long been aware of problems with spelling and other mechanics, and perhaps had given these more importance than was warranted. Additionally, the main tenets of academic writing with its discursiveness and seemingly inflated language went against his own concept of direct, clear and simple communication, while in terms of material he preferred the tangible and concrete over the abstract and theoretical. Finally, his grasp of content may have been too literal and superficial for the level of understanding expected, so that while he felt he had an adequate grasp of his material, the marker may have been looking for a deeper interpretation of the topic.

Indeed it can be argued that Ben’s approach to his content may have impacted just as much as his writing on his academic achievement. His comments show that he did not see himself as a competent writer, nor did he agree with the principles and purpose behind academic writing but the linguistic evidence suggests that Ben’s main problem may ultimately have been his own devaluation of his writing skills. In summary, the role of writing in Ben’s academic success may have been more positive and important than he realised.
5.3.2.2 Case Study: Grace

Introduction
Grace was one of two students in the interview group who had enrolled in mid-2004 for the degree programme, so that her studies overlapped with the previous and following intakes. As a result, at the time of the first interview, she had already begun some third-year papers while sharing other second-year courses with the main cohort of this study. Most of her programme had been carried out on the smaller North Shore campus, and she enjoyed the sense of belonging to a familiar and intimate little community. In addition, by the time of the final interview she had graduated and had been working for some months, and all these experiences gave her a particular perspective on her experiences as a student.

Grace displayed a strong sense of purpose in her studies. She often spoke of herself as an accountant, rather than a student, and the systematic approach and attention to detail required in her major were shown in other subjects as well. In writing, these features were particularly apparent in her careful planning during the composing process and they helped ensure that she completed her degree with success, despite some limitations in writing English.

Background
Grace’s background was Filipino and she had spent her childhood and early adolescence in her native country before the family emigrated to New Zealand. Here she completed several years of schooling in a New Zealand high school, fitting in with little difficulty. Her education in the Philippines had been in an English-medium school, so her oral skills were native-like and only a slight American accent distinguished her from her New Zealand-born peers at school and at university.

The eldest of four siblings, Grace reported that the languages used at home were both English and Tagalog. Conversation with her parents was mostly in Tagalog but with the rest of the family and even Filipino friends, English had become the dominant spoken language, and although the cultural background of the Philippines was strong in other respects within the family, English was the first language for academic purposes for Grace and her siblings.
Overview of experiences by years

Like many first-year students, Grace arrived at university somewhat apprehensive because she had little concept of the nature and extent of the university demands, especially on her English. She felt that her studies were likely to be challenging for her, because of her concerns about the level of her written language for academic work. Her oral skills were very good but English had been her weakest subject at school and she had found Form 7 English very hard. Her final grades had allowed her to pass but were not up to her own high standards: ‘Compared with other students, it wasn’t bad but for me, ... getting about 60s or something, that’s low’ [NS: 242-243]. Consequently she reasoned that a lack of proficiency in her academic English might affect her progress in her degree course. In fact, although she did encounter some difficulties, none of them proved a serious obstacle to advancing in her studies, largely because of the efforts she made to seek ways to resolve them.

To begin with, however, her fears seemed to be confirmed in her first essay in Semester 1, which earned her a distressingly low mark. But feedback from the marker clarified some important writing principles. University essays required a more thoughtful approach than English at school. At tertiary level ideas and opinions, rather than accuracy of grammar, were prioritised and good structuring of writing with effective linkage was essential in providing the flow that made these ideas clear and coherent. This first experience of the need to structure one’s work carefully may well have been the impetus for the attention from this point onwards that Grace gave to planning in detail. As an additional precaution in these early months, she also went on occasion to the Student Learning Centre on campus to have her work checked for clarity and coherent organisation.

Other differences between school and university that caused some concern in the short term were common to most of the group in this study. The prospect of writing a 1000-word essay for the first time was daunting and Grace found the early experience of writing to this word limit required more effort than the higher word counts of later years. But once she learnt that she could amass enough information and ideas to meet the minimum limit, the situation began to resolve itself. On the other hand, while constantly exceeding the word limit was an ongoing dilemma for some in the group, it was not for Grace. She put this down to her meticulous planning: as she prepared her outline and organised her ideas, she kept the word limit in mind and rarely had to cut down her writing. The practice of using sources to support her ideas in written tasks was another area of concern at first, though the major difficulty was how to access such material, not how to use it in her writing. Using the databases in the library system and the APA method of referencing were unfamiliar skills and in her first year she made
full use of the library staff’s expertise, by taking problems and inquiries to them personally and using online resources. As a result, by the end of the first year she had become an independent and confident researcher.

With her growing skills and knowledge, by the end of the second year Grace was able to express a general confidence in her ability to cope with the study demands on her English skills. She still had reservations about her writing but had made a determined effort to improve during this time by using a range of support sources. In her first year, academic staff had been influential in helping her understand the nature and structure of the writing tasks set and the use of sources in writing, so that as a second-year student Grace had become more independent and no longer sought staff input before beginning assignments, although she would still normally respond to written feedback on work which had been marked.

I actually go and see lecturers, especially when I don’t do too well on that report because of course I want to do good on the next one. And we sit down and they tell me what can be improved on that report and what I can do next time. [GRACE.3: 83-85]

Grace made use of other forms of input to improve her writing in her final year when there were fewer formal lectures. Lecturers would make themselves available in ‘problem clinics’, though these tended to deal with discussion and clarification of content material more than linguistic problems in written assignments. However, the movement away from assessment through individual tasks towards more use of team projects provided an opportunity for Grace to examine closely how others might express an idea, and to learn from their approach to word choice and sentence structuring, as well as organisation of ideas. Working with other team members involved a collaborative approach towards aspects of the group report, such as speaking with a consistent voice for the audience.

[It’s] not just writing your own report. It’s a group report, so that means you have to integrate it. So before you write something, you have to have a group meeting and … you think about how you can write it and it will sound like one person wrote it because that’s what it’s supposed to sound like. Like it helped me to think of the other person and how would they write and how would we put them all together. [GRACE.1: 232-236]

Additional informal collaboration of this kind included the class study groups, arranged by students to deal with exam preparation for a specific paper. Interestingly, Grace participated only in those groups
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

where the exam required longer written answers, such as Management and Business, so her focus seems to have been not just on having the relevant content but ensuring it was organised and developed appropriately. Even more informal input came from discussion with classmates about questions and points of difficulty with assignments. The culture of BBIM placed a lot of emphasis on collaborative learning and Grace seems to have made full use of these opportunities to improve her understanding of her subject content as well as linguistic aspects of her work.

Despite her progress in both understanding and expressing her knowledge in assignments, Grace continued to see her position as a second-language writer of English as problematic for her writing, and this was a recurring theme in her interviews.

Sometimes I have to think before I type something, like I have to make sure that the grammar is right or the tense of the sentence and the verb. I still think like that. I’m not so fluent like I can just write anything, I still I have to make sure it’s correct. [GRACE.1: 65-68]

By fluency then she meant the ability to write without needing to search for the precise word for the context or to monitor sentence structures, an ability which she perceived local students to possess.

I envy some of my friends who can write fluent, like write well, because they can just sit there for 15 minutes and ... type an introduction without stopping. [GRACE.1: 63-65]

In her group interview Grace had also compared herself unfavourably with the local students in another respect: ‘ ... when they have this essay and they use, it’s like big, fancy words, and I just wish I could write something complicated’ [NS: 418-419]. Despite this observation, in the personal interviews Grace constantly identified simplicity as a desirable element of style, and emphasised the need for a simple, uncomplicated vocabulary: ‘I would want to write in simple words that [the reader] can easily understand, that they only have to read once and they know what I’m talking about’ [GRACE.1:175-177]. Moreover, as she had realised early on in her study, in the end it was content which mattered more than accurate language. She had seen with other students’ work, and more importantly with her own, that a certain amount of language error would be tolerated, provided the meaning was clear.

Because with regards to our assignments and getting marks, sometimes if my idea is better and my logic is better and the flow and structure is better, I might get more marks than someone who is really good in writing but there’s no essence, there’s no idea. [...] The concept is really important,
and what’s really good is that if your grammar and your structure can support your idea, that’s even better. [GRACE.1: 163-168]

As a newly graduated student already in employment by the time of the third interview, Grace was able to bring an additional dimension to her comments on her writing. Some of the writing qualities she had learnt in her tertiary study, such as adjusting her style and structuring to different audiences, meant that workplace requirements for writing so far were easily accommodated. For the most part, as she had previously anticipated, the demands were on her accounting skills, for example, analysing a set of sales figures and adding an informal written comment. In these situations her insistence on a direct and simple style, ‘nothing flowery’, served her very well.

G: … I think it’s fine just saying: The sales increased by 20%. That’s fine.
INTERVIEWER: What would be the flowery version of that?
G: Well, ‘Dramatically the sales increase is …’. I’m just trying to make up something. Or even … like long sentences. I hate long sentences. It’s like, ‘Sales increased by 20% due to something, something because of blah-blah and as a result …’. It just means sales increased by 20% stop and then another de-de-de and then stop. Easier to comprehend. [GRACE.3: 340-349]

Where more extended writing was required, such as letters to customers, she had continued her student practice of careful checking for grammar and spelling errors and, if unsure, could readily get help from her manager.

On the whole, it seemed that Grace’s early fears that her written language might not be adequate for her academic study were not realised but it took some effort and a systematic approach to her assignment and exam writing to ensure her success.

**Writing analyses**

**Raters’ score for academic writing**

The rating for Grace’s first exam writing was 55%, suggesting that she had some way to go in reaching a proficient academic writing standard but her exam grade for this paper was an A-, showing not only that the content was of high quality but also that ideas were very clearly expressed.
The role of academic writing in the study experience of undergraduate business students

Analysis of Management 191 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

The rating for Grace’s writing in her first semester exam was low but the academic writing features of that text when compared with the cohort averages did not appear to reflect this lower rating: in most areas of content word use, the figures were very similar. Differences occurred with some minor items, such as the restricted use of determiners, but were more marked in the frequencies of modifiers and in the narrow range of verb tenses, both perhaps an indication of a second-language writer’s language practices. Although rates for pre-modifiers were a little higher than cohort use (91; cohort average, 80.7), especially in the use of adjectives attributively, post-modifiers (56; cohort average, 62.1) were lower. Passive forms, a feature characteristic of academic writing, exceeded the average use, however (14; cohort average, 8.7). In contrast, Grace made almost exclusive use of the present simple in her sentences, frequently inappropriately. While present tense use is normally quite high in academic writing, e.g. 65% in the LSWE corpus results, tense forms in Grace’s writing often constituted grammatical errors, and her error rate overall must partly account for the low writing rating she received. In making use of material from the case study, on the other hand, she sometimes managed to integrate it quite skillfully into the existing syntactic structures of her text.

Departures from the cohort’s practices in clause choice and sentence structure were also apparent in some areas. For example, while the cohort average for main clause use was 38.5%, exactly half of the clauses in Grace’s writing were main clauses, creating short, abrupt sentences with a jerky effect which impeded the flow of the writing.

Today’s position of Bank Direct are affected by the behaviour of consumers in their target market.
Bank Direct make sure that they fit and tailor their services on how consumers want them to be.
They always make sure they have the best, latest updated services they can offer to provide customer satisfaction. [GRACE: 191]

In addition, there was a consistently lower use of subordinate clause types (20.6%; cohort average: 26.8%), even in non-finite forms. A striking feature of the latter was her preference for –ing participles (64.0% of all non-finite forms) whereas class members in general tended to employ mainly to followed by a base verb. With fewer words per T-unit (13.5 and 17.57 for Grace and the cohort respectively) and many more single-clause T-units than the cohort average (55.0 and 23.72 respectively), she also generated a higher number of clauses, albeit very basic ones.
All in all, in her first semester Grace was producing features of academic writing to a similar extent to many of her peers but with some grammatical features typical of an EAL student, including a high grammatical error rate. The more readily produced forms of verb tense and aspect allowed her to avoid problematic structures, and her sentences, while clear and direct, were fairly simple, lacking in fluency or any great precision of expression. A sample of her writing at this stage is provided below, with phrases from the Case Study in italics.

Employees and corporate culture are vital for Bank Direct in able to gain this advantage. It is important that the corporate culture that exist in Bank Direct is pleasant to the employees because this is the foundation of a leaning organisation. Having a good corporate culture include three ideas: whole is better than part, culture is egalitarian and improved and strong, adaptive culture. The idea of whole is better than part extremely focuses on teamwork. The synergy of working together is stronger than working individually. Due to Bank Direct’s small dynamic nature, staffs recruited are skilled and are capable of doing different things in the company. ‘All hands to the pump’ is required.

[GRACE: MGMT191]

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<tr>
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Table 46: GRACE - Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words)
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

Analysis of Business 292 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

In this exam writing Grace appears to have made a determined effort to strip her writing of more descriptive elements, with a striking reduction in the use of all forms of modification, including adjectives. While adverb rates were similar, there was more use of linking adverbs to increase the smooth flow (191: 3; 292: 9). The most noticeable point was an improvement in the range of verb tense and aspect, and in verb grammatical accuracy. The issue of grammatical error was not relevant to the Biber features of academic writing, since the LSWE corpus did not target second language writers and speakers. However, for EAL students an improvement in grammatical accuracy is a significant step towards a more academic style, since it brings greater clarity and subtlety to their writing and provides a foundation for more complex structuring.

The writing in her BUS292 paper demonstrated a much greater facility in manipulating verbs, reflected in the increase in auxiliaries which led to a wider range of tenses and progressive and perfect forms. This also produced a more balanced tense ratio, with about one-third of all verbs being in the past and used appropriately and accurately. A deeper understanding of grammar could be seen in the doubled occurrence of pronouns (191: 33; 292: 73) and increased accurate use of the definite article, while the insertion of linking adverbs demonstrated her expressed concern for improving the flow of her work. However, types of modification, already low in comparison with her first year peers, had decreased even further by about one-third over all types, complemented by a reduction in noun (191: 323; 292:262) and preposition (191: 121; 292:109) rates. This appears to bear out Grace’s determination to avoid ‘flowery’ language and keep her writing simple and direct.

Sentence structures had not appreciably changed during the time of the first and second exam writing samples. In fact, Grace was remarkably consistent in the number of words and clauses she produced, the number of words per clause and the number of clauses per T-unit. It is only in the detail of clause types and non-finite sub-types that any changes are noticeable. With a little less reliance on main and non-finite clauses, Grace was making more use of subordinate clauses, adverbial (191: 6.2%; 292: 9.7%) and complement (191: 7.4% ; 292: 10.9%) clauses in particular, and had increased her preference for –ing non-finite clauses. Neither her sentences nor her clauses had been extended more than previously, again reinforcing her desire for simplicity and directness in her writing.
Grace had evolved a well-defined view of the essential features of her academic style and she had put effort into increasing her grammatical accuracy and keeping her writing simple but clear and precise, so that she was eventually competing on equal terms with her ESB and more proficient EAL peers. These features are displayed in the extract below.

Relating to Business 292, we can see it as an example of project-based liberation management. In the beginning of the semester we formed our teams. To ensure the diversity in each team, we made sure that each team has someone doing Marketing, and Accounting as their major. It is often said that marketer and accountants have different way of thinking. By having a cross-functional team, ideas from different mindsets can create better ideas for the project. In this way, it gives the teams a foundation for innovation and diversity. We also made sure that there’s a mixture of gender, culture and experiences in each team. [GRACE: BUS292]

Discussion

Although Grace had not attained quite the proficiency that many other EMS (English-medium schooling) students had reached, the fact that she had been educated completely in English was no doubt one of the factors in her successful progress through her academic study. She had acquired a sufficient foundation to allow her to build up her linguistic skills, and she brought a disciplined approach to both her study and her language improvement. This included her meticulous researching and planning and attention to structural detail, and her deliberate practice of keeping her written language simple, direct and clear. Additionally, she does not seem to have experienced to the same extent the emotional ups and downs that others in the Focus Group described. Rather she continued to work steadily, maintaining her enthusiasm and motivation despite the variable results in the first few semesters.

Another aspect of her success may have been her view of herself as an accountant from early on in her programme. The creation of this identity allowed her to see the challenges that emerged during her study from a longer-term perspective than many of her peers, and to deal with them more constructively. So the practice she used of reducing her written language to a plain and straightforward form of communication both facilitated her assignment writing and served her well in the workplace.

In addition, it may be argued from this case study that what Grace saw as a considerable limitation in her academic writing, her position as a second-language student, in fact helped her in several ways to succeed in the demands that her study placed on her.
Firstly, her concern for her language skills motivated her to seek early help in the aspects of her writing tasks that were initially problematic: structure, flow and research skills. Secondly, while she was very conscious of her lack of fluency in writing when compared to native speakers, this knowledge encouraged her to keep to a simple and straightforward style, rather than imitate the more sophisticated or complex writing of her first-language peers. At the same time, she showed a steady improvement in grammatical accuracy. A third point to make here is that, having identified content as the most important area of responding to any assessment task, Grace put considerable effort into producing sound, well-researched and well-reasoned material which she had carefully constructed to respond to the task set. Provided her message was clear, easy to follow and to the point, she believed her readers would follow it without difficulty. Her patient and methodical routine of planning, revising and checking her work allowed her writing to achieve this degree of clarity, coherence and relevance.

Other more proficient writers in the group displayed an erratic approach to coping with the demands of their academic writing, sometimes frustrated by problems which they did not seem able to resolve easily and which affected their progress. Grace, on the other hand, appears to have followed a path of steady improvement, in that most of the common problems were promptly attended to and resolved, allowing her to concentrate on the content of her work. In fact, the excellent final results she obtained are all the more striking in that she was able to attain a higher standard than many of her ESB peers.

In any assessment of the role of writing in Grace’s academic achievement, it should be acknowledged that her attitude was probably the most critical factor, for she brought into her studies both the ability and the determination to perform well. Additionally, her good foundation in English progressively allowed her to exploit those qualities to a very rewarding level.
5.3.2.3 Case Study: Dipak

Introduction
The multicultural and multilingual nature of the BBIM intake in 2005 could be seen in the wide range of first languages spoken. Dipak was one of several students of Indian ethnicity who were very proficient in English, having been wholly educated in English-medium schools. These students saw their Indian home language as their first language and the marker of their culture. Accordingly they identified themselves as second language speakers of English, although in fact their level of spoken and written English was often native speaker-like.

Given his high level of proficiency in English and his success in the subject, not only at school in India but also in his senior years at a New Zealand high school, Dipak arrived at university confident of being able to cope with academic writing demands. But his path as a writer through the three-year course was marked by a long period of self-doubt and disillusionment. By his third year, however, he had matured into an assured and thoughtful writer who had come to terms with the demands of the academic writing task but equally had been able to establish his own approach and voice within these boundaries.

Dipak was interviewed only twice, in addition to the Group Discussion. His first interview followed the Group Discussion in the second semester of Year 2, but his second interview had to be postponed until August of Year 3. Accordingly, no third interview seemed necessary when the rest of the participants were interviewed in October and November of that final year.

Background
Born and brought up in a part of India where both Tamil and Hindi were spoken, Dipak and his family also spoke Gujarati within the home and, from time to time English, ‘just to keep in touch sort of thing’ [DIPAK.1:12]. The family moved from a small town to a much larger urban environment in his early adolescence, and here for the first time he encountered the use of English as well as Hindi as a lingua franca, because of the multiplicity of language backgrounds amongst the varied urban population. His English-medium schooling ensured that when the family moved to New Zealand in Dipak’s final years of secondary schooling, the transition was relatively straightforward and he continued to do well in English writing.
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

Well, in school and even back in India, I used to excel in English in the sense that I used to have a really good flow of words and I used to be able to express what I was thinking clearly in words. That was the case in school in here as well. Even in sixth form when it was the last [time] I did English, I did pretty well considering it was not a favourite subject by the other students. [DIPAK.1: 55-59].

So Dipak could be confident of his readiness for the academic requirements of university study in the medium of English when he enrolled for the BBIM programme.

Overview of experiences by years

Dipak’s initial semester, however, brought some disappointment about his ability to write well when his first assignments did not get the marks he had hoped for. As this trend continued, he began to lose confidence and to question his writing ability in which he had previously taken great pride.

In the beginning of my degree, I still continued with the whole flow of writing from school. Like I just like: Oh yeah, this is my forte. I can do this easy. And then came back the Cs and B minuses and I was like: Maybe I’m doing something wrong. And then came the doubting where I’m still figuring out what’s required. [DIPAK.1: 70-74]

He was reluctant to look for models of what might be good writing from his peers to help remedy the problem, citing a lack of patience and concentration, but his failure to work out what he was doing wrong brought confusion and a sense of disillusionment. This in turn affected his approach to study. Looking back at the end of his second year, he reflected:

I think I just went off track after the first semester anyway because of my academic results. […] Because I never have struggled writing essays before, even in school. English was one of my strong points and I didn’t actually think much about it until probably this semester when I actually concentrated on improving. [TAM II: 38-42]

These first two years were quite difficult for him as the feedback from lecturers provided him with the kind of criticism he had not encountered at high school. There his work had always received an ‘excellence’ grade but at university, where expectations were different, staff comments identified weaknesses in his work which Dipak found hard to act upon.
One aspect of writing, conciseness, was a major problem for him, as it was for others in the group who seemed to struggle in their first semesters with the task of identifying the most relevant material from the wealth of information they had acquired, and then expressing all they wanted to within the word limit. Dipak himself was aware of his lack of conciseness and related it to his reluctance to revise his work.

One of my feelings has been the lack of re-drafting that I do. Like I know people who go through multiple drafts but I only can do it once, as if I have a thought in my head, I tend to type it out and let it out of my system and once it’s out, it’s there sort of thing. [...] Yeah, it’s really hard for me to go back and go fix it around to sound better or not. [DIPAK: 116-122]

An even more contentious aspect of his work was his use of sources. Initially Dipak felt that as a tertiary student he should rely on his own ability to think and not make use of the opinions of others. He also felt that reinforcement through using the opinions of others stifled the creation of his own ideas and impeded the flow of his writing. Then, realising that this approach was not earning him marks, he embarked on a slightly cynical process of ‘pleasing the audience’. His strategy involved closely following the marking rubric and incorporating only the source material provided.

... [Y]ou sort of think that this is probably what they’re expecting and not what you think yourself. So you tend to take the resources that other people have put out and just say: Okay, I’ll put this in this part of my essay and probably remodel it in some way or another, and probably if I say it this way, they might like it better. It’s always about pleasing the audience in other words: it’s not about whether you’re happy with your own work. [DIPAK: 61-67]

Such a system prevented Dipak from including any significant personal input in his work and in fact the approach was not particularly effective as he continued to receive unsatisfactory marks. Thus he began to realise the value of applying lecturer feedback. After referring to an episode in Year 2 where he received another disappointing mark for what he had thought was quite a good assignment essay, he described his changing reaction to staff comments. In doing so, he acknowledged that he had had difficulty taking on advice.

[Feedback] is important because it makes you realise that this is where you went wrong and it’s a learning process. Like for Management, I realise that it’s my writing style and it’s my referencing, it’s my broader point of view, how concise I have to be. If they keep telling me again and again, I get it through my head. [DIPAK: 161-165]
By late in Year 2, future employment was also a powerful motivator.

At this stage, especially when you’re looking at jobs and future employers, they make it clear, the employers, that they want marks and that’s what sets you apart from the rest. So that’s what you concentrate on. [...] Like for example, if you apply for Deloittes, they expect you to apply in March and there is a cut-off point, B+ average only. So it’s like a clear message... . [DIPAK.1: 82-87]

Towards the end of his second year, Dipak experienced a breakthrough in his work, not only getting good results but enjoying the writing process as well.

Like the last report itself ... According to my standards, I think it was one of the best I’ve done at university. Like I actually felt I knew what I was writing about and I had a complete understanding, and it all flowed down really nice and clearly. And it was just one of those moments. I think it was just the topic that probably incited that. That’s important as well, that you be passionate about the topic you’re writing about. And it was really a topic that made me think a lot and had brought out something of the best in me sort of thing. [DIPAK.1: 131-138]

Continuing good marks in Year 3, a deeper understanding of his material and his own growing maturity: in an interview late in his final year Dipak attributed his increased motivation and sense of purpose mainly to these three factors. But he noted other elements as well: increased conciseness by eliminating unnecessary ‘waffle’; greater clarity by expressing ideas in a simple and straightforward way; and a declining reliance on the marking rubric.

Incorporating research into his work had ceased to be an obstacle in the preparation of assignments and he reported a more constructive approach to the way he used source material. Firstly, he now employed a strategy for individualising assignment reports and essays by including some piece of primary research, whereby he contacted a company and searched out their point of view on a particular situation. ’I seem to think it’s a good habit to have, so I keep doing it again and again, and especially when it works’ [DIPAK.2:132-133]. This allowed him to bring in a unique element which no others in the class had thought to use. In addition, he had realised the benefits of taking time to evaluate his secondary research sources critically. This was something of a liberating factor for his writing, allowing him to express his own views while following the conventions of building previous research into his work. Asked whether he now felt more confident about using material from other researchers, Dipak responded:
Yes, because I feel that I can find a way to contradict them as well. Even though they have said something, I can always say: No, this is what I believe, but these guys have said this as well. Because at the end of the day that piece of writing is mine. It’s my piece of research, my viewpoint and it shouldn’t have to be a particular way. It can easily contradict or support an argument. [DIPAK.2: 81-85]

Working from this perspective, he found himself able to accommodate the conventions of the academic genre without sacrificing his own personal style.

A critical factor in Dipak’s writing development seems to have been better time management which of itself encouraged quality thinking. Discussing his changed attitude towards his study, Dipak commented:

... I believe I’ve become more focused on what I want to achieve in a sense. I’ve become determined not to leave everything to the last minute for one, like becoming more particular about things like that. And I believe that just as soon as your time habits change, everything else streamlines itself sort of thing. You become more clearer on what you want to write about and what not. If you start thinking about something two weeks before, as opposed to the night before, you always seem to do better. [DIPAK.2: 17]

A final factor to take into consideration in Dipak’s progress towards finding a successful individual writing approach was an external one. As part of his course, he spent three months working for an IT company to gain the experience of working for a large organisation. A major part of his role was communication, especially emails, with other employees including his superiors. At the end of his time there, he was both surprised and gratified to be complimented on his writing skills.

In that environment, I feel I grew a lot in terms of communication, like talking to people, getting to know people, approaching people for more information. [DIPAK.2: 226-229]

And actually I was told in my workplace that I have really good English, and that was surprising because I never thought I was special. But they find that whatever I write is concise and to the point, and I was like: Okay, take it on board. [DIPAK.2: 319-322]

The last interview finished on a very positive note. Dipak was off to Wellington to research and present a project for a government department. Despite the pressure involved in collecting data by day and
writing it up each evening, he was looking forward to the experience: ‘It should be fun, my first taste of the real world’. [DIPAK.2: 336].

**Writing analyses**

**Raters’ score for academic writing**
The MGMT191 examination writing was assessed as a B-, a result that might have surprised Dipak at this early stage of his academic career for he knew he was a skilled writer. But the rating is in line with the result of this paper overall and in a sense a predictor of his pathway over the next two years.

**Analysis of Management 191 examination writing**

**Specific features of academic writing**
Dipak’s academic style was much in line with his peers’ and where differences emerged, they were mainly because frequencies were below, rather than above, the class rate. For instance, both nouns as a proportion of content words (44.8%; cohort average, 51.1%) and nominalisations (11; cohort average, 26) were limited in number, and the rate of pre-modification, including nouns as pre-modifiers (14; cohort average, 43.7), was also lower in comparison with the writing of the majority. Equally there was a relatively low number of attributive adjectives (49; cohort average, 65). Verb use, in contrast, tended to conform to or exceed class practices. Lexical frequencies were a little higher, and Dipak made far greater use of the past tense than was the case for the class in general (70; cohort average, 35). Moreover, where most students restricted themselves to expressing past events in the simple past, Dipak made quite frequent use of the perfect aspect for such ideas, and also employed the passive more often than the cohort average (11; cohort average, 8.7).

In constructing sentences, Dipak tended towards slightly fewer words and clauses per T-unit than many of his peers so that his sentences were on average relatively short. Longer sentences showed a preference for the use of relative clauses (16.2%; cohort average, 9.2%), a complexity avoided by many of the class, and this meant a correspondingly lower recourse to non-finite forms (25.2%; cohort average, 34.4%). Where the latter were used, however, the occurrence of bare infinitives, though limited, was proportionately greater than his peers, leading to a rather more even distribution of non-finite types.
As a first-semester student, Dipak’s work did not display many of the features identified as academic and indeed, in a class where the use of an academic style was not very widespread, he fell below the class standard in several aspects. Additionally, the tone of his writing, which contained a striking mixture of formal and quite colloquial lexical items, gave the impression that the writer, like many first-year students, had incorporated elements of conversational language into his written work, without distinguishing between oral and written registers. This is well illustrated in the excerpt which follows.

This programme gave birth to a new set of employees. Those who chose it led a reformed life with set goals. They worked for a purpose and [not] just for the ‘heck’ of it. Commitment levels had increased which is shown by the decrease in absences and an increase in the number of staff retained. All this had created a set of employees who J. Barney’s would have described as being rare, valuable and inimitable resource. These employees were a par above the rest and had made themselves indispensable as they became a core ingredient of the organisation. The programme had allowed the employees from Tesco to be distinguishable to other employees from other retailers. They were much happier and were able to serve the customers better. [DIPAK: MGMT191]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIPAK</th>
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<th>BUS292</th>
<th>MGMT191</th>
<th>BUS292</th>
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<td>265</td>
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</table>

Table 47: DIPAK - Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words)
Analysis of Business 292 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

Dipak’s writing fluency appeared to have developed strongly and engendered a consequent increase in academic features. Together with a somewhat higher rate of nouns to lexical verbs, there was also a much increased fund of nominalisations (191:11; 292:37) and a noticeable rise in the use of pre-modifiers, especially nouns as pre-modifiers; adjective use however had not changed. Adverbs generally were reduced but there was a greater incidence of linking adverbs (191:4; 292:7) which served to improve the smooth flow of the writing.

In contrast, there was a less balanced distribution of tense and aspect: past tense verbs had decreased in number (191:70; 292:63) and, interestingly, aspect distribution was modified, with the majority of forms now in the simple aspect and virtually no instances of progressive or perfect forms. Passive use, on the other hand, had risen (191:11; 292:20).

Many of the changes between Dipak’s writing in his first and second years suggest a growing awareness of a more acceptable style although the mixed formal and informal tone did not entirely disappear. The extract below provides a useful illustration of the extent to which Dipak’s writing had changed over this time. Not all the informal language has gone but there is no longer the jarring effect of the frequent incongruous vocabulary choices of the previous extract. Dipak is much more confident, too, with extended sentences, although the result is not always successful. The final sentence is a good illustration of how nominalisations and post-modifiers not only add to the academic tone of the piece but to its conciseness as well.

Liberation management encourages that in a project-based environment one should put in place a flat hierarchy that fosters open communication and also allows the team members to feel empowered. They should feel like they have the power to decide and be responsible for whatever they do. The flat hierarchy promotes this based on the fact that the newest recruit is not afraid to seek advice from a veteran who might have been around for 20 years. This open communication breaks barriers and enhances the efficiency and quality of the project as a result. [DIPAK: BUS292]

Discussion

In the course of his final interview Dipak described himself as being ‘not [language]-oriented but [language]-literate’ [DIPAK.2:338-339], and there is little doubt that his writing in English was quite
competent by native-speaker standards. His judgement that English was not his first language seems to have been based on cultural and social, rather than academic, factors. Hindi was the language of choice amongst his family and friends but he did not use it for writing. All his schooling had been in English and it was his level of English that equipped him for study at university. So in an academic context, he can be seen as a first language user of English and a highly proficient writer, but these factors were not enough to ensure success in the early part of his tertiary study.

For Dipak the integration of sources into his writing posed a stumbling block. It was this, he felt, which prevented him from expressing his own opinions as he would wish. Until he found a way to resolve this issue, he could not feel confidence in his academic ability and this affected his general motivation for his studies.

A strong awareness of one’s writing identity may then be a disadvantage, where writers have defined their style and are unwilling to compromise on this point. A complicating issue here is that many able writers fail to grasp the concept of academic writing as a discipline-specific sub-genre where all beginning tertiary students need to learn a new ‘language’ as part of their studies, and some writers’ reluctance to accept advice or direction may stem from the notion that their general writing skills are being criticised. This kind of sensitivity may result in a severe loss of confidence in themselves, as occurred with Dipak, and be followed by a demotivating change in attitude which has obvious consequences for academic progress.

By the end of the final semester, however, while others such as Imogen (§5.3.2.4) had still not been completely won over to writing concisely, Dipak had progressed to a point where he could reconcile the use of source material with the expression of his own ideas. His growing maturity had brought him a clearer understanding of what academic study really involved, in particular, the critical analysis of research findings, and he was now able to incorporate it constructively in his work. Another influential motivator may have been the imminent prospect of moving into the workplace. His writing approach was affecting his marks, which could in turn affect his employment choices. In addition, his work experience towards the end of his study had stimulated his confidence in his ability to write well.

Thus his writing played a crucial role in Dipak’s academic success because of the extent to which the loss of confidence in his writing affected his academic performance. Fortunately the extended period of doubt and disillusionment he experienced came to an end late in his second year and the following year
saw his potential realised. By the end of his three-year course he had moved to a point where he could discuss his progress in these optimistic terms:

There’s no level of perfection you can’t attempt ... . It’s something you can’t attain but you can keep striving towards it. [DIPAK.2: 173-174]
5.3.2.4 Case Study: Imogen

Introduction
Few members of the Focus Group in this study spoke so enthusiastically and passionately about their enjoyment of writing as Imogen, and this enthusiasm and passion were maintained throughout her course. However, the constraints of the academic writing in her Business degree and especially in her Marketing major set up conflicts which pursued her throughout her three-year programme.

Background
Imogen was brought up in South Africa in an English-speaking family who moved to New Zealand when she was in her mid-teens. She had some basic knowledge of Afrikaans but little interest in the language, seeing English as the linguistic tool for expressing her personality and identity. For this reason she had enjoyed the kind of creative writing in English that she did in her South African school. In her high school in New Zealand, on the other hand, she found there was more emphasis on grammar and essay structure than on content and opinion, and only a limited chance to practise these structuring skills in essay-writing [NS: 23-28].

Overview of experiences by years
Before beginning her degree programme, Imogen anticipated that she might not have been well prepared at school for the probable changes in writing level of her Business course. In fact, her experience was quite the opposite. This was where the more prosaic writing skills, such as the organising of ideas through careful structuring learnt in her senior secondary programme, proved unexpectedly helpful. ‘I only learned to apply what I learned in secondary school in uni, and now I see the importance of it’ [NS: 225] and the anticipated lack of tertiary writing skills turned out to be of no great significance.

The conceptual demands of the course on the other hand were, as expected, more intense because of the research-based approach and the theoretical content of the assignments, very different from the analysis of literature which had been part of senior school English. As a keen writer, Imogen seems to have enjoyed the chance in her programme to do more writing and, from her perspective, more creative writing, where opinions were valued and content mattered most.
The main conceptual difficulty she encountered in the first year was the problem of ‘integration’: in practical terms this meant that content, structure and flow were not isolated and distinct aspects, but worked together as a single factor to produce a more academic tone in assignment essays. For Imogen this was initially a problematic concept to grasp but a session with the lecturer to clarify her understanding, followed by a resulting improvement in marks, eliminated this concern; and her determination to apply an integrated approach to her work suggests a growing awareness of the elements of academic style. Another problem which arose in the first few months, keeping to the word limit, caused rather less concern as she believed the markers were looking for content first and foremost, and so essay length was not as important as it had been at secondary school. Apart from these two issues, the first year’s work was therefore straightforward and enjoyable.

Particularly in her first and second years, Imogen sought feedback on a frequent basis from lecturing and tutoring staff who provided advice on course writing through one-on-one sessions and through ‘clinics’. Imogen, taking great pride in her writing skills, was very determined to benefit from their input in order to present an appropriate standard of work. Although much of the comment from lecturers concerned assignment content and structure, other advice concerned her practice of writing over the limit. Imogen was in two minds over this matter.

The lecturer said he wanted to limit it to two pages, and I knew he would probably mark me down but I did three pages because I wanted to get my ideas expressed. [IMOGEN 2: 201-203]

A short time later, discussing this situation, she asserted:

But now I sort of think we need to limit our writing, make it more concise, because sometimes, say, like when they say two pages, it can be done in two and they don’t want that much detail. [IMOGEN 2: 220-222]

Another important factor which helped drive improvement in her writing was the need to sound professional, and to this end she consulted business journal articles to find writers whose work had an appropriate tone. Their authority as a style model for her own work arose from their extensive background and established expertise in the corporate world. As she noted, such writers had a similar style, combining an academic approach with the ‘jargon’ specific to the business world. In this way she identified her ‘favourite’ writers and modelled her style on theirs.
Towards the end of her second year, Imogen felt, as she looked back, that her writing had undergone dramatic changes, particularly in the areas of essay structure and flow, and vocabulary. Her writing at school had in retrospect been somewhat formless: ‘Before if my teacher told me to write an essay, I’d just write one long piece of, you know, whatever, and I could still get some marks’ [IMOGEN I: 186-187] but in university, this attitude had to change. (Her comment here is somewhat at odds with her previous view of secondary school writing where structure and grammar had apparently been the main considerations.) She had also previously mentioned the need to use more sophisticated words but now tempered this awareness with the importance of considering the audience:

I've learnt to structure and use the proper words for the proper situation, like the jargon to use. If I'm writing for some stakeholder, then I'm trying not to use big words he wouldn’t understand. If it’s my employer, then I would change the vocab to suit the situation. [IMOGEN.2: 189-193]

The question of integration, of showing how the ideas related to the wider context, was no longer a concern, as Imogen now spoke confidently of applying this perspective in her work. An ongoing issue, however, was word length. The emphasis in second-year Business and Marketing papers on effective communication brought up again the conflict between explaining in what Imogen saw as sufficient detail while keeping within the word limit. However, she felt she had made progress. As she saw the situation: ‘I’ve also learnt you can’t restrict yourself in writing if you want to get your point across, but you have to try to condense it down ... and get to the main topic’ [IMOGEN.1: 252-254]. It seemed at that stage a workable solution to what she acknowledged as her biggest problem in writing. At this point she described academic writing in a way which summed up her indecision about how she should be writing:

I think academic writing should be to the point and get across what you want to say, but I also think that academic writing is [the] detail, and that sets you apart from another writer who’s just got a simple essay: it might be good but it might not be effective. And I think, for me, the more detail you have, the more effective it is.

But good academic writing is just sticking to the main points and keeping it simple but not having it too detailed .... At the end your reader comes away thinking: “Wow, that was a really good piece of work and I really understand what she’s written, you know”. [IMOGEN.1: 141-149]
The need to write in such a way that her audience understood was an important concern for her in her work and had been strongly emphasised in discussion on communication in business. This concern was underlined when she spoke about the effectiveness of academic research writing as a communication form:

"Oh, I find some research articles highly intense, sometimes I don’t understand it myself and I even wonder if the people who are writing the research understand what they’re writing. [...] I think they should balance it and make sure the topic they’re talking about is understandable to the reader."

[IMOGEN.1: 165-173]

In practice, for Imogen this meant noting down every point in detail from her reading for inclusion in her assignment. This could in turn lead to problems with editing, because she became strongly attached to the topic: ‘When I look at a research topic, I tend to get so excited. [...] I tend to get carried away’ [IMOGEN.2: 236-240]. As she noted in a third-year interview, this attitude was not in her best interests, however.

The lecturer kind of implied to me that if I had stayed to the limit, ... I would have gotten a higher mark. And that did kind of get to me but I had more satisfaction and got down what I wanted to express. [IMOGEN.2: 217-220]

In the third year, lecturer feedback lessened and Imogen began to make more frequent use of peer input, sometimes through comparing exam answers to see where she might have approached the response differently. She noted that other more successful and obviously more succinct fellow writers seemed to have made a thorough analysis of the question and therefore knew what ideas were relevant [IMOGEN.3: 246-250]. To encounter this approach helped her to understand her tendency to ‘babble on’. [IMOGEN.3: 27]

The emphasis on teamwork through group projects also opened up the opportunity for other students to comment on her work, though she did not always find it easy to accept their viewpoint, especially on her lack of brevity. While she took very seriously the obligation to avoid incurring a penalty for the team, she was quite unhappy to see her contributions reduced in length. Describing one incident, she related:

"One of my team members said to me: “Oh, we’re not going to include this.” I'd written two pages and he only took one or two lines out and I was so upset because I'd really put some effort into this
Imogen’s enthusiasm for writing and her enjoyment of the course assignment challenges was always evident in her third-year interviews. ‘As you go through the Business course, you learn different skills and you try to apply them as you go along ... . So you always learn something new’ [IMOGEN 2: 4-8]. She was now concentrating on her two very contrasting majors, Marketing and Information Systems, and new skills, such as a more analytical approach and the ability to write longer assignments, were nurtured through her Marketing studies. It was not just that she had acquired a broader concept of integration, which took in the transfer of knowledge and perspectives across papers and added depth to her writing, but the continuing emphasis on research also provided her with more ideas to discuss. This in turn impacted positively on her vocabulary range. However, she believed the restrictions of the word count and the need to write economically interfered with her natural desire to explain her ideas in depth and this constraint tempered the creative satisfaction she found in her academic work.

Writing analyses

Raters’ score for academic writing

Given 77.7 or B+ in the raters’ assessment of academic writing, Imogen’s examination answers contributed to a course grade of A-, so that her skill in writing was recognised and rewarded at this early stage in her tertiary study by both the raters and the lecturer.

Analysis of Management 191 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

As may be expected when nearly 40 students of varying linguistic thresholds and academic experience contribute to a corpus of features, few individual students will entirely follow the model established by the group and within the group’s writing, most features showed a wide range of occurrences. The average which the corpus represents, then, is highly generalised. So Imogen showed some similarities with the group as a whole and diverged from them in other respects.

Her use of nouns is interesting in that she used plural nouns quite freely (99; cohort average, 67.4) but very few determiners of any kind. Moreover her noun rates were somewhat below the class average but
those which did appear were quite highly modified, mainly with attributive adjectives (71; cohort average, 65) rather than nouns as pre-modifiers, and an atypically high number of multiple post-modifiers. Given the lack of predicative adjectives, occurrences of copula be were consequently below average for the cohort (20; cohort average, 24.5). All of this tended to bring a greater conciseness of structuring which suggests that Imogen’s problems with expressing herself within the set limits were more a matter of unnecessary detail and repetition than any problem in constructing succinct sentences.

Along with others in the cohort she used adverbs quite freely, more than would be common in an academic text, but made only average use of linking forms. Tense and aspect choice did not follow the conventional class pattern with a predominance of simple past tense forms (78; cohort average, 35), narrating the events of the Tesco Case Study, and very few instances of the present tense. Where the more complex forms were used, Imogen showed a decided preference for the progressive (6; cohort average, 2.9) with virtually no use of the perfect aspect.

In terms of sentence structure, Imogen was generally able to produce well-balanced sentences employing a variety of construction strategies, that made for clear and precise expression. Her total clause output was more than twice the average (476; cohort average, 213) and, although the number of words per clause was close to the class average, she generated more words and clauses per T-unit. This meant that her sentences were generally quite long, and occasionally over-long. She also made a slightly lower use of the main and non-finite clauses and instead had more frequent recourse to subordinate finite clauses, particularly relatives (14.7%; cohort average, 9.2%), and a range of non-finite forms. In this way she produced sentences with rather more of an academic tone than many of her peers. The extract that follows illustrates her ability to combine a number of these features to create an academic tone to her writing.

Other basic underlying assumptions of Tesco include ‘attitude differentiates good service from great service’ and ‘as emotional loyalty is inculcated within staff, it infects customers’. This is an unconscious, taken-for-granted belief because the root of emotional loyalty is a deep empathy for customer’s needs and the ability to be ‘in someone else’s world.’ The assumption that staff could choose their attitude, was a key factor in change at Tesco. They were able to stick to the basic underlying assumption that attitude is the key to great customer service. They also realised that in order to meet the needs of their target market, their attitudes and behaviour had to be in line with
Tesco’s corporate values and beliefs. These corporate values enabled them to be happier in their work as they strived for continual development, learning and improvement. [IMOGEN: MGMT191]

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<th>BUS292</th>
<th>ADVs overall</th>
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Table 48: IMOGEN - Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words)

Analysis of Business 292 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

The BUS292 examination writing showed a slight increase in the quantity of writing from the MGMT191 work (191: 3230 words; 292: 3252 words) but even more features of academic style made an appearance. With a greater number of nouns in relation to lexical verbs (191: 286:189; 292: 307:138), the ratio was more in line with academic text and this was reinforced by a drop in plural forms and a related rise in definite article instances. Modification of nouns was already well-established in the MGMT191 writing and this practice too had noticeably grown during the second year of writing, though mainly in the area of pre-modifiers (191: 99; 292: 131), both nouns and adjectives. Multiple post-modification on the other hand had practically disappeared. Adverb numbers were down but since this
included an almost complete absence of linkers, this reduction may not necessarily have been a constructive change. Although verb numbers were reduced, there was an increase in passive forms (191: 9; 292: 13) and a general improvement in the balance of tense use, combined however with an almost complete reversion to the simple aspect.

Turning to sentence structures, we find that the overall word count for the exam essays remained very similar and the number of words per clause in fact slightly decreased. However, the sentences were longer, with more words per T-unit because there were more clauses per T-unit (191: 2.92; 292: 3.71), bringing an increased complexity to the writing. This was paralleled by the broader distribution of all subordinate clause types, again diverging from class norms which tended to show a reliance on a basic main clause/non-finite clause structure.

The increase in specific features which provide the academic tone including compact sentence structures, and the wealth of detail which affects overall coherence are contrasted in the extract below.

Traditional project-based managed involved very rigid, bureaucratic or autocratic approach to management. The result of this management style was that it restricted creativity and new ideas or information flowing within the organisation or team because of its unflexible and dictator-like style of management. Traditional project-based management focuses on a hierarchy of management figures, which left no room for mistake, experimentation or innovation. The so-called ‘rules’ were structured and organisation members had to stick to them because ‘that’s the way things are done around here’.

In contrast to this highly formal, traditional managerial approach to project-based management came the introduction of liberation management. This new implementation of project management skills and principles affected positive change in organisational improvement and performance. Liberation management applies to managing a change project, such as the consolidation of the BBIM programme to the City campus. [IMOGEN: BUS292]

Discussion

Imogen arrived in the course from a background of successful writing at school, confident of her skills and aware of the importance they would play in her academic study. From her very first days she saw the writing tasks not just as challenges but as a chance to satisfy her self-expression.
As with most of the other students interviewed, Imogen’s perspective on academic writing was to a considerable extent determined by the principles and guidelines put forward in lectures and in feedback sessions with lecturers and the language and structuring of the readings in her course. There is a marked vocational objective in the teaching of Business studies at university level and communication for the workplace plays an increasingly significant role as students progress through their course. Written communication is also influenced by the journalistic style of many business periodicals, targeting a general rather than academic audience.

But Imogen had already developed a strong sense of her identity as a writer and a clear concept of her own style, and her apparent intention was to modify this style to incorporate essential elements of Business academic writing. Thus her approach appears to have been guided by two main, often conflicting, factors: the expression of ideas with an emphasis on effective academic and workplace communication, and her own personal belief in writing as a form of self-expression.

In order to produce a high standard of academic prose, Imogen looked constantly for chances to improve aspects of her work. Where many other students saw a good academic style as the key to successful grades and, in the longer term, a boost to their career prospects, Imogen’s primary reason for raising her writing level seems to have been her own satisfaction in writing well.

In her desire to improve her work, she actively sought feedback but in practice she tended to ignore the advice on how to improve. In this respect, she and Dipak had much in common. Both valued their writing skills and were disappointed to receive criticism for failing to adapt to a new manner of writing. In Imogen’s case, her major problem was a lack of conciseness. She was not unaware of the issue. Indeed she was frequently urged to reduce the length of her writing and the topic recurred often in her research interviews. Nonetheless, while she often appeared to accept this limitation in theory, she found it hard to follow through in practice. One exception was when working on group projects where fellow students criticised her wordiness: only loyalty to the group persuaded her to accept their viewpoint and even then, she did so reluctantly.

The problem of conciseness in her academic writing brought continuing difficulties for Imogen and the inclusion of long, detailed explanations was a feature of her writing style to the very end of the course. Although at times she believed she had found a way through this dilemma, in reality it remained unresolved.
One aspect of the problem was her remarkable speed and fluency in writing, by hand or on the computer. For example, for both the Management and Business exams in this study, she managed to write twice as many words as any other student. This fluency, particularly when combined with a lack of time pressure, may have caused some of the difficulty she experienced in keeping to the word limit for assignments.

A second factor may lie in her interpretation of what the clear expression of ideas meant. For her, it was a detailed explanation, with a good deal of repetition or paraphrasing, to ‘drive the points home’, and the belief that clarity arose from explaining in extensive detail. But where Imogen thought that she was making the material clear and easy for the reader to follow, the surfeit of detail and the repetitiveness may have served simply to confuse the reader and impede clear communication.

A final element was her ambivalent approach to the problem because of her own contradictions over what made good academic writing. If this included conciseness, it always had to be balanced by sufficiently clear explanations. Thus her interviews are marked by a vacillation between acknowledging the need for conciseness and asserting that full and detailed writing was essential to the reader’s understanding.

The key to Imogen’s dilemma may lie in her belief in writing as a form of self-expression. She equated expressing oneself in writing with her own sense of what made good writing, and assumed that it was also the best way to communicate with the reader. Although the reader, in the form of a lecturer or fellow class member, might point out the drawbacks of her approach, she continued to follow her own instincts.

So we may assume that Imogen’s writing was intended mainly for her own satisfaction and not the reader’s. Although she asserted she would select vocabulary carefully for her audience, Imogen was not really prepared to select her content so considerately. She does not seem to have been able to stand in the reader’s position and see her work from that perspective. Ultimately, she maintained a writing style that conformed to her sense of rightness, whatever its cost in other ways.

The consideration of the role that writing played in Imogen’s progress leads to the conclusion that it may in fact have been a hindrance in her efforts to achieve at a high level.
5.3.2.5 Case Study: Jalal

Introduction
Jalal was already a highly proficient writer of English when he began his tertiary study. He did not take this proficiency for granted, however, but worked constantly to improve his English, motivated by the belief that his written language was likely to be an essential factor in achieving at the highest level.

A relatively recent arrival in New Zealand, Jalal had been born and brought up in Zimbabwe in a multilingual family of Indian origin. While his family’s first language was English, he spoke several other languages deriving from his Indian culture and his Zimbabwean environment. The transition to a new country and a new educational system in New Zealand during his secondary schooling brought very few problems for him, given his high level of English and quite possibly also his familiarity with a British post-colonial culture. Determined to perform as well as possible in his tertiary studies, he sought to bring to his writing a unique voice which would differentiate his work from other students’ and allow him to achieve the high standards he had set for himself.

Jalal was an articulate participant in this research study, giving extensive and considered responses to the interview questions, and over the course of the group discussion and the three interviews he provided a detailed and insightful description of his experiences as a student writer.

Background
Although ethnically Indian, Jalal’s family had been established for some time in Zimbabwe, where Jalal he spent his childhood and much of his adolescence. The use of both Gujarati and Hindi in the home was part of the family’s cultural tradition, and along with Shona, the local African language, were also used outside the home. However English, the official language of the country, was the family’s first language and all Jalal’s schooling was in an English-medium system. Moreover the family placed importance on a high level of literacy in English and encouraged him from an early age to read widely, ‘more or less anything I could get my hands on’ [JALAL.3:264]. At home Jalal conversed in English with his parents and in Gujarati with his grandparents, and at his English-medium primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe he learnt Shona, with the study of French coming later at high school.

Thus by the time of the family’s move to New Zealand, when Jalal was partway through secondary school, he already had a reasonable command of several languages and as an English native speaker had
reached a high level of spoken and written proficiency. He completed his education at a New Zealand high school, studying English and other subjects related to his interest in becoming a business professional, and took the first major step on this career path when he enrolled in the BBIM course as part of the Semester One intake in 2005.

Overview of experiences by years

Jalal’s expectations of what lay ahead of him as he began his programme centred on the approach to writing which students might encounter. In broad terms he anticipated that tertiary writing would be more serious and professional than it had been in high school and he could not imagine, before the first semester started, how he would cope with the length of the essays: one thousand words seemed in his mind ‘undoable’ [TAM.I: 29].

At the same time, he had no very detailed notion of how high school writing might vary from that at tertiary level, and when he recalled his first year, he noted several important points that had not been anticipated. Firstly, the extended length meant that there was a need for a more structured approach to the essay. School essays had been composed in a very basic manner: introduction, a couple of body paragraphs, conclusion. Now he realised that the much higher word count, set to accommodate a more in-depth approach to the topic, required a logical ordering of ideas and conscious attention to linkage between and within paragraphs in order to provide flow, meaning a coherent and readily followed train of thought.

The question of structure raised even more complex issues because of the need to understand and apply an integrated approach to writing. Where students had had any previous experience of using theoretical material, it was in a linear structure which recorded a series of events or related a theory to an event. Now, as Jalal explained it, they were not only expected to find and apply multiple relevant theories to the event in question, they also had to explore interconnections amongst the various theories, in effect, a synthesising process. All the students in the interview group struggled with this challenge to some degree. Jalal described his own difficulties with integration in a variety of metaphorical terms.

But with a more integrated approach, it’s really hard to get started and doing the research, there’s no guidance, in a way. So you have to just wave yourself around in the dark until you finally find a relevant piece of research that applies to you and then it’s the ball just starts rolling slowly. And then
once you’re at that point where things start, and then you identify two or three theories that apply together and then you like, ‘Oh, now I get it’, and it just flows like towards the end, I think.

But that initial stage of [being] lost just takes ... Like you’ve got a four-week assignment, then you’ll be lost for about three weeks and it’s in the last week when you just finally, ‘Oh, now I get it’ sort of thing, I think. [TAM.I: 435-442]

Another implication of the greater length, apart from these structuring issues, was the acquisition of new skills in researching source material from online databases and applying APA referencing. In high school, essay topics had been dealt with in a much briefer and more superficial manner, covering a couple of points in about two pages, and everyone in the class was likely to consult the same few books from the library for their essays. This limited range of sources meant that each essay covered much the same material, but neither inadequate referencing nor the possibility of plagiarism was a significant concern. At university, on the other hand, the number of sources to be included in assignments would be stipulated and students had access through online databases to an overwhelming amount of material. In addition, there was a much closer scrutiny of students’ submissions and, in order to establish his own writing style, as well as to avoid any suggestion of plagiarism, Jalal tried to ensure that his assignments presented what he termed a ‘unique perspective’, which included both his choice and presentation of material and his use of language, so that his writing would be clearly distinguishable from that of other students, an intention that was always to the fore during his period of study.

This first year represented the period of greatest change for all the cohort and the students struggled to adapt to the new academic environment and different expectations of academic writing. The results of the first assignment in particular were a wake-up call – ‘shock treatment’ in Jalal’s words [JALAL.1:88] when almost no one in the class received above C+ for their efforts.

Initially when I started, I remember my first academic piece I ever wrote. When I wrote it, I was in two minds on: ‘What am I doing?’ sort of thing and I gave it my best. When I got the piece back, I had I think it was a C+, and for my first paper ever, I kind of didn’t expect to get a C+. ... It just sounds: ‘Oh, my God, C+! [JALAL.1: 60-65]

He took swift action and consulted the marker who pointed out that main ideas had not been fully explained. Jalal had assumed the marker would be familiar with the material, whereas he needed to be
more explicit in showing that he had identified the important theory in his essay and had also clearly understood it.

This led to a different issue which occupied Jalal during his first two years: if he was to be explicit, could he also be concise? Explaining theory and source material comprehensibly in his own way required more words, so that the clarity in his paraphrasing was often at the expense of brevity. Conciseness, however, was essential in assignment writing. For Jalal, as for the Focus Group in general, this came down to the basic aim of keeping within the word limit to avoid a penalty. It was not until his final year that he was confident of being able to reconcile these two concerns satisfactorily. The anticipated difficulty of writing a thousand-word essay thus gradually disappeared and the reverse became the case:

In the first year the most important point was just trying to get points out and the second year, it’s more or less trying to curtail your words. [TAM.I: 76-77]

Another issue, researching for source material, proved less problematic for Jalal than for some in the class. He was concerned, though, to keep to his principle of presenting a unique perspective, and avoided relying on the textbook or class discussion as obvious resources. Instead he used his IT skills to find research studies that were less likely to be duplicated by other students, coping with this constraint without apparent difficulty.

To an extent, because most of our essays have a minimum limit of research sources, they’d say, like, six sources, so ideally we’d aim for about seven or eight and we’d restrain ourselves to that. So when we’re looking, and if we find a theory we don’t really get across, oh, that’s fine. We’d just leave it and find something else because there’s always an abundance of theories to find. [TAM.I: 212-216]

But the earlier problem of identifying the theory in what he had written could still be a concern as he progressed in his studies. He found himself becoming very familiar with the theoretical concepts the class was studying; as a result they were internalised to the point where they seemed to be part of his background knowledge. Consequently, when his work was returned, comments from the marker would point out the failure to acknowledge theory as such.

It does happen a lot of the time when you have to find theories and you’d write your essay and you’d go on writing and you’d find that, ‘Oh God, I can’t find any theory or anything’. But in fact the stuff that you have written encapsulates a lot of theory but it’s just that you don’t identify what you’ve
written as theory. You take it for granted and say: ‘But that’s common knowledge or something that’s a given in this topic area’ or something like that but in effect it is a theory itself and you just don’t identify it. [TAM.I: 223-228]

The importance of recognising the audience and adapting one’s style appropriately was strongly emphasised to students in the degree programme. In their case the audience was generally interpreted in a fairly narrow sense as the person who marked their work and allotted their grades. They made a point of trying to identify the expectations of different lecturers and markers and adapted their writing approach accordingly, though this could bring its own problems.

[One of the biggest problems] so far, I think, would be selecting the appropriate target audience for your report. Because most of our reports, every report has a different ... It’s not like a consistent thing. Even within a paper, it’s not a consistent style of writing for each report. Each report is different in itself. [JALAL.1: 106-109]

Some lecturers insisted on a strictly integrated approach in terms of structure, for instance, while others might be anticipating a purely linear response to the assignment task. In the same way, the choice of vocabulary played a large part in determining one’s style of writing: Should one employ technical terms or avoid them at all costs? Consequently the experience in the second year of a change of lecturers just as assignments were being submitted brought a certain frustration to the class, who had applied the preferences of one marker, only to find that their work had been marked by someone else.

So we structured it to one lecturer and it got marked by a different lecturer. But then that’s where you can tell, when it comes out and you feel like, ‘Oh I intended it to go to her and it came up with him’. But you still get a reasonable mark but you can identify the difference, where if you had structured it in such a particular way that suited him better, you would definitely have done better, sort of thing. [TAM.I: 398-402]

For Jalal, for whom high standards were the norm, getting a ‘reasonable mark’ was not good enough when in different circumstances the mark might have been higher, and during the first year or so he searched without success for a single common approach where all the expectations of the various markers would be combined.

I think initially when I was towards the end of Stage I, beginning of Stage II, [...] I was trying to find a certain format or template to follow for my reports. But then after a little while I just realised that
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

it’s not that there’s a certain template. It just depends on who’s reviewing a piece of writing and things like that. [...] Because some people look for deep analysis and things like that, and others are looking for broad scope where you’re just linking ideas and things like that, ... it just depends. [JALAL.2: 194-203]

In his first two years, Jalal put considerable effort into producing good academic writing, in the belief that that his style should be of the same high standard as the content of his work. He summed up his approach in the comment: ‘The thing that makes you a B+ to an A+ would be a delivery style of how you write’ [JALAL.1:102]. He had noted that some second language students might receive full credit for the content of their work but be held back from higher achievement by the relatively low level of their language.

Accordingly, from the very beginning he made use of lecturer feedback, seeing this as one of the most important sources for improvement. This feedback provided comments on aspects such as conciseness, explicitness, structuring for clarity, logical reasoning and good flow, but Jalal noted a progression in the nature and extent of the comments.

When we came into uni, ... the more important points were trying to be concise, bringing up argument. Towards the second year, once people have started getting a grasp on what actually needs to be written, there’s more focus on actual flow of what you’re saying, to structure your writing in certain ways. [...] Initially you would have like a paragraph of comment: ‘You did this right, you did this wrong, you need to improve on this.’ But then as the years went on, it’s more like: ‘A good essay but the flow was slightly poor’ or ‘Your arguments weren’t structured well’. Or like they’ll highlight certain paragraphs to say: ‘This would have been better down here’ and things like that. [JALAL.1: 133-148]

Peers were a second source of advice and examples of good writing. While less proficient second language students asked for help with language errors, Jalal’s focus was on lack of coherence.

Most of the time you’re not awake to your own mistakes. So when you get others to read, they’ll like identify, this point flows and this part flows but then there’s this isolated section which doesn’t fit in anywhere. [...] The second person can identify it straightaway. [TAM.1: 274-278]

He also looked amongst his peers for models of good writing, borrowing the work of students who had received higher marks and analysing where the variation in quality of style might lie.
Like, for example, if I get a B, somebody gets an A+ sort of thing, I read their work. And most of the time you can spot differences and ‘Okay, now I know why he got an A and I got a B’. Because not all the time it comes down to discussion, because most of us talk about the same thing. [JALAL.1: 97-100]

Research articles from scholarly journals also proved valuable as examples of academic writing. Jalal preferred to use journal articles for source and background material as he found both the content and academic language of the prescribed textbooks were at a very basic level. So he soon became more familiar with the journal article approach to writing. He appreciated how the structuring and flow made the content easier to follow while the language suggested other, more stylish ways of expressing ideas, and journal articles became his model of best practice in this respect during these first two years.

Ultimately however, the value of one’s writing depended on more than a good writing style. For Jalal the key to producing effective writing was considering the audience, an approach which also drew on non-linguistic factors such as choice of content, presentation and format. Only when elements like these were in place would the quality of the writing become a deciding factor.

Maybe just the most important thing I’ve learnt so far to do with academic writing is the target audience. […] When you come into university, you can extend that language only so much, and the structure, sentence structure and stuff can only be extended so much. And beyond that it’s just the approach to writing …. [JALAL.1: 245-251]

Consideration of audience was a crucial principle for students to take on in the first two years, as the final year would expose them to different target audiences, necessitating a range of different writing styles.

Although the transition from school to Year 1 was generally seen as the most demanding and difficult, Year 3 nonetheless brought a number of adjustments for students. Significant modifications to the curriculum now placed a greater emphasis on providing the class with experience in their professional role in the field. This brought different demands on writing skills as the approach had to be adapted to the various workplace audiences. One such change was the abrupt reduction in the length of writing tasks. Over the previous two years Jalal had become quite proficient at writing lengthy academic essays which incorporated a strong theoretical basis, together with the use of source material and referencing.
skills. His Year 3 Accounting and Information Management papers, on the other hand, usually required a short business report or the explanation of a theoretical concept in technical rather than academic terms, and writing for Statistics was almost formulaic in style. The team project that made up the bulk of the final semester’s work had a number of different components, which the team members worked on individually and as a group. In most instances, although their writing tasks used a range of formats and structures, they were generally quite straightforward in style.

This was not however always the case. One assignment proved especially problematic, given the five-page limit, the breadth of the topic and the absence of any firm guidelines. Like many of his cohort, Jalal began with a much longer report and then had to resolve the problem of reducing it to accommodate the five-page limit. This was a particularly frustrating task because of the wealth of useful information which had to be removed. Finding a satisfactory answer to this question was not an easy task. And that process, I think, is the hardest of the whole assignment.

I started off going a couple of lines, going back editing. And then halfway through the assignment, I said: No, this is not working, and I went and wrote the whole thing out and then went back to edit because I knew I wasn’t going to make that word count, the page limit. And then once I had got within that five-page limit, it becomes a point of utter frustration where I just didn’t go back and read the whole one. I get the five pages and it’s like: Great, print and just hand it in. [JALAL.2: 134-135; 232-237]

One benefit of writing for a workplace audience was much less use of theoretical material. As Jalal pointed out, a business audience was not interested in theory but in facts and recommendations. As well, earlier problems such as combining explicitness with conciseness had resolved themselves (apart from the instance cited above), and Jalal often used the technique of including diagrams with a brief explanation to avoid a more lengthy verbal description. In this way he brought both clarity and brevity to his text. In addition, most writing tasks were quite straightforward in terms of style. The focus for Jalal now was on keeping his work ‘easy to read’ so that the audience could usually understand on the first reading without becoming lost in the course of the paragraph. Equally straightforward was the reading for his papers: simple and unambiguous, in contrast to the journal articles of previous years which dealt with complex abstract concepts.

In his final year Jalal spoke of a gradual change of emphasis in the writing skills that students employed over their three-year period of study.
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

We could say the first year in our course was more or less introducing you to the academic sort of style and some basic theory. Second year was fully understanding all these theories and applying it and explaining it. And now this third year the focus has changed to more of using those theories but not relying on them as such but using your own sort of professional judgement, as the lecturers keep on saying. [JALAL.2: 342-346]

A parallel progression from an emphasis on style as well as content in the first year to a much stronger focus on content by the end of the last year did not however change Jalal’s approach to his writing and he constantly worked on improvement. He noted a pattern over this period: an aspect identified and worked on, followed by a plateau, and then the search for another area for improvement.

For most of us, it was a point where you’re getting a low mark and then you start becoming more concise and you start showing what you wanted to and then your mark does improve. But then it kind of steadies off again and then you start looking at your writing and say: Okay, what more do I need to do to get to the next one? [JALAL.1: 140-143]

Jalal’s comment here shows the two features which seem to have been the key to reaching a very high standard in his writing and in his work generally: constantly analysing and identifying where problems lay, and then dealing with them.

Writing analyses

Raters’ score for academic writing

At 94%, Jalal’s writing score from the raters was the highest of all the Focus Group members and the grade of B+ for this Management paper does not quite achieve the same level. The implication that the content was not sufficient to merit a higher mark may explain this discrepancy between the two scores.

Analysis of Management 191 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

While Jalal was already on entry a proficient writer with a wide vocabulary, this is not made obvious from the examination of specific features which in many cases were similar to those of the cohort and at times lower. When set against the fact that the class standard was itself not particularly high at this early stage, it may be concluded that it was the selection of vocabulary and sentence constructions
which was largely responsible for the academic tone of his work. Much noun and adjective use was at a basic level with a high proportion of lexical verbs to nouns, a high rate of plural to singular nouns and variable modification. For example, pre-modification whether by noun or adjective was at a lower rate than the class average (72; cohort average, 80.7), and post-modification at no more than the norm for the group, although there were several instances of multiple post-modifiers. Copula be with predicative adjectives was higher than average (35; cohort average, 24.5), so that conciseness was possibly affected. To offset such deficiencies, passive numbers were double the class figure (18; cohort average, 8.7) and the more frequent rate of past tenses provided a balanced use of verb tenses, despite the restricted use of modals (6; cohort average, 13.9) and infinitives (32; cohort average, 47.9).

Jalal produced about 200 words less than the cohort average, and this brevity could also be seen in the construction of the sentences, where the total clause numbers were correspondingly fewer (184; cohort average, 213). Although the high use of main clauses produced more T-units, the T-units themselves were relatively short with fewer words than on average (14.1; cohort average, 17.5), resulting in fairly short basic sentences and the novice academic writer’s practice of habitually building only one proposition into a sentence produced a jerkiness to the text.

Tesco has identified ‘Customer Service’ as ‘a real differentiator for general retailers, and a powerful multiplier of sales’. Porter identifies cost leadership, differentiation and focus as ways of creating competitive advantage. Tesco has made use of each one of these methods and thus achieved its current market position. [JALAL: MGMT191]

Since main clauses were so frequent, all forms of subordination were consequently restricted and among the non-finite forms, the only notable feature was the higher incidence of bare infinitives. Given the low number of modals, this may have been brought about by reliance on certain lexicals such as ‘help’ which take a bare infinitive.

The combination of an advanced and formal vocabulary together with very basic sentence constructions is obvious in the extract below.

Firstly 80 Living Service coaches were recruited from all areas of Tesco’s business levels and activities. These coaches were viewed as ‘change champions’, who projected the project’s messages through their actions. These actions inspired employees as the Living Service coaches did their daily activities while applying the new change within each of their business levels. This affected everyone
in every level. This showed bottom-up as well as top-down commitment. These coaches were also responsible for soughing out sceptics and dealing with them. The last step in implementing the change was through the second role of ‘Firelighter’. 20,000 people from within the organisation were recruited and trained to change themselves as well as initiate change in others. These firefighters ensured the change process continued past the role-out period. They acted as role models for new staff and existing staff. [JALAL: MGMT191]

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>JALAL</th>
<th>MGMT191</th>
<th>BUS292</th>
<th>MGMT191</th>
<th>BUS292</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOUNS</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>ADVs overall</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNs as % of content words</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>ADVs linking</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRNs this, one</td>
<td>5; 0</td>
<td>3; 1</td>
<td>PREPs</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NN : PRN</td>
<td>274; 37</td>
<td>304; 34</td>
<td>VBs lexical</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plurals</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>VBs auxiliaries</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominalisations</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>VBs modal</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definite article the</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>VB tense Past</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem DETs this, these</td>
<td>11; 6</td>
<td>10; 3</td>
<td>VB tense Present</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP + preMD</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>VB aspect Simple</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>VB aspect Progressive</td>
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<td>NP + postMD</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>VB aspect Perfect</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>NP + multiple postMDs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>VBs passive</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADJs overall</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>VB Cop be/become</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADJs attributive</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>VBs infinitive</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>ADJs predicative</td>
<td>22</td>
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Table 49: JALAL - Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words)

Analysis of Business 292 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

By the end of Year 2, a number of specific changes were obvious, nearly all typical of a more academic style and most centred on noun and adjective features which in the MGMT191 writing had been markedly absent. With a higher number of nouns and a reduction in lexical verbs, the ratio tended much more towards academic levels (191: 274:160; 292: 304:126). Similarly forms of modification, pre- and
post-, had increased or, in the case of nouns as pre-modifiers, more than doubled \( (191: 30; 292: 63) \), although there was very little application of the multiple post-modification which had been a feature of Jalal’s MGMT191 writing. The reduction in verb numbers overall may have contributed to the lack of variety in verb use, as the practices of the MGMT191 writing were largely replicated in the BUS292 work. The most evident alteration was in the respective frequencies of past and present tenses. While past tense figures were much the same as previously, the instances of present tense use had halved, denoting a greater dependency on past verbs. This was partly because the essay questions required reflection and comment on past events but, since an explanation of theory would also be expected, the trend towards a single-tense use was surprising.

A greater range of sentence construction practices was not noticeable in the BUS292 writing, although the higher word output brought several changes in word, clause and T-unit ratios. In addition to the higher word total \( (191: 1289; 292: 1944) \), there were also more clauses and more T-units, resulting in a higher ratio of words per clause \( (191: 7.0; 292: 7.96) \) and per T-unit \( (191: 14.1; 292: 16.0) \). However the number of clauses per T-unit remained the same. Effectively, sentences were longer because clauses were longer, but there was little extension by means of additional clauses. Relatively unchanged also was the distribution of clause types within the sentence structures: main, adverbial and non-finite clauses formed the basic sentence, with a stronger dependence on complement clauses compensated for by the reduced proportion of relative clauses. In the same way, the staple types amongst non-finite clauses were still \( to \) and \( -ing \) forms with a higher rate of \( -ed \) balanced by a less frequent recourse to bare infinitives. These non-finite forms may well have been used for extending sentences.

The degree of progress in acquiring an academic style through an increased use of specific academic features and skilful construction of complex sentences may be judged by the following extract from Jalal’s Year 2 examination paper.

Business 292 can be viewed as a subproject (learning project) within the BBIM. Its project goal was to teach project management concepts to their products (the students). Instead of taking the traditional approach of concept delivery by lecturer in regular lectures and then structured assessments to measure the success of retention or even possibly a slight application of these concepts, the Business 292 took a project-based approach. The goal was to deliver the project management concepts to its products. By taking a project-based approach it was able to be flexible to the situations at hand, in this case various events such as staff disestablishments, Project Manager
shifts [...] and staff funerals to name a few did not in effect displace the project considerably. [JALAL: BUS292]

Discussion

Jalal embarked on his degree course motivated to reach as high a standard as possible in his studies. He saw himself as an achiever who could attain his goals and writing played a role in this process. He was already a very proficient writer but unlike other good writers such as Imogen and Dipak, he did not take his own proficiency for granted. He took pride in his writing ability but he used it in his study as a tool to be honed, rather than as an integral expression of his own identity.

Jalal was a student who grasped conceptual material readily and applied intelligently the principles and knowledge of the papers he studied. One of the attributes he brought to his academic study was the ability to analyse. He realised that although high quality content was the essential element in any academic assignment, the writing level represented the difference between a B result and an A. Attaining such a level would demand changes in his writing and he was fully prepared to adapt his writing accordingly.

In order to reach this goal, he developed his approach of the ‘unique perspective’ in which the selection of content and the quality of his writing would make a point of differentiation from other students and increase its worth. Although he acknowledged that at a certain point his language would not realistically be capable of further refinement, throughout his years of study, he paid close and careful attention to the quality of his writing, improving it where the opportunity arose. Hence his attention to increasing coherence and his conscious modification of style according to his audience, accepting that workplace language would need to be clear, direct and easy to read.

So the role of writing in Jalal’s academic success appears to have been critical. While a low standard of written language was not necessarily an obstacle to passing the course, as some second language students’ experiences show, the achievement of distinction which Jalal sought and realised rested on his successful integration of the two elements of content and language to produce writing at a very high level.
5.3.2.6 Case Study: Lucy and Dylan

Introduction
Among the members of the group who volunteered to be part of the intensive study were Lucy and Dylan, two LEMS (limited English-medium schooling) students from China, who had worked together closely from the start of their studies. The interview arrangements reflected this mutual support. The two were first interviewed together near the end of the second year, addressing the discussion group questions, and this was followed by a personal interview with Lucy. At that stage of the year it was impossible to fit in a personal interview with Dylan because of his other commitments. Each was interviewed separately in the middle of the following final year and then again in a shared interview at the end of the year.

Their background and experiences and in particular their level of language were not uncommon among second language students from China, and coping with the challenges of a tertiary course was a struggle. But the two friends made extensive use of collaboration and consultation, especially within their first language group, to help not only with the linguistic and conceptual demands of their coursework but also with their acculturation into the wider environment of study in an English-medium university, and they did so with considerable success.

Background
In their schooling experiences and consequent proficiency in English, Lucy and Dylan were fairly typical of a large number of students from China who enrol in New Zealand tertiary institutions. Each had studied English for six years in their Chinese middle and high schools before coming to New Zealand. Then prior to enrolment in their Business School programme, each had completed a Foundation year in a private educational institution in Auckland to prepare for eventual admission to their university course.

However the four hours per week of English study in their Chinese school, even with the many hours of homework also required, had not over these six years allowed them to reach a very high level of competence in any of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Cultural tradition, teaching and assessment methods and class size probably all played some part in this outcome. The approach to teaching was a traditional one and the one-way transmission of knowledge from teacher to student discouraged questioning of the teacher. There was a strong focus on grammar, which was
tested by multiple choice questions rather than by writing in English. There was very little emphasis on oral communication in the curriculum: conversational practice amongst students was hardly a realistic option given student numbers of 50 or more per class, so only pronunciation of individual items of vocabulary was practised. The major effort centred on preparing for the critical written examinations, which would complete their secondary schooling.

After their arrival in New Zealand, a year of study in an English-speaking environment at a private language school brought a more communicative approach to the use of English and exposure to a more relaxed style to classroom teaching but the principal purpose of this study period was to pass the IELTS examination, the criterion for university admission for international students. So much of the learning focused quite narrowly on the well-established aspects of the four language skills that this examination would assess. Despite their IELTS pass, neither Lucy nor Dylan was in fact adequately prepared for the broader linguistic, academic or social demands of their course when they began their first year of university study.

Lucy had enrolled a semester before Dylan, halfway through the previous university year, and apart from another Chinese friend with whom she worked and flatted, she had very little contact with other students on the campus and was much too shy to seek other acquaintances. Only the OSAS project, which at that time operated as a support group for Asian students, provided the opportunity to mix with a wider group of students. Lucy had very limited understanding of the subjects she took that semester, was reluctant because of shyness and the unfamiliar environment to seek help, and failed both her papers. Fortunately, the following year the first semester intake for the course was much larger and she met a number of other Asian students, including Dylan, who were doing the same papers and so was able to develop a network of friends and study partners.

Dylan, enrolling a semester later than Lucy at the start of the 2005 academic year, was part of this larger intake which afforded him the opportunity for developing friendships. In addition, a classmate from the language school where he had taken the Foundation course was taking the same Business course, so from the beginning of his tertiary studies, Dylan found social networks more readily available and made good use of them.
Overview of experiences by years

Students in the course who had been educated in English-medium schools, whether in New Zealand or overseas, encountered a number of difficulties and challenges in their first year, as other case studies in this research project show. However for LEMS students whose English-medium schooling was extremely limited – two years or less, sometimes followed by a university foundation course in New Zealand – the first year constituted not so much a challenge as an ordeal, particularly since they had virtually no concept of what study at university might entail.

The low level of their English skills exacerbated the demands inherent in coping with a strange academic environment: the very different teaching practices with their emphasis on interaction; the embarrassment of working in groups with NS students without being able to contribute to the discussion; the difficulties in listening to and grasping the main points in lectures; the complexities of researching databases for relevant source material to support assignment ideas; the effort needed to understand the new vocabulary of the academic readings, select key ideas and then express them in their own words; the variety of text types required in addition to the essay form; and the need to determine an appropriate structure for assignments of up to 1000 words. All of these were cited as factors that made the fulfilment of course demands very stressful and extremely time-consuming.

The strain of dealing with the course material and the time needed to complete their assignments made for some discouraging experiences: ‘[T]here’s many, many nights we can’t sleep to be able to write the essay’ [Lucy, LEMS.1:368-369]. And the relative ease with which local NS students coped with such academic problems did not escape their attention.

But I found that, you know, as a secondary language student, we spend a whole week to do assignment and we get maybe, kind of, 55-60% mark. But the first language one, they maybe spend one or two days on it but they can get 70-75%. [Dylan, LEMS.I: 336-338]

A more positive aspect of the first year for Lucy and Dylan was the help they received from both teaching staff and other Asian students with whom they formed a study group. As a first port of call, Lucy and Dylan sought help from several individuals who, in their formal capacity as staff, could offer support and guidance. One of these was the Management lecturer who taught the group over both semesters of that year. She provided advice on the preparation of assignments as well as feedback, both oral and written, after assignments had been marked. In addition she undertook to work with the weaker EAL students on more obvious errors of grammar, alerting them to where checking and revision
should be targeted. An additional source of help was provided on a more regular basis by the LanCom teacher. The LanCom programme was a voluntary component of the first-year programme set up specifically to assist BBIM students with writing problems. Weekly sessions were held on all aspects of assignment tasks, with special attention to EAL students’ language use. Both the Management lecturer and the LanCom teacher offered the chance for individuals to ask questions about class work and assignment tasks and to have personal feedback on their writing. Another member of this valuable group was the course librarian, who was able to give guidance on the use of the databases for research, the selection of relevant source material and the application of appropriate referencing practices.

Gradually Dylan and Lucy began to discern some progress in their work, although they were still far from confident with their ability to cope satisfactorily.

In their first interview Lucy and Dylan were asked to describe what made the writing for their academic course different from other types of writing outside the university.

Lucy: Structure.
Dylan: Structure.
Lucy: We can come out with good idea but if we can organise the idea better, we will get passed and get better mark for the assignment.
Dylan: I think content is really related to topic ... it’s not that hard to find the content and the idea, just hard to ... make the structure. [LEMS.1: 283-290]

Their answers immediately made a connection between length and structure. Assignment essays and course readings from academic journals were much longer and more complex than other kinds of writing, and this length required a clearly structured framework. Once a structure had been determined, the organisation of ideas became more straightforward, leading naturally to a better flow in the writing.

Content, which included the ability to explain and relate theory to practice and to use research material effectively, was also important but posed fewer problems. This may have been because of the discussions that went on in their informal Asian students’ study groups, where ideas were thrashed out in their first language, making the understanding of theoretical material much more straightforward.

The second year brought some easing of the stress of the previous year for a number of reasons. As the two LEMS students progressed into their second and third years, their peer support and study networks became more significant in their learning. The discussions in their own language in their informal study
group brought a greater understanding of theoretical concepts and their use in assignment essays. Both students had a greater familiarity with the academic environment in which they studied; their language proficiency was slowly improving; they had a clearer grasp of citation and referencing techniques; long individual assignments were now replaced by team reports for some of their coursework; and this last activity brought more interaction with first language speakers, a greater sense of social inclusion and the chance to engage in collaborative writing with their team. By the end of their second year then, Lucy was able to cite a number of areas in which she had increased her writing ability: vocabulary, grammar, structure and flow, and building an argument. Reading had become easier as well as she learnt to scan for key information instead of reading every word. While acknowledging these improvements, which she credited particularly to her experience working with her Business project team, she still had reservations about her English writing proficiency.

I think we are now second years, the last semester of second year, we can easily write a report to get a pass, say a B-. But we are ... finding it difficult to get more higher mark. Lucy, LEMS.1: 346-347]

Dylan too, as he looked back on his second year, was not satisfied with his achievement and echoed this assessment:

I think in Information Management I can get a high mark, A level mark, because I get the idea about all sorts of computer stuff. But even though my writing’s not good, I know that in my exam, I get the idea, I know the idea, I can express it. But in Business or Management, I can’t really get a high mark, only have C level or B, even though how many effort I put on it’. [Dylan, LEMS.1: 351-354]

The transition to third-year studies seems to have been somewhat easier for Dylan and Lucy, and their increased confidence in addressing questions and articulating opinions was very evident in the mid-year and end-of-year interviews. Having passed their second-year papers was undoubtedly a boost to their confidence, even though they had not often achieved at the level they might have wished. They felt much more at ease with others in the class for they had now worked with them for the past two years, and their comments suggest there was now a greater sense of trust and respect between the LEMS students and their ESB (English-Speaking Background) classmates.

Until now, however, language had not been seen as a critical area for the LEMS students. Initially their main concerns were to have an adequate grasp of content and then to organise their ideas within a clear, logical structure. It was not until the third year, for example, that the question of conciseness
arose in interview discussions and Lucy and Dylan began to pay attention to choice of language as a way of bringing conciseness and clarity to their work.

I know that for the final exam, you have to write in terms of telling the lecturer what you have learnt into a piece of work. You have to have a good concise and written skill that express your idea. [DYLAN.2: 38-40],

and

In terms of the vocabulary, we have the idea but we can come together and think of the best words to fit into that sentence. So sometimes we can write down a whole sentence and then eventually we find one word or phrase to just paraphrase it. [Dylan, LEMS.3: 26-28]

However, the two students felt they made considerable improvements in their writing in Year 3, due in some part to the perspectives of local students’ composing techniques, afforded to them through group work. There was much more emphasis on language improvement in these mixed teams, where the native speakers paid special attention to the wording of the final team report in order to improve its clarity and conciseness. These discussions and the sharing and critiquing of writing tasks for the group reports gave Dylan and Lucy an insight into how NS writers worked and where their own writing might fall short of team norms.

The importance of outlining became clear to the LEMS students as they worked with their team, for although both had placed much emphasis on ascertaining the correct structure for their assignment text type, they had not taken this to the point of working out a detailed outline, prior to writing. Such an approach enabled them to look more closely at the order of their ideas and so create a better flow, which in turn made their presentation of ideas more persuasive. A related useful writing model gained from the teamwork was the process of revision, something of a luxury previously for Lucy and Dylan who, in the interests of managing time effectively, had had to prioritise other, more critical aspects of assignment writing. In these ways the mixed-team experience persuaded them that improvement was possible and that greater attention to language would bring rewards.

Another key factor in their growing confidence in writing lay in the improvement in their oral skills, as a result of the part-time jobs they had taken on, and the group work that was a major part of that third year’s course. The jobs were in customer service, so they had to use English to communicate to customers and other staff. The situation initially pushed them beyond their comfort level but, like the group work in class, mixing with native speakers eventually made them more at ease and confident.
conversing in English, and the general language proficiency of the two grew as a result. They saw the longer-term outcome of this experience not just as increased oral fluency in English but improvement in proficiency generally. Dylan analysed his experience in these terms:

I think I have improved English from the work I have taken. [...] You have to talk to the customer and also tell your staff what to do, and it has improved my speaking and also the way I think …’ [Dylan.
LEMS.3: 218-224]

Lucy made a strong connection with speaking in her job to account for her improved writing skills, explaining:

I think I’m more confident to write and speak and talk to people as well because I got two jobs and I have to talk a lot with customers. Therefore I think it affects my writing style as well, and I can pick up my own mistakes when writing, when reading it. But before I can’t do that, I can’t realise my mistake. [LUCY.2: 5-8]

Thus the growth of confidence in writing that they experienced over the three years of their study seems to have been triggered largely by increased social interaction of various kinds; and the eventual outcome, as they pointed out in their final interview, was to increase their independence as writers.

Writing as a collaborative process

The theme of social interaction constantly recurred when Lucy and Dylan described how they coped with their course and responded to its writing obligations. Assistance with writing within the academic environment came from three areas: interaction with others such as teaching staff on an individual basis, within small Chinese-language study groups and in the mixed-language project teams, and each of these appears to have made a contribution to the pair’s understanding of the course writing requirements and their ability to fulfil them. The same-language groups that they established were particularly important in getting them through the struggles of the first two years.

Lucy’s first semester had been a lonely and unsuccessful time when her social and academic contacts were extremely limited, apart from her participation in OSAS, the support group for Asian students. She had got to know very few people on campus, and it was only when she repeated her previously failed papers with members of the new 2005 BBIM intake that she began to make friends and share her study
experiences with classmates from a similar background. These included Dylan, with whom Lucy established a close study relationship.

In their first year the two were part of a wider, six-member Chinese-speaking group, which was set up in response to the OSAS experience and with encouragement from their Management lecturer. The study group continued to operate during the second year but in the third year only Dylan and Lucy were left from the original six-member group. By this time though, they had also both become more confident in their writing, so the need to seek each other’s help had somewhat lessened, although the strong bonds of friendship and shared experiences remained.

Members of the Chinese study group met together from the first year onwards for organised sessions at assignment and exam time. They were able to meet at one another’s homes at weekends for the first two years because all lived close to the Tamaki Campus. Unfortunately this convenient arrangement, based on proximity to one another and to the facilities of the Tamaki campus, was lost in the final year with the move to the City Campus. In these meetings students shared their knowledge, that is, they analysed the requirements of the assignment task and clarified the theory which had come up in lectures and readings. They did not touch on the issue of language, however, nor did they prepare common answers; rather their concern was to ensure a clear understanding of the theoretical material and how it related to their assignment answers. After an all-day session of this kind, they would return home to work on their own personal responses to the assignment.

They also consulted one another individually about aspects of their completed writing, although, because of time constraints, this was often no more than a brief look at an assignment draft. But for Dylan at least, this was a necessity, even in his final year, because his language was still often inaccurate and unclear. ‘It’s better to find someone to have a look at it. […] Otherwise if I just hand in the first draft, most of the lecturers don’t understand what I try to express’ [DYLAN.2: 205-206]. While occasionally these students also looked for comment from their Indian classmates, they tended not to seek help from their local pakeha peers, who often appeared to be too busy to help.

The informal study groups sometimes overlapped in the first and second years with self-selected class teams which worked on group projects in certain papers. Where Chinese students worked together in this way, they followed a similar routine as for assignment preparation. Finally each written contribution
would be briefly checked and then all were combined for submission without, however, any further attempt at presenting a consistent team voice.

For exam preparation the routine was a little different. Each student would prepare an aspect of a possible exam topic and explain it to the rest. They would then brainstorm possible approaches to likely questions. The benefits of these sessions, according to Lucy and Dylan, were firstly, that they could exchange ideas in their own language and so acquire a deeper understanding of the material and, secondly, they were able to study in their own Chinese style which they saw as being different from the Kiwi approach.

When I work with the Chinese student in a group, you just kind of easy to communicate and read their mind, so that’s a little bit more effective than with the Kiwi group. [...] In terms of the written part it’s a little bit more easy as well because we’re in the same kind of level. Once when I read their written, it’s easy to combine, when I combine those two together. But with the Kiwi one, they are a little bit more higher requirement in terms of the written, in terms of the sentence structure, and when I’m with the Kiwi group, most of the paraphrasing and combining is done by the Kiwi, not me, but when I’m with the Chinese one, we’re sort of doing it together. [...] With the Kiwi one, we have to talk a lot with the idea, and then sort of everyone have to contribute with each idea a little bit and then combine. [DYLAN.2: 161-178]

In the ethnically mixed ‘Kiwi-style’ project teams, apart from the cultural difference in approach, there were other drawbacks, from Lucy and Dylan’s perspective. The changes that were made to their written contributions by the local students were not necessarily discussed with the team, so Lucy and Dylan might not always be aware of how or why changes had been made, thus limiting their opportunity for learning. Another disadvantage was that the level of oral communication inhibited both from participating as fully as they would have wished until their third year, when their confidence had grown. Consequently in the first year or so, the local students tended to dominate the conversation, not so much because the second language speakers lacked understanding: rather it took them too long to formulate the ideas in English.

We do not speak a lot but we have the idea. But every time we want to express or we want to talk there would be someone, a Kiwi, who is talking already, who say what you thought, which makes us not contribute. [Lucy, LEMS.3: 422-424]
Asked about the mixed-team writing process, Lucy and Dylan explained it in some detail:

*Lucy:* First of all we, all of us, discussed what kind of ideas can be applied in this essay and write just phrase, not the whole sentence, and then make some headings, what were going to be in each paragraph. And then two or three people write one point. Other people, when they finish [...] the work, they exchange, then read it and change, correct the work. After the whole process finished, we all read the part[s] together and correct the whole part.

*Dylan:* Because normally what our secondary language write is quite long and repeated sentence, so the English student, normal student, they rephrase it and put it in a more concise way, more proper word, proper vocab sentence. [LEMS.3: 205-217]

The two students saw the need for setting limitations on the size of teams however. In one second-year Business paper, the teams had included as many as a dozen members, and the Asian students felt uncomfortable about participating in such a large group. Dylan and Lucy suggested that smaller teams of four or five facilitated a more equitable input.

[The bigger group], I would say, is not that good for Asians because in a big group Asians need a quiet corner or something like that. [Lucy, LEMS.3: 421-422]

I think ethnic is not a problem but the size of the team is matters. If the team member is more than four, then it is very difficult to communicate to all the team members. [Dylan, LEMS.3: 445-456]

But in general the pair gave endorsement to the concept of learning academic skills through working in mixed teams, for example, by having writing judged and critiqued by others in the team. Lucy cited the example of the weekly reflection in Year 2 where each team member looked back on the events of the week and then passed that on to another for comment and a mark.

By looking back I see how important it is but when I was actually writing the reflection, I don’t like it at all, I think it is a waste of time. [LUCY.1: 121-122]

A more advanced vocabulary, a wider variety of sentence structures and greater grammatical accuracy; increased awareness of the role of structuring appropriately and making an outline; improved ability to use language persuasively and concisely; and perhaps most importantly, greater open-mindedness and willingness to interact with others: all these were seen as having developed from working in mixed-language teams.
A side-effect of the BBIM learning culture as the 2005 cohort moved through Years 2 and 3 was the emergence of a lively social scene, fostered by one or two students who took on leadership roles and organised events such as barbecues, sports games, quiz nights and the BBIM Ball. These occasions were much appreciated because they included all the year levels of the programme, so that first- and second-year students met on equal terms with those about to complete their studies. The LEMS students seem to have found this breakdown of cultural and social barriers especially valuable and in their final interview suggested that attendance at social events of this kind would be extremely useful for all international students. The shyer second language students would be able to develop their language and social skills and make the transition into the new academic culture more easily.

In the final year, however, the BBIM programme moved from the intimacy of the smaller Tamaki campus to the new Business School building on the larger, more impersonal City Campus, and the culture of teamwork and mutual support which the BBIM staff had encouraged became rather harder to sustain. The meetings outside class which the team project required were more difficult to organise, as students no longer lingered on the campus but left for homes in distant suburbs at the end of the day or for part-time jobs around the city. The more members in the team, the more difficult it was to organise a time that suited all, and on at least one occasion the team meeting began at 10 in the evening and finished at 12. The social events which had become something of a uniting force for BBIM students were not so readily organised in the final year, and several interviewees commented on the breakdown of the culture of sharing and working together which had developed so positively at the Tamaki campus.

Writing analyses: LUCY

Raters' score for academic writing
Lucy’s low rating of 44.4% for her writing was paralleled by failures in her two first semester papers and there is a clear link between the low quality of her language and her poor academic results. However, her difficulties in reading and listening to lectures must also have played a part in this disconcerting outcome.
Analysis of Management 191 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

When examining the results of the analysis of Lucy’s first semester writing, two factors should be considered. To begin with, because much material was ‘patched’ into her text from the Case Study, the writing in its entirety cannot be seen as typical of her style. A second problematic element is the rate of grammatical error which sometimes meant that coding was based on a corrected form where the original wording was grammatically inaccurate. This generous approach to such mistakes applied to both Lucy and Dylan, and at times they may have benefited more than was deserved. However the identification of error was not the purpose of the analysis, and coding took a ‘best guess’ stance at times, given the difficulty of discerning the underlying form. Generally where the intention was not clear the ungrammatical form was coded in its original state. Bearing in mind these limitations, the following data emerged.

There was some similarity with the class averages but more often slight variation without any clearly discernible pattern, though she and Dylan shared some common practices. In Lucy’s writing the ratio of nouns to lexical verbs and the frequencies for each did conform broadly to class norms. Lower rates were found for pronouns (26; cohort average, 49.8), nominalisations (18; cohort average, 26), and demonstrative determiners and definite article use were slightly below the norm. In the area of modification, similar frequencies to the class averages occurred for pre-modifiers, with a preference for nouns rather than attributive adjectives; post-modifiers conversely were slightly limited by cohort standards (46; cohort average, 62.1). Judged by class levels, Lucy made considerable use of linking adverbs (7; cohort average, 3), a common trait in Chinese writers of English (Shaw and Liu, 1993), although adverbs overall occurred at average rates. Total verb figures conformed to the average but varied in the strong tendency for the present tense (73; cohort average, 37.6) and simple aspect, the choice of the present on a number of occasions being unsuited to the context. The perfect aspect was also employed at above the average rate. The slightly less straightforward forms, such as infinitives and modals did not appear as frequently as with the majority of writers (38, 11 respectively; cohort average, 47.9, 13.9 respectively) but passives were well above the class average (14; cohort average, 8.7).

Lucy’s exam script was very close to the average length but was broken up into clauses and T-units in a different fashion from the average writer. The number of T-units was considerably higher but words per clause (6.4; cohort average, 6.77) and clauses per T-unit (1.9; cohort average, 2.59) were lower, indicating a construction technique which relied on main clauses within short sentences with limited
extension. This is borne out by the breakdown of clauses which shows that over half those used were main clause, with little recourse even to non-finite forms (just over a quarter of all clauses). To and –ing forms made up the bulk of her non-finite clauses but bare infinitives occurred at above the class rate. Below is a typical sample of her first MGMT191 exam writing. Patched phrases are shown in italics.

To summer up, ANZ use the HR functions to manage the change in people’s mindsets towards an ‘e-culture’ is successful. This functions give the chance to update worker’s skilling and make them accept technology willing to chance the way of work. Finally ANZ bank group Ltd get the profit. This is win-win stregy [strategy]. ANZ is successful in its culture change. They are e-culture transformation is not speed or nature of its conversion to technology but rather in depth and scale of conversion. For these reason, they use top-down stregy to roll the changing. There chang management get great support from management. And also they oriented infrastructure. Manager, worker and technology cooropeart together running a successful quantity culture. [LUCY: MGMT191]

### Table 50: LUCY - Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>LUCY</th>
<th>MGMT191</th>
<th>BUS292</th>
<th>MGMT191</th>
<th>BUS292</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>307</td>
<td>316</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNs as % of content words</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PRNs this, one</td>
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<td>2; 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NN : PRN</td>
<td>307; 26</td>
<td>316; 29</td>
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<tr>
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<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominalisations</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>NP + preMD</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
<td>NP + postMD</td>
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<td>75</td>
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<td>NP + multiple postMDs</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADJs overall</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADJs attributive</td>
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<td>ADJs predicative</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADVs overall</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADVs linking</td>
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<td>VBs auxiliaries</td>
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<td>VBs modal</td>
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<td>VBs passive</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>VB Cop be/become</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VBs infinitive</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Business 292 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

This second sample of exam writing followed four semesters later, instead of the usual three, as Lucy had begun one semester in advance of the cohort. Accordingly she had had a little longer than Dylan, for example, to acquire further English language skills.

In common with many of the class, Lucy’s writing showed an improved ratio of nouns to lexical verbs (191: 307:173 ; 292: 316:121) and as a proportion of other content words (191: 52.3% ; 292: 58.0%). Another indicator of progress was an increase in nominalised forms (191: 18; 292: 27) but determiner use was down from her earlier work. Both pre- and post-modification had also risen, although nouns as modifiers (191: 81; 292: 67) appeared less often, overtaken by attributive adjectives (191: 49; 292: 69). Linking adverbs occurred even more frequently, despite a fall in general adverb use (191: 40; 292: 27).

The reduction in verb numbers overall brought a corresponding drop in tense types but proportions of present and past tenses were now more balanced, although a preference for the simple aspect was still a strong feature of Lucy’s writing. Her modal use (191: 11; 292: 14) had increased, bringing a little more variety of construction and shading of meaning to her sentences.

Progress in sentence structuring was more consistent than in academic writing features, and Lucy’s sentences were now more extended as a result of incorporating more words per clause (191: 6.4; 292: 7.35) and more clauses per T-unit (191: 1.9; 292: 2.35). The extension of sentences was effected through greater use of subordinate clauses and a more equal distribution of clause types overall. This was not carried through to non-finite varieties, however, where the tendency was to use the to form for more than half the non-finite clauses, while –ed participials had almost completely disappeared. Grammatical error, although reduced, was still a prominent feature of Lucy’s writing at this stage but the meaning could more readily be discerned and, although the application of verb forms was erratic, the intended sentence structure was apparent. The sample provided below is taken from Lucy’s BUS292 examination writing.

According to Tom Peters, liberation management in project management which is to reorganise the project to sub-deliverable and assign those sub-deliverable into individual project teams. Within each project team, there are diversity skilled member who come from different functional department. Each of the team working separately as a business units but towards same organisational goal. Project manager who as a facilititor looking after those project teams, looking at
the whole map as well as the internal project team and direct teams to the right direction. [LUCY: BUS292]

**Writing analyses: DYLAN**

**Raters’ score for academic writing**

Dylan received only a 50% rating for his writing on the basis of his first semester exam writing but his Management course result of B- for that semester makes it likely that his content was very good and took precedence over language considerations in the marking process.

**Analysis of Management 191 examination writing**

**Specific features of academic writing**

As was the case with Lucy, Dylan’s scripts displayed large numbers of grammar, spelling and punctuation errors, so that corrections were made to facilitate the coding process and allow subsequent analysis.

A number of aspects of Dylan’s writing conformed to class norms, in particular, the noun:lexical verb ratio (286:169; cohort average, 293:154) which in turn reflected the percentage of nouns over all content words (50.0%; cohort average, 51.1%). The definite article rate also was close to class figures, although instances were not always grammatically appropriate. Similarly plural forms were below the class norm and often used incorrectly. Dylan employed nominalisations (16; cohort average, 26) and demonstrative determiners (9; cohort average, 14.9) with nouns sparingly. Premodifications were a little above average for the group, including the use of nouns as pre-modifiers but Dylan had not yet acquired any marked degree of post-modification of noun phrases (36; cohort average, 62.1). Adjective figures were relatively low, and particularly in the attributive position; accordingly the majority of pre-modifiers were nouns, not adjectives.

Verb numbers were in line with the group as a whole but the rather higher rate of auxiliaries (36; cohort average, 27.4) was linked to an overuse of the progressive aspect, where a simple form would have been more acceptable. Another feature of verb use was a preference for the present tense, more than twice the rate of the group average, and on a number of occasions wrongly chosen. An unexpected feature was the high use of passive forms (16; cohort average, 8.7), again not always in the correct grammatical form but they were normally quite appropriate within the context of the sentence.
The role of academic writing in the study experience of undergraduate business students

The length of the text, about 300 words above the average, created no obvious effect on the rate of words per clause or clauses per T-unit but did affect the overall T-unit count (118; cohort average, 82). So while sentences were not particularly long, they were numerous and tended to be based around a main clause extended by non-finite forms, principally followed by an infinitive verb. Complement clauses were the only subordinate finite forms to be used with any frequency (15.6%; cohort average, 10.0%), and at somewhat above the class rate. The extract below shows the high incidence of grammatical and other errors but also demonstrates that he could convey his message and that he did not try to insert ‘patches’ from the Tesco Case Study material to present his ideas.

Because the employee have the knowledge how the business and knows what the customer’s need and why customers are not fully satisfied, Tesco are maintain this valuable information to improve its customer service. As well as the relationship between customers and general assistants are important internal resources. Because the personal service are offered by stuffs [staff], the managers do not really contact with customer. Therefore it is import that Tesco retain their stuffs in order to keep their customer. In other words, if stuffs have better relationship with customer, the customers are more satisfied. To sum up, Tesco has change their focus on their stuffs, in order to provide greater service to customer. [DYLAN: MGMT191]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DYLAN</th>
<th>MGMT191</th>
<th>BUS292</th>
<th>MGMT191</th>
<th>BUS292</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOUNS</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>291</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNs as % of content words</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRNs this, one</td>
<td>286; 35</td>
<td>291; 40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NN : PRN</td>
<td>286; 35</td>
<td>291; 40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plurals</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominalisations</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Definite article the</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem DETS this, these</td>
<td>9; 0</td>
<td>3; 0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NP + preMD</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NN as preMD</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP + postMD</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NP + multiple postMDs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ADJs overall</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ADJs attributive</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ADJs predicative</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ADVs overall</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ADVs linking</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PREPs</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VBs lexical</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>143</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBs auxiliaries</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VBs modal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VB tense Past</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VB tense Present</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VB aspect Simple</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VB aspect Progressive</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VB aspect Perfect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBs passive</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VB Cop be/become</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBs infinitive</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 51: DYLAN - Features for MGMT191 and BUS292 (standardised over 1000 words)
Analysis of Business 292 examination writing

Specific features of academic writing

In comparison with the earlier exam script, the BUS292 paper showed some progress in academic language features, though the error rate was still quite high. Both noun and pronoun occurrences had risen and, in conjunction with a lowering of the lexical verb rate, brought a somewhat closer alignment with academic writing practices. The threefold increase in nominalisations was another indication of this kind of progress. A decrease in adverbs was paralleled by a reduction in linking adverbs but linkers still occurred at a very high rate in comparison with class practices (191: 20, cohort average, 3; 292: 14). EAL writers may tend to overuse linkers of this kind but ESB students are equally apt to underuse them, inhibiting the flow of their argument. For EAL writers, the use of such signals may improve the readability of their work and help in some way to compensate for confusing grammatical variants.

Rates of pre-modification, already adequate in Dylan’s earlier writing, had remained constant but were supplemented by a growth in the use of adjectives in the attributive position (191: 41; 292: 50) and further development could be seen in a rise in post-modifying forms (191: 36; 292: 64). There appeared to be more awareness of tense usage, with an increase in past tense verbs but the range of aspect shown by the instances of the progressive in the MGMT191 writing was less evident and the simple aspect was strongly preferred.

By the end of his second year, Dylan was writing quite fluently in that the text length had increased. This was realised in longer sentences, with more words per clause (191: 6.22; 292: 7.60) and more clauses per T-unit (191: 2.33; 292: 2.88), rather than in a rise in T-unit totals. With this advance came a higher use of subordinate finite clauses in relation to main clauses. In non-finite forms, the use of –ed and bare infinitives had noticeably increased, all bringing greater variety to sentence structures.

If we are able to look past the distractions of incorrect grammatical forms and confusing punctuation, the intention of the writing has become clearer and the developing academic tone more discernible.

In the liberation management, it is also vital that team member have empowerment from the top level manager. As a project team, when we receive the project of consolidation of moving BBIM to City. We have our right to define our goal mission in planning this proposal. We discuss in class with all member. Also as the big project team and the difficult project task, we implement to divide the project into each project portfolio. And team are divided into small team with different perspective
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

of knowledge in terms of different major combination. Therefore each team are focus on different aspect of the whole project. As our project portfolio team are focus on the internall marketing about studen’s awareness of BBIM, and our team are combined with different major in accounting, marketing and HR. [DYLAN: BUS292]

Discussion

By the end of their studies, both Lucy and Dylan were sufficiently equipped for the writing demands of their course to be able to complete the final stages, even if it was not at the highest level. Their linguistic accuracy was still far from perfect and their ability to express ideas in writing was at times hesitant and occasionally confusing, but they had successfully grasped the conceptual material of their course, improved their oral skills and were organising their ideas and structuring their written work appropriately.

Like many overseas students, Dylan and Lucy were linguistically ill-prepared for university study in the medium of English. It is clear from this case study that their IELTS band, while judged as a satisfactory level for admission to university, was not really adequate for their studies and their language level did little to smooth their academic path. Moreover, it is likely that both students were unaware of just how low the level of their written language was or of the role it would play in reducing the quality of their academic performance.

Consequently they made a tactical choice to focus on the content and structure of their writing, rather than improve the breadth and accuracy of their language. They judged written style to be of much lesser significance: a desirable rather than essential quality. When there was such limited time, priorities had to be established and structure and content came ahead of language. And while an appropriate academic style might be a factor in achieving a higher mark, it still depended to a large extent on the paper, the text type and the lecturer.

Given the time and effort needed to cope with the content of lectures, assignments and examinations, it was hardly surprising that they came to this decision. Although there was improvement in their language, it appears to have arisen often incidentally and not as a result of their own direct and concentrated efforts. The oral input from working in teams and dealing with customers in their part-time jobs appears to have made a major contribution, not just to their ability to communicate more easily and clearly in English, but to their overall confidence using English. Equally the effort they put into
using their networks helped them to grasp the discourse demands of their genre and acculturate into the academic and broader social community.

Yet the absence of an appropriate style and its effect on their academic performance had an emotional impact on these two students. Like the great majority of Chinese students who come to study in New Zealand universities, Lucy and Dylan were both highly motivated and, as some of their results for the papers in Information Management confirm, extremely capable scholars. In their interviews they occasionally mentioned but did not dwell upon their disappointing results in essay-based papers where they could not adequately express their ideas. But their failure to reach the academic level of local students was clearly a demoralising issue for them, all the more so when it was seen as an indication of inferiority by their New Zealand-born peers. In students less motivated than Lucy and Dylan, such a negative reaction might well have affected their determination to complete the course.

In these circumstances the networks and informal groups that they established played an essential role in providing emotional and academic support and the two were fortunate to be in a programme which placed such an emphasis on the value of learning collaboratively. When we add the attributes of tenacity and high motivation to their own sense of their ability as scholars, it becomes easier to understand why against such odds they completed their degree programme successfully.

Lucy and Dylan were both high-achieving students in their first language but the case study shows that they did not sufficiently take into account the significance that English, and especially writing in English, would play in their academic progress. It did not prevent them from completing their programme but it did prove an obstacle to achieving at the level of which they were capable.
5.3.3 Academic writing development

The relationship between results and writing confidence and the ensuing fluctuations in achievement which the Case Studies reveal are mirrored in the patterns for the fourteen Focus Group students (Figure H: Academic progress of individual Focus Group members by GPAs). After varying results in Semester 1, some students began to advance steadily, peaking in Semester 3, while others took longer to establish an upward trend in achievement. There was an erratic pattern of grades for most in Semesters 4 and 5 but their final semester proved positive for virtually all the group, and all successfully completed the programme.

Similarly, when we look at the writing development of the group as a whole, it is clear that this variability also marked their acquisition of academic style. Erratic progress is reflected in the diverse nature and extent of acquisition of academic writing and sentence structuring features. This diversity was already evident in the early work of the whole cohort, and its continuing occurrence serves to emphasise the wide range of writing skills at any stage amongst the group members.

Several general trends could be discerned, although caution should be exercised in drawing any firm conclusions from these broad generalisations in view of the small sample of writing. Nonetheless, it is evident that all members of the group, whatever their level of proficiency, made some gains in academic feature use over the two years. This was apparent in the increased use of nouns and noun phrases,
through nominalisation and modification, together with a corresponding reduction in the use of lexical
verbs. A second trend was indicated by the increased complexity of sentences, with most texts
displaying longer and more structurally varied sentences, and a third commonality was fluency, in the
form of higher word counts for the essays, though this was sometimes achieved at a cost to formality of
tone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCREASED OCCURRENCE</th>
<th>REDUCED OCCURRENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominalisations*</td>
<td>Plural nouns*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns overall</td>
<td>Demonstrative determiners: *this, these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns as % of all content words</td>
<td>NPs + multiple modifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPs + pre-modifier</td>
<td>Adverbs overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns as pre-modifiers</td>
<td>Lexical verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPs + post-modifier</td>
<td>Auxiliaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives overall</td>
<td>Perfect aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive adjectives</td>
<td>Present tense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modal verbs</td>
<td>Infinitives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copula be/become</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total words</td>
<td>Words/clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total clauses</td>
<td>Main clauses as % of all clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial clauses</td>
<td>* to as % of all NFCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-finite clauses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ed as % of all NFCs</td>
<td>* = for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* = for all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 52: Variations in occurrence of academic writing features and structures over 4 semesters

On the other hand, the greater or lesser use of a number of specific items, e.g. passives, plurals, reduced
clauses with –ed and -ing, and general academic and discipline-specific vocabulary, contributed to each
writer’s distinctive voice. For the two LEMS students and for Grace, there was a gain in accuracy, and
several other writers displayed an increased awareness of planning and structuring essays clearly,
something which less proficient writers already used to advantage.

5.3.4 Staff interviews

Background to staff interviews

Four lecturers on the BBIM programme agreed to be interviewed about staff perspectives on the role of
writing in students’ academic development. These interviewees were selected, not as a representative
sample of the programme’s teaching staff, but rather to garner a range of views relating to their diverse roles in the programme. Donald held the position of Director of the programme and had had wide international experience in the field of business, while Lesley taught Management and Business, working especially with first-year students. Raewyn was manager of the language support programme, LanCom, and with a background in Education specialised in the development of communication skills. Stefan, the only second-language speaker in the group, came from a professional and academic background with expertise in Marketing.

At the time of the interviews, in 2009, the BBIM programme had moved from the Tamaki campus to the new Business School building within the more impersonal and anonymous setting of the City Campus, and this physical move was echoed by changes in the BBIM curriculum and culture, facilitated by the opportunities for shared teaching with the B.Com. programme. At the same time, however, the move and resulting changes resulted in the loss of certain features that had made the programme unique. Accordingly at the time of the interviews, staff responses often reflected a ‘then’ and ‘now’ tone as they considered the benefits and problems of the changes that had occurred in the period since leaving the Tamaki campus. These responses are summarised under their question headings below.

Responses to staff interview topics

The role of writing style in the BBIM course

There was agreement from all on the importance of language skills in general in the BBIM programme, exemplified by their embedding in marking rubrics and in the feedback from assignments, as well as the provision of support through LanCom. However, the respondents interpreted the term ‘writing style’ in a very comprehensive manner, and contextualised it within a particular concept of thinking in their discipline, so that they saw their role as instilling a specific approach to knowledge acquisition and construction in their students. Students should read widely and deeply to gather and understand information, integrate it with their own opinions and ideas and then construct and clearly communicate further knowledge. Many responses thus embodied a very broad approach, with a focus on communication skills in general, rather than a specific style of writing.

While the target register was still academic prose and there was a strong emphasis on the acquisition of academic writing skills in the programme, poor academic writing was no longer seen as a barrier to passing a course. Moreover, staff were preparing students for a professional career which would involve
The Role of Academic Writing in the Study Experience of Undergraduate Business Students

the appropriate use of a range of registers. Further to his own position on this issue, Stefan explained that, as a second language speaker of English, he would in any case not feel free to comment on their language skills.

These responses made it clear that acquisition of a conventional academic writing style was not, of itself, critical for success in the programme.

Desirable features and qualities in student writing

Reflecting the broad approach mentioned above, responses to this topic tended to focus on two aspects: evidence of higher-level thinking and qualities essential for communication in the business world. The need for students to develop the capacity to think through concepts and theoretical issues, and then relate them to their own observations and beliefs were seen as important, as was the ability to construct an argument, take a position and present a convincing case. The qualities of clarity, conciseness and flow were also highlighted, and it was clear that all four interviewees saw their responsibility, not just as acquainting their students with the demands of the Business discipline but also preparing them to function effectively in the workplace.

While Stefan and Donald saw an academic style as less important than other features, such as logical organisation and flow, Raewyn and Lesley believed that a competent writing style could not be divorced from the content and its logical organisation. Each informed and influenced the other, in their opinion, and organisational qualities only succeeded when combined with the ability to use language to enhance cohesion, coherence and conciseness. For Lesley, the ‘thinking side’ should come out in students’ writing, the capacity to understand their material, show that understanding in their summarising and then integrate it with their own observations.

Such responses suggest that, while there might be some disagreement on the importance of a specifically academic style in students’ writing, there was consensus on the need for the content to be well-organised and clearly and concisely expressed.

Encouraging the desired writing skills

The range of approaches to this topic largely reflected the participants’ differing views on the role of academic style, and ranged from explicit modelling of appropriate writing in lectures, through the
embedding of general communication skills in papers and marking rubrics, to the expectation that
students would acquire the appropriate skills as a result of their reading. The last of these was adopted
by Stefan, based on his own experience in acquiring academic literacy in English.

However all four respondents actively promoted the acquisition of essential features in their classes,
agreeing that Year 1 was the crucial period for making students aware of the need to acquire skills of
communication and information organisation. In particular, all four encouraged conciseness through
specific tasks to reduce word output while retaining essential content. Lesley and Raewyn also included
a focus on the linguistic aspects of writing in their teaching of communication skills, and Raewyn in her
role of advisor on language issues, worked with staff to show how students might be supported in their
writing problems.

Such a diversity of approaches to encouraging an appropriate writing style may well be a reflection of
attitudes of teaching staff throughout the university and, as one respondent commented, lecturers
frequently adopt the approach that students will work it out by themselves eventually.

Students’ problems in achieving an appropriate writing style
The quantity and variety of responses to this topic was considerable, and on occasion went beyond
writing style to address the question of how students acquired the knowledge base, both of content and
of language, which they needed to write about a topic. More specifically language-oriented responses
referred to problems of conciseness, a topic which had been raised a number of times already, the
inability to write in a formal academic register, and the issues faced by less proficient second language
students.

Stefan pointed out the cognitive link between reading and acquiring an appropriate writing style.
Quoting an average reading rate of five pages per hour for a first-year student, he saw lack of reading
ability as a major obstacle to gaining the conceptual knowledge that would be essential in Years 2 and 3.
Another problem respondents raised was the conversational tone which many students employed in
their writing, particularly because a number were unwilling to accept it as an issue which might affect
their employment opportunities. The perceived disinclination of the Faculty to support the expectations
of high standards of language, despite the structures set in place, exacerbated this situation.
Academic honesty in writing from sources and the need for all students to understand the basic philosophy of building on the ideas of others was another problem raised by staff. For LEMS students, writing from sources was a particular challenge because they were too unsure of themselves to use their own words and often too tired and overwhelmed by their workload to take advantage of the help available. Predictably many of the problems tended to reflect the qualities which staff looked for in student writing but failed to find.

**Changing expectations of writing style for examination work**

There was broad agreement that content, not writing style, was important in the examination situation and that careless errors of spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence construction would generally be ignored where meaning was not affected. However, certain features were still of importance: clarity, conciseness, coherence and relevance of material. Both Lesley and Donald emphasised that it was quality, not quantity, that mattered here and believed that it was of benefit to reduce the exam pressure by ensuring that students had enough time to give a full and well-considered answer. In fact, the important point emerging in response to this question was that certain criteria were applied by all four lecturers when it came to exam marking. That is, language was not expected to be error-free or indeed necessarily in conventional sentence structures, as long as the content was relevant, well-organised, accurate and concise in presentation.

**Useful features of the academic writing style in future employment**

Reference had been made throughout the interviews to preparing and training students for the workplace, so that in a sense this topic had already been extensively covered in earlier responses. As before, the interpretation of the term writing style ranged from linguistic and rhetorical features through to a more general perspective on cognitive qualities which shaped the written expression of ideas.

There was agreement that certain items which had featured strongly in earlier responses carried over into communication in business: the need to make the message explicit, so that the content was clear and ideas were presented in a coherent and logical fashion; the importance of conciseness in circumstances where there was often limited time to present or absorb material; the skill of building a well-constructed argument, based on sourcing material from reading and integrating ideas; and finally
the ability to adapt to the new circumstances and to recognise the differing communicative conventions that individual organisations practised.

It was clear from these answers that teaching staff were not only aware of the communication skills needed in the business environment but actively sought to ensure that their students knew and practised these in the academic context.

Discussion

In the design of the BBIM programme, creating an awareness amongst students of the need for effective communication had been seen as an essential element. So an important theme revealed in the staff interviews was the attention given to communication skills in general, rather than any emphasis on teaching a particular discourse style. Relevance and conciseness in the organisation and presentation of ideas were of more concern than their expression in a specifically academic manner. Linked to this was a second theme, that staff had the responsibility of preparing their students for successful communication in the business world. The focus by the later stages of the programme was thus on future needs in professional life, rather than the acquisition of the conventions of the academic discourse community. But the qualities of clarity, conciseness and coherence were often expressed through linguistic means and, since at that time the administration and faculty appeared to pay only lip service to the value of language proficiency in academic achievement, many students avoided the opportunity to improve their written expression.
An interesting point to emerge from these discussions is the role of the second language speaking lecturer towards student writing. While the situation of second language academics who are writing in English for publication has become a growing topic for research and discussion, their role in the classroom using English as the teaching medium is not often mentioned in the literature. With the increasing multiculturalism in our academic communities, this is no doubt an area that could be further addressed in research inquiry.

The factors from student and staff interviews affecting writing and academic progress have been grouped into five principal areas and are set out in Figure 1 (Principal areas affecting writing and academic progress).

The findings for Research Question #3 are drawn from these principal areas.

5.4 Key findings of the Longitudinal Studies

This section looked at students’ perspectives on academic writing through their experiences over the course of their degree. The following key qualitative findings were identified.

Key Finding #4: Gains were made in the acquisition of features of academic writing and the range of sentence constructions amongst the individual Focus Group members, but with considerable variability in the nature of acquisition.

Key Finding #5: Both staff and students perceived academic writing as being important, in varying degrees, in the successful completion of the course. However, it was not seen as critical, except for achievement at the highest level.

Key Finding #6: The main writing focus for students in their first year was the selection of appropriate content and its coherent organisation, and the acquisition of research and referencing skills for essay writing, whereas in the following years attention turned to effective communication through a number of different text types.

Key Finding #7: Participation in groups, both formal and informal, was an important aspect of the process of understanding and producing appropriate disciplinary writing.
5.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has presented the principal qualitative material of this study in the form of seven case studies based on personal interviews with Focus Group members, together with analyses of changes in their writing between the first and second years, in order to provide an insight into the experiences and progress of tertiary students as they deal with the writing demands of their course.

This material was supplemented in two ways. Firstly, as an preliminary to the case studies, there was a brief discussion of the themes emerging from the group discussions. Then, following the case studies, the views of teaching staff on the role of academic writing in their area of teaching and their perceptions of students’ management of its challenges were set out.

The chapter was completed with a summary of the key findings of the Longitudinal Studies, which are further explored in the Discussion chapter.
Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Overview of the chapter

Chapter Six discusses the results of this study of novice academic writing. The first section provides a brief account of the study so far, followed by a summary of the results of both quantitative and qualitative investigations.

The next section comments on the study’s findings, beginning with the Quantitative Results. It links each of the key quantitative findings to the Research Question, explains the findings and seeks to account for them. The section makes reference to relevant studies, discussing the degree to which they agree with or diverge from the current study and evaluates the significance of the current findings. The section on the Qualitative Findings follows the same process.

The final section integrates the two sets of results and discusses the broader issues they raise, relating them to the three Research Questions:

Research Question #1
What are the features of the written academic English of first-year Business students and to what extent do they reflect the accepted features of academic writing in general?

Research Question #2
What changes in students’ acquisition of academic writing features and understanding of academic writing requirements can be seen over the first two years of their course?

Research Question #3
What understandings and insights into attitudes to academic writing and its development can be gained from the experiences of students as they progress through their course?

6.2 Background to the research study

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the role of academic writing in student achievement. The research questions were formulated to achieve this purpose, based on the theoretical principles which inform our understanding of writing: the writer’s linguistic and textual resources; the cognitive processing which takes place as these resources are retrieved, evaluated and selected; and the external...
socio-cultural context which influences decisions taken during the cognitive processing (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

The first two questions address linguistic aspects of academic writing. To answer the first, a corpus of the first-semester Management examination essays of the MGMT191 cohort was subjected to analysis, to identify the main linguistic features of their writing. The second of the research questions was addressed through an analysis of the changes in the linguistic feature use of seven Focus Group members over their first two years of study. In response to Research Question #3, the main points emerging from the student interviews were presented through Case Studies of these seven Focus Group participants.

The Quantitative Findings show that the group was able to produce a number of recognised features of academic writing in their examination essays at the end of Semester 1, despite their limited resources for producing varied sentence structures, and that they had some understanding of source use. The Qualitative Findings provide evidence of a range of approaches from students and staff towards the role of academic writing, and variability in students’ development of an academic style, influenced by both personal and contextual factors. All these circumstances combine to create a somewhat complex picture of academic writing at undergraduate level, reflecting to a large degree the very varied composition of the cohort.

6.3  Quantitative findings

6.3.1  Background to Quantitative Findings

This section addresses the findings of the study relating to Research Question #1 and discusses the three key findings, produced by linguistic analyses of the examination writing of the MGMT191 cohort.

6.3.2  Discussion of Key Findings #1 and #2

When we consider the first finding, four characteristics of the student corpus emerge. The writing broadly conforms to academic norms as established by the Biber study (2006), especially in the frequencies of content words (nouns, adjectives and adverbs) and in preposition use. Furthermore, some features contributing to higher information density, for example, various forms of noun phrase modification, were evident in the student corpus. However, the more difficult syntactic structures, such as passives, a range of clause types, and lexico-grammatical forms were not frequent in the MGMT191
writing; and a distinctive feature of the oral register, a high ratio of lexical verbs to nouns, was also found.

The second finding relates clause use to the structuring of sentences in the production of an appropriate academic style. The analysis of clauses and their integration into sentences showed that most students could construct simple but adequate sentences but many had only a limited resource for sentence-making and sentence extension, with little variation in the sentence types they produced, decreasing opportunities for conciseness and variety of academic style.

Finally, an examination of conciseness measures in the MGMT191 corpus revealed a surprising broad comparability with the scores for the Biber (1988) study. However, an interesting contradiction emerged between the two attributes of conciseness, word length and TTR (type-token ratio): while figures for word length were high, those for TTR were low. This divergence may be put down to the lack of a refined analysis, or the highly repetitive use of technical vocabulary. In addition, conciseness is also built by clausal structures, and the previous findings have made it clear that the more advanced clausal structures were restricted in their use.

The paucity of multifeature studies similar to this linguistic survey explains the somewhat restricted nature of confirmatory or contradictory evidence, since the body of research is fragmented and piecemeal. There are few large-scale descriptions of students’ use of academic features which can provide an insight into the current results. Of the following four such studies looking at linguistic features of early tertiary writing, the first deals only with NNS writers, the second compares NNS with NS; and only the last two deal with groups whose language status was probably mixed, although this was not made explicit.

The range of linguistic backgrounds in these four pieces of research brings into focus again the problem of how, or indeed whether, one can separate students into the two somewhat simplistic conventional linguistic categories of NS and NNS (or ESB and EAL); and the validity of comparisons where students are categorised in this way, especially in small-scale studies. These points should be borne in mind in relation to confirmatory or contradictory evidence in the following research accounts, where the original terminology (L1, L2 etc.) has been retained.
Grant and Ginther (2000), studying the writing of 90 L2 writers for the TWE (Test of Written English), compared the features used according to proficiency levels based on the TWE scores, as part of a trial of a tagging program. The most proficient writers showed a number of distinguishing features, including more clause-level items, such as complement and adverbial clauses, and passives. Their restriction to the more skilled writers underlines the difficulty of acquiring this kind of structure. These features were also present in the MGMT191 corpus, but two points are worthy of note. One point of similarity, the increase in verb forms found in both corpora, does not accord with the academic norms identified in the LSWE corpus, where nouns markedly outnumbered lexical verbs. This suggests that the writers in both student groups were making use of nominalisations but not at a conventional academic level, and were still partly influenced by the oral style seen in features such as the high incidence of lexical verbs. A second point is the difference in the use of relative clauses between the Grant and Ginther group and the MGMT191 writers. While syntactically complex forms were often avoided by both sets of writers, the MGMT191 group produced more relatives and so a more equal distribution of clausal subordination types. The more proficient L2 writers in the Grant and Ginther study may have written in accord with academic norms but, overall, academic features appeared to a lesser extent than for the MGMT191 cohort, where there were both L1 and L2 writers.

Hinkel’s (2002) research comparing NS and NNS college-level essays covered similar items to those used in the present study, despite the application of different criteria and Hinkel’s purposeful distinction between NS and NNS results. Certain aspects of MGMT191 usage appeared to align with Hinkel’s NS findings: infinitives, attributive and predicative adjectives and copula. Lower MGMT191 frequencies for other features studied were more typical of NNS underuse, such as nominalisations and passives. Findings on tense for both NS and NNS were much closer to academic norms in Hinkel’s study than in the MGMT191 corpus, a disparity that may be related to the narrative nature of the change process being described in the latter case, where the past tense was frequently required to describe specific events. Finally, in the Hinkel study, NS and NNS figures produced mixed or similar findings for finite clauses, but reduced adjective and adverb clauses were clearly more familiar to the NS writers. In the MGMT191 corpus, a different criterion was applied, examining distinctions in the use of –ing and –ed clauses: the –ing form made up over one-third of all non-finite clauses, with the implication that the cohort had some experience with the technique of producing a reduced clause.

Text type, task type and disciplinary context have been found to have an impact on a range of linguistic choices (Charles, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Pecorari, 2009), but these three factors appear to have exerted
an effect only on tense use and verb semantic domains in the Hinkel and MGMT191 corpora. However, complexity and academic language limitations were influential factors in distinguishing between NS and NNS writers in the Hinkel study, and the MGMT191 findings also suggest that less experienced writers looked for syntactically simpler substitutes. While syntactic complexity is an important distinguishing factor between NS and NNS writing, it nonetheless seems logical to assume that problems with such structures may also affect less experienced NS writers. Finally, comparisons between the Hinkel and MGMT191 sets of findings are limited by the different criteria used to classify linguistic features, e.g. semantic domains, and the differing purpose of the Hinkel study, which placed a strong focus on NS/NNS variation.

The Haswell (2000) study of undergraduate writers has limited scope for comparison with the MGMT191 results because of its narrow focus. Haswell’s methodology used a multidimensional approach to reduce 80 linguistic items to nine (principally syntactic) measures, each representing a dimension of academic writing. The participants studied, who may well have included second language writers though this is not specified, showed improvement in length and range of lexical, clausal and textual factors over three years but, as the study stresses, at a variable rate, with some students actually regressing from their earlier scores. There was little evidence of any unified progress across all nine measures within the cohort. The MGMT191 results tend to confirm this variation across the range of writers, especially where no discrimination is made on the basis of language status.

As part of the development of the BAWE corpus, Gardner (2007) carried out a multidimensional register analysis of 60 undergraduate History and Engineering essays. Although most of the findings related to genre variation between disciplines, the study also found a marked differentiation among the four year-levels on the conversation/academic prose dimension, which covered features such as nouns, attributive adjectives and word length, appearing to confirm that acquiring an academic style continues over an extended period of time and may be hindered by a continuing preference for features of a conversational style. This underlines the MGMT191 finding that the students had already taken on some aspects of an academic style but that a number of more advanced features were not yet in evidence. It should be noted that the two features mentioned above are among those identified as building conciseness into texts (Biber, 1988), indicating that the ability to write concisely tends to emerge only with advanced proficiency.
Individual items and sets of specific features tend to evoke more interest among researchers than large groups of items, however. This is especially the case where student and professional writing have been compared. Studies relating to lexical bundles, for example, have shown that, in the form of clauses which post-modified noun phrases, they occurred at similar rates in professional and student academic writing (Cortes, 2002), which accords with the finding of the current study. Granger and Paquot (2009), studying fixed strings of lexical verbs in NS, NNS and expert academic writing, found an under-use of academic verbs but an over-use of more general verbs by the novice NS and NNS writers, which reflects the MGMT191 cohort results in both the level of verbs used and the concentration on a small group of verbs.

The role of adverbials in creating cohesion by linking and signalling has also been studied, and while the settings and participants’ language status may vary, it is clear that more experienced writers have access to a greater range of cohesive structures than simply adverbials in initial position (Reid, 1992). There are, moreover, suggestions that professional writers reduce explicit cohesion, increasing text difficulty (Crossley, Weston, McLain Sullivan and McNamara, 2011). This practice would not hinder expert readers with a shared specialist knowledge of the topic but would prove a significant barrier to novice readers, and an even greater challenge to their writing skills. Conversely, overuse and inappropriate selection of cohesive forms, in relation to NS expert preferences, have been found in both NS and NNS novice writers (Bolton, Nelson and Hung, 2003; Gardezi and Nesi, 2009; Hinkel, 2001; Kaldor, Herriman and Rocheouste, 1998; Shaw, 2009), although the tendency is especially marked in NNS writing. These studies confirmed findings in the current survey: the frequent use of adverbials and the even more marked overuse of specific items (however, yet, thus, therefore) in contrast to the more balanced range of forms employed amongst experienced academic writers.

Like cohesion, complexity has often been the focus of studies of L2 student writing, mainly as an indicator of proficiency levels, together with accuracy and fluency. Longitudinal studies have found that syntactic complexity among L2 writers does not develop rapidly but may follow a fluctuating and unstable pattern of acquisition (Hinkel, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2006), and that lexical features such as formality are more readily acquired, certainly by NNS writers, (Hinkel, 2003a; Shaw and Liu, 1995; Storch, 2009). Studies of NS novice writers (Crossley and McNamara, 2009, 2010; Gardner, 2007; Holmes and Nesi, 2009) have produced similar results to the NNS findings, with the implication that novice ESB students should not be expected to necessarily display a complex style of writing. Findings in
the current study also suggest a distinction between the rates of acquisition of lexical and syntactic complexity as part of academic writing development.

Finally, studies of conciseness are difficult to find in the recent literature, and Biber himself does not appear to have followed up his early work on this feature. Accordingly, comparisons with the findings of the present study could not be made.

Of particular interest in the findings of the present study is the ability of the cohort group to produce a number of items of academic discourse after only one semester of tertiary study, although the influence of the Tesco Case Study on their production cannot be discounted.

In evaluating the findings of a cohort in general, however, individual variations will be largely masked, so that the range of performance is not revealed. Equally, one cannot claim comparability between findings unless each study applies the same criteria. Both these considerations affect the extent to which the current findings can be seen as supported by results of other studies. Nonetheless, studies of the first-year experience at university show that students bring a range of writing experience and skills to their tertiary studies. While most are able to express themselves adequately, if not in a skilful academic style, there also appears to be support for the claim that the syntactic features of academic style which lead to a concise packaging of information will take some time to master.

While the Key Findings #1 and #2 relating to the first research question are not conclusive, they provide a comprehensive coverage of the features which the cohort displayed in their writing, and suggest that the writers are in the process of adapting to the linguistic conventions of their discipline, although at differing rates of progress.

6.3.3 Discussion of Key Finding #3

The third finding refers to Research Question 1 in a rather more indirect manner. An important aspect of academic writing is the ability to incorporate material from the literature into one’s own texts. It requires the language resources not only to understand a source text and select relevant points but also to paraphrase or summarise the source material and integrate it appropriately in one’s writing. It is a task which demands a skilful manipulation of the lexis and grammar of English. For this reason, the examination of how students used source material from the Tesco Case Study was included in the linguistic analyses.
Three related aspects were examined: the incidence of specific linguistic features and sentence structures in the two sets of texts in order to evaluate the Case Study influence on students’ linguistic choices; the way in which sections of the Case Study were drawn upon and placed within the essay text; and the proportion of verbatim Case Study material reproduced in the students’ completed essays (identified through a text-matching program). The issue of attribution was not relevant in the examination tasks since the questions required all the source material to come from the Tesco case study.

The results of the first analysis can do no more than suggest whether students might have been influenced in their writing by the lexical and syntactic examples found in the Case Study; nonetheless, the similarity between the two sets of texts is quite striking. Perhaps more importantly, the other two sets of results on the selection and integration of source material indicate that students were able to apply the principles of citation use in choosing and positioning their material but not in paraphrasing or summarising it.

In the first analysis, the incidence of shared linguistic features and sentence structures was high with numerous commonalities in word class use and clause types in sentence formation. However, passives, the future tense and past participles used adjectivally all appeared at higher rates in the Tesco Case Study, and some indicators of a more academic tone were more frequent in the student texts: adverb rates, adverb clauses, and preposition phrases used as post-modifiers.

The high degree of linguistic similarity between the two texts may be accounted for by a range of possible factors, singly or in combination. The most obvious is students’ access to the Tesco Case Study, which could have directed their language choices, consciously or unconsciously, as they wrote their examination essays. In addition, the common topic of the two sets of texts means that the writers were in any case likely to draw on a common lexical pool (see also Pecorari, 2009). Possibly, too, where students copied longer strings from the Case Study, the vocabulary and structuring of the strings would have influenced the frequencies of some features. Another factor could well be the simple and direct journalistic style of the Case Study, exemplified in the preference for relatively short and uncomplicated sentence structures, which were already favoured by some student writers quite independently of the Case Study sample. The points of contrast (e.g. the occurrence of passives, post-modifying preposition phrases and adverbial clauses) are fewer but may arise from the relative status of the writers,
professional and novice; the two different settings, journalistic and academic; and the anticipated audiences, popular and specialist.

The second aspect to be explored looked at students’ use of the source material in terms of choosing suitable extracts and placing them effectively. It found that students on the whole appeared to carry out this task appropriately so that extracts could be used as support for their own arguments, as for instance, with the figures showing the firm’s market significance or details of the factors influencing the board’s decision to institute change. The students were thus aware of the need to put forward their own claims and then refer to relevant Case Study material to buttress these claims, suggesting that most had a grasp of the principles of effective argumentation. This ability to establish connections and relationships between the Tesco Case Study events and students’ theoretical knowledge is an important step in understanding the academic community’s approach to knowledge creation.

In contrast, the third analysis showed that there was a range of approaches to representing Case Study material in one’s own words. Some of the highly rated writers demonstrated a more subtle and indirect use of source material, by making a generalised reference to the relevant item rather than reproducing the original words verbatim, whereas students with a weaker grasp of writing in English might prefer to let the words of the Case Study speak for them. The former practice can be seen in the following example.

We can see that Tesco, together with Trilogy, used both internal and external factors to gain sustainable competitive advantage. External forces led to them to recognise that the company needed to improve in the customer service area. A RBV gave Tesco a means of enhancing customer service through its employees. [MS18]

The main purpose of supplying the Case Study to the examinees was to allow accurate and relevant citation of significant points. The majority, however, quoted verbatim to a greater or lesser degree and only the very proficient succeeded in putting their case without resorting to direct quotation. Perhaps students felt certain points had to be reproduced in the words of the text as they amounted to factual material. Equally, others may have had little knowledge of the conventions of using source material. Yet others may have judged the Case Study wording to be superior to their own, or felt they could not represent the ideas clearly, particularly those writers with a somewhat tenuous grasp of academic English (Pennycook, 1996).
Taking a broader perspective, students’ inadequacies in integrating source material seem less significant and critical to their academic development than their ability to understand the principles behind source use. It is interesting that, despite a considerable body of research on students’ use of source material, the literature has given much of its attention to plagiarism (Liu, 2005; Pennycook, 1996; Shi, 2008). More positively, a number of researchers have spoken out for a wider discussion of the developmental aspects of using source material (Bazerman, 2004; Harris, 1997; Howard, 1995; Pecorari, 2001, 2010), a perspective which seems more likely to increase students’ grasp of the effective choice of source material.

6.4 Qualitative findings

6.4.1 Background to Qualitative Findings
Research Question #2 deals with indications of student writing development and Key Finding #4 explores this topic over three semesters of the students’ programme. Research Question #3 is addressed through the qualitative findings on writing experiences. Attitudes to academic writing are discussed in Key Finding #5, while Key Finding #6 relates to the changing priorities as students’ writing developed in response to new course demands. Key Finding #7 discusses the role of group and teamwork in responding to disciplinary writing demands.

6.4.2 Discussion of Key Finding #4
Key Finding #4 found that gains were made in the acquisition of features of academic writing and the range of sentence constructions amongst the individual Focus Group members, but with considerable variability in the nature of acquisition.

Overall, the academic results for the group over the period of two years showed considerable fluctuation, some of which may be attributable to early confusion over academic writing conventions and a lack of the requisite skills. The linguistic analyses offer an insight into the skills students used in their work and demonstrate a similarly variable pattern.

The linguistic analyses of features of academic writing and sentence construction in the BUS292 Focus Group writing replicated the analyses of the MGMT191 essays, and were supplemented by brief reports on specific items of language use. Despite the small size of the sample, they offer some interesting insights into how individuals may progress in their writing skills.
Some generalities were observed: in the acquisition of academic language overall, in sentence complexity and in fluency. Conversely, a marked variation amongst the writers was apparent in specific areas and in individuals’ level of acquisition. For example, two of the more proficient writers, Dipak and Jalal, showed increased awareness of planning and careful text structuring in their later work, whereas Imogen, whose earlier essays had been characterised by careful organisation of ideas, appeared to have abandoned this quality for the moment. The two LEMS writers continued to display clear signalling of structure, often more effectively than more experienced writers of English, but their greatest gains were increased comprehensibility, rather than specific elements of academic style.

Variability was most marked in the production and frequency of individual items of feature use, where no discernible pattern could be found. This may be partly attributed to the basic level of proficiency on entry, in that more competent writers enhanced their already existing academic style with more sophisticated items of academic language, while the LEMS students appear to have made the most gains in their level of general language and in specialist vocabulary. However, the value placed on academic style, awareness of discourse conventions, and personal motivation no doubt also contributed to this result.

The analyses indicate that the students were developing some understanding and acquisition of the underlying principles of disciplinary discourse that are achieved through the use of specific features of language: an in-depth approach to the topic through longer texts and longer sentences; coherence and logical argumentation through the linking of ideas with cohesive forms, key words, synonyms and the structuring of paragraphs; and conciseness through attention to the relevance of ideas, the use of specialist and precise vocabulary and phrasal and clausal features. Nonetheless, even where similarities could be seen in the group as a whole, individual writers created their own patterns of acquisition.

This individuality is especially marked in the case of Grace, who like the rest of the group, made clear gains in her language skills but who stood out from the group in her divergence from their trends. For example, her rapid rate of writing progress overall was apparently contradicted by her slower acquisition of individual items: by the fourth semester, where the group as a whole showed increased word length and noun use and reduced lexical verb frequency, Grace’s texts employed fewer words overall, fewer nouns and more lexical verbs.
The differentiation in item production amongst the Focus Group writers may be partly accounted for through considering the principles of Emergentist theory (Ellis, N., 2003; Ellis, N. and Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2006), which disputes the notion that language development occurs in a regular, stable and predictable way. Rather,

[i]ndividual development paths, each with all its variation, may be quite different from one another, even though in a ‘grand sweep’ view, these development paths appear quite similar (Larsen-Freeman, 2006, p.594).

This perspective on language acquisition originally referred to child L1 and to adult L2 language learning but may equally well be applied to the patterns of language development seen in this study. For some students in the Focus Group working from a native speaker’s knowledge of English, their linguistic progress was not a matter of learning a new language so much as the acquisition of a more formal written discourse and learning to manipulate it for their communicative purposes at a fairly sophisticated level. For others, whose English acquisition had been founded mainly on oral communication, there was a greater task ahead of them, in identifying and eliminating the features of spoken discourse in their written work. A third group was still in the process of acquiring aspects of basic English grammar and lexis and the metaphor of second language acquisition can most properly be applied to this group. Yet even within each group there was a range of academic writing features acquired and different frequencies of use.

A similar variability in academic language development has been observed in studies of first-language (Haswell, 2000), second-language (Storch and Hill, 2008) and mixed groups of writers (Hinkel, 2002; Ortega, 2003). While individual variation may be expected in mixed groups of writers and with L2 writers in particular, it is interesting to note that this can also be discerned, if on a lesser scale, in native speakers. This last group is an infrequent subject for study, and more data on their academic language development would be of interest.

The wide range of proficiency levels and language backgrounds in this small student group allows us to assert that the findings, while not widely generalisable, may still give a reasonably representative picture of the variety of student writing development in an undergraduate EMI (English Medium of Instruction) tertiary course.
Emergentist theory reminds us that the application of newly-acquired forms of language occurs on a somewhat random and non-linear basis and includes periods of regression before consistent production. Entry-level proficiency, awareness of academic style and intrinsic motivation are also factors influencing the rate and extent of changes in students’ academic style. Finally, the explicit teaching of certain qualities expected in texts, such as careful organisation of material leading to a coherent flow and the use of specialist terminology, will also impact to a greater or lesser extent on student approaches to text production.

6.4.3 Discussion of Key Finding #5

Key Finding #5 found a range of views among staff and students on the importance of academic writing: while most agreed it played some part in success, few saw it as critical.

The students appeared to fall into three groups, according to the attitudes towards academic writing which they brought with them on entry. The confident writers, Imogen, Jalal and Dipak, had enjoyed English writing at school and took pleasure in producing a high standard of written text, quite apart from mark considerations. A second group, consisting of Ben and Grace, saw writing as a tool for enhancing their academic achievement but neither had shown great interest or ability at school. A third group, the LEMS students, Lucy and Dylan, approached writing from a very different viewpoint. As they struggled to express themselves adequately in written English, they had little time to attend to points of grammar and sentence structuring.

However these initial groupings were modified by the students’ experiences, so that they followed distinct writing pathways which suggest connections with case studies in the literature.

*Ben*

Ben had little interest in writing at the beginning of his study and little faith in his own writing abilities. This approach was reinforced by his negative view of academic writing style, especially the type of language it entailed. In this respect, Ben had much in common with Tiffany, who told her researcher (Crosby, 2007) that she hated writing and found it boring, similar terms to those Ben used in his interviews. Both Ben and Tiffany, in fact, turned out to be quite competent writers, although neither attained the level of some of their peers. An effective oral communicator, Ben favoured simple and direct expression to achieve the essential quality of clarity, and preferred to view successful
communication in terms of spoken rather than written properties, just as Tiffany, a second language ‘ear’ learner, found listening and speaking quite straightforward. Confident of his oral abilities, Ben saw them as the key to his success in the workplace (which may indeed have been the case). In addition, in his approach to audience Ben resembled Dave, in the McCarthy (1987) study. He was very ‘context-oriented’ in that he put considerable effort into finding out the marker’s preferences and expectations for each assignment, just as Dave tailored his assignments on an individual basis. While McCarthy sees this as Dave’s inability to transfer skills across contexts, the variability of marker expectations could well have been justified in Ben’s case.

Ben’s focus on content and organisation of ideas, but not language, did not in fact greatly impede his success, however. Ben may not have become an independent and mature writer but, contrary to his own assessment of his writing skills, he adapted effectively to the demands of his papers and achieved especially well in language-rich papers. As a result, Ben was the one student in the group whose attitudes towards writing apparently had little impact on his ultimate academic success.

**Grace and Jalal**

For Jalal and Grace, improvement in their writing skills was a goal from the outset and remained so throughout their study, although they brought widely differing competencies to their work.

Grace had not shone at writing at school but, like Yuko (Spack, 1997), was motivated to work consistently on improvement because she was a second language speaker of English. Both Grace and Yuko had confidence in their own intellectual abilities, and were determined to advance their writing skills by establishing good relationships with their teachers and by seeking frequent feedback on their work. Equally, Grace had much in common with the Generation 1.5 students, in being familiar with the culture of her host country from her secondary schooling. For example, we can see connections with Jan (Leki, 2007), not in work habits certainly, but in their ease in the cultural setting. However, while Jan found other students picked up on his Polish accent and saw him as a foreigner and outsider, Grace’s slight American accent seems to have marked her as one of the group rather than an outsider and she was readily accepted by her peers from the beginning. This social acceptance facilitated Grace’s acculturation into the academic discipline, while, conversely, Jan’s sense of alienation deprived him of the motivation to engage with his community.
Understanding of the host culture, a strong identity as a scholar and good social relationships also marked Jalal’s writing development and academic achievement and he shared these qualities with Zack in Crosby’s (2007) study. The two came from a similar ethnic and social background where English held a privileged status inside and outside the home and there were high expectations of achievement. Both began from a point of considerable experience in English writing which they were able to build on. Jalal sought constantly to refine his skills, seeing writing quality as the determining factor in achieving academic distinction, and he and Zack appear to have shared a capacity to look beyond the formulaic and take on the challenges of establishing their own voice despite discourse constraints. It is possible that this similarity arises from their common social and cultural beliefs which valued educational achievement and motivated them to set their sights high.

Grace and Jalal seem at first glance to have been very different Focus Group members, but writing appropriately was a critical issue for them, though at different levels. The two obtained the academic success they hoped for, due not just to their disciplinary knowledge and understanding but to their writing proficiency as well. Both required good grades for their future employment, but for Grace, it was a matter of being able to compete on the same terms as New Zealand-born students when she applied for a position in the future. In Jalal’s case, it meant the chance to enter employment at the highest level when he finished his studies.

Dipak and Imogen

Imogen and Dipak, enthusiastic writers on entry, found difficulty in adapting to academic conventions, which they saw as a threat to their identity as writers and their personal voice. This led to a period of struggling to reconcile conflicting personal and disciplinary views of appropriate writing, which we see mirrored in Ivanic’s depiction of Rachel (1998), in the Lillis study of six bilingual women (1997) and in the stories of Nick and Anna (Chiseri-Strater, 1991). All these students felt that the requirements for writing, as well as the approaches adopted by teaching staff, swamped their own personalities and identities.

Dipak, for instance, chose to ignore material from research, preferring to express only his own views in his assignments. This decision brought poor marks and engendered a period of disillusionment and cynicism which is echoed in the game-playing activities of Rachel, and of Jan in Leki’s study (2007). There is a range of pathways to follow at this juncture: to conform and accept, to adopt a critical stance to conventions and avoid the unacceptable practices, or to wholeheartedly resist (Allison, 1996; Benesch, 2001, 2009; Pennycook, 1997). Eventually Dipak discovered an approach by which he could incorporate
research findings, as convention dictated, and still retain his own perspective in his writing by adopting a critical approach to his material. This discovery represented a ‘breakthrough’ in Gourlay’s terms (2009), in that success in writing brought him renewed confidence in his writing ability as well as a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the discourse expectations. To attain this stage, which Crosby’s (2007) criteria suggest is the sign of the mature writer, reflects the goals of the BBIM approach to academic literacy where independent thinking and existing disciplinary knowledge combine to produce new knowledge.

Imogen strongly believed that detailed explanations were essential to clarity of expression, and so could not bring herself to write concisely and in line with the expectations of her teachers. She wavered between acceptance and resistance, failed to find a middle way through her dilemma and, in the long run, followed her instincts for copious explanation. In order to preserve her writer identity, she followed a path of resistance, like Rachel in the Ivanic 1998 study, although she did not succumb to Rachel’s more cynical strategies but stayed true to her convictions. It was a stance which highlighted her limited understanding of the purpose of conciseness and her lack of concern for her audience. The price she paid for pursuing her beliefs, however, was that she did not complete her studies at the level of achievement her skills and understanding merited.

For Dipak, gaining a mastery of academic writing became an important motivation in his final semesters in order to realise his career ambitions. For Imogen, on the other hand, writing up to marker expectations was not so critical and she was ready to sacrifice higher grades in order to maintain her own version of good writing.

Lucy and Dylan

Although the two LEMS students, Dylan and Lucy, never achieved the level of language competence of others in this study, theirs is nonetheless a tale of achievement. Like a number of second-language students, both Lucy and Dylan had a clear idea of their goals in undertaking university study and, in view of their success in high school in China, they were confident of their abilities and status as scholars. This confidence seems to have been an important factor in their determination to succeed, and in this persistence, they reflect the attitudes of Yuko (Spack, 1997), Jinny (Frodesen, 2009) and Andrew (Crosby, 2007), other Asian students whose educational and cultural values seem to have sustained them through their programme. In one respect, however, Lucy and Dylan do not conform to most depictions of Asian students in the literature; they made a tactical decision in their first two years of
study to ignore linguistic issues and direct their efforts to mastery of content and text structure. It was only in their final year that they began to attend to language issues, such as conciseness. They acknowledged the need for extending their specialist vocabulary but improving sentence structuring and grammar features were outside their brief for most of their programme. This omission did not greatly matter, it seems. In certain subjects there was no requirement for academic language, while in language-rich papers the two accepted that they would not gain the marks of their more skilled peers. In brief, their decision to prioritise content and structure did not bring high grades but still led to their completion of the course. This suggests that, if we apply Crosby’s criteria, Lucy and Dylan bypassed the early stage of giving attention only to micro features of grammar and worked at the higher stage where rhetorical and other macro considerations apply. Ultimately Dylan and Lucy achieved their goals, but like Imogen, did so at a lower level than their abilities deserved because of language issues.

Teaching staff

Staff views on the value of academic language and responsibility for its teaching were also diverse. All four unequivocally acknowledged the importance of language at the heart of their programme but placed academic discourse, including academic writing, in broader contexts. All expressed the need for certain higher-level qualities in writing: clarity, coherence and conciseness, but in the short-term their attention was on academic literacy rather than features of academic style, and their long-term language responsibilities lay in training their students to be effective communicators with the appropriate linguistic skills for the workplace (Gollin, 1998).

6.4.4 Discussion of Key Finding #6

Key Finding #6 found that the focus on academic writing requirements in Year 1 developed into wider concerns about mastering professional discourses over the following two years.

Because the BBIM degree was designed to operate as an integrated programme, certain underlying principles could be built into its curriculum. One of these was a concern for language and more specifically for the teaching of communication skills throughout the various papers. For example, language requirements were explained in the marking rubrics. There was also a staged progression from academic writing skills, especially in the form of the academic essay, in Year 1 towards workplace communication by Year 3. The essential principles of clarity, coherence and conciseness, however, continued to be stressed in other kinds of communication, adapted appropriately to the different
audiences that students were now being exposed to. This conforms with Gollin’s findings in a Computing course (1998, pp.309-310), where she noted marked differences in audience, authorship, genre and time constraints (amongst others) between academic and professional writing, which were both required at various times and in varying degrees. Attention to language issues also informed the BBIM final semester’s capstone assignment, which aimed to bring together the skills and disciplinary knowledge that students had acquired in their course. Again this collaborative approach can be seen as training for future employment, where teamwork is a feature of the writing process (Gollin, 1998; Odell, 1985, cited in Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p.155).

For most students in the Focus Group, academic writing demands lessened as they progressed through their programme, and studies in FYHE (First Year in Higher Education) agree that the first year is critical in acquiring new knowledge and skills, especially in writing (Krause, 2001), which become a foundation for later learning (Bright and von Randow, 2008; Krause et al., 2005, Krause and Coates, 2008; Murray, 2010; Yorke and Longden, 2007). Business courses are notably eclectic as a result of their composition, which includes all of Becher’s (1989) combinations of domains of knowledge (Drew and Ottewill, 1998).

Students found that later study demands varied. Information Management, the common major that all were required to study, made few demands on advanced writing skills and students who had chosen Accounting as their other major, found their academic writing requirements much reduced in Years 2 and 3. Those majoring in Marketing and Human Resource Management, however, still had a heavy essay-writing load through to the end of their studies. Even the final capstone project involved a range of writing requirements, but it was carried out in teams where members brought complementary skills, so that the more experienced academic writers could take on the role of composing the text.

6.4.5 Discussion of Key Finding #7

Key Finding #7 found that participation in groups, both formal and informal, was an important aspect of the process of understanding and producing appropriate disciplinary writing.

Group work was implicit in the teaching approach but was equally encouraged outside the classroom and students took the initiative to set up their own study groups prior to an assignment and to exams. The main focus in these informal groups was content, as interpretations were teased out through vigorous discussion, but the work in class on team reports gave an opportunity to look at other students’ approaches to writing, for Imogen, for example, and the LEMS students. For this latter group,
working collectively was an especially important feature of their knowledge acquisition and of their social integration into the class (Cameron and Meade, 2003). The first year found them tending to seek students of the same ethnicity for group work in class but Years 2 and 3 seem to have brought them increased confidence in taking part in a mixed language group and expressing views which would draw understanding and respect from the group. Several studies have confirmed the importance of group work in learning, and students clearly find this helpful both socially and academically (Gulik and Tippin, 2004; Johnston, 2001; Scutter et al., 2011; Yorke and Longden, 2007).

6.4.6 Issues relating to Qualitative Findings
The findings from the qualitative data in the Case Studies suggest that students were not prepared for the realities of university life prior to the course, and the nature of their expectations, based on family, friends and school sources, were indicators that their first year experience (FYE) might well be problematic.

Their environment for study in the BBIM course was, however, atypical in its supportive and personal nature. The design of their course emphasised deep learning and clear communication within an academic literacy context, and the relaxed atmosphere of the campus, the relatively small size of the cohort and the close relationship between staff and students built an encouraging social context for their introduction to university study.

Despite these advantages, the Focus Group interviews showed that students experienced in a variety of ways many of the difficulties and challenges which are discussed in the literature.

*Variation in staff approaches to academic writing*

The Case Studies describe students’ experiences of the wide-ranging attitudes towards academic writing held by staff, and confirmatory evidence of this is provided in several research studies. At the University of Auckland, staff and student attitudes towards language issues were examined by Gravatt, Richards and Lewis (1997), who found that staff rated an appropriate tone, attitude or style in fact amongst the least important features in writing, with content and organisation of ideas viewed as the essential qualities of students’ written work, consistent with the findings of this present study.
Smith (2005) studied lecturers’ rating of academic essays at the University of Auckland and found that they varied considerably between and within disciplines, influenced partly by the lecturers’ own views on the importance of academic writing study. Leniency was especially notable in low-scoring essays from low proficiency L2 students. However, language issues were represented under the heading of grammar, a consideration which was rated second ahead of organisation of material, and is contrary to the finding in the present study.

Research into disciplinary differences in Engineering and Business lecturers’ approach to writing (Zhu, 2004a) duplicated the finding of the current study, and pointed out that views of academic literacy are not uniform within disciplines and may be quite diverse in nature and distribution amongst staff (pp.42-43).

Studies of L2 student writing assessment suggest that subject lecturers show tolerance of non-academic styles, although correction of grammar and spelling is a frequent focus. For example, Baik (n.d) demonstrated that disciplinary background and years of experience affected marking practices, as did Smith (2005). Despite the perception held by a number of respondents that they did not apply special standards to ESL texts, they nonetheless acknowledged that they were more accepting of errors in grammar and spelling.

A study of a native speaker’s experiences with college writing (McCarthy, 1987) mirrors the finding of the present study that the question of the individual marker was paramount: in Dave’s words ‘figuring out what the teacher wanted’ (p.243). This circumstance implies once again that staff have differing writing expectations, and that students are aware of differences in attitude and expectation amongst staff and alter their writing behaviours accordingly.

This ambivalence of attitude is a reflection of the continuing debate over the value of academic discourse conventions in general (Allison, 1996; Benesch, 2001; Pennycook, 1994; Turner, 2004).

Voice and identity

The confusion experienced by Imogen, Dipak and Ben over their identity as writers was echoed by others in the wider Focus Group who came from non-traditional L1 backgrounds or were L2 writers. This experience has been widely discussed in the literature (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Hyland, 2006, pp.16-17; Lillis and Turner, 2001), with the claim that the insistence on conventional academic discourses stifles
writers and damages their perception of their competence. This can in turn lead to the loss of confidence and demotivation in one’s studies, as was the case with Dipak.

In addition, in the pedagogical literature, the teaching of academic discourses is seen as problematic precisely because they are discourses, not a single homogeneous set of practices (Hyland, 2006, p.3), leading to debate about how academic writing should be taught. Possibilities include general academic courses, courses specific to the discipline, within the subject programme or as an adjunct, team-teaching with the subject teacher or independent support service courses. One approach that is not publicised as often as it is practised is where the input of disciplinary writing conventions is random and haphazard, and dependent on the interest and determination of the writing teacher. That was not, as we have noted, the case in the BBIM experience although, like the examples cited above, the emphasis may have been on a wider approach to writing, incorporating future workplace needs.

On the other hand, the value of teaching and practising conventional academic discourses lies in a belief in their intrinsic value as literary forms, precisely adapted to the communicative needs of their communities (Swales, 1990), and in their ability to reveal the ‘mysteries’ of the discipline (Lillis, 2000, p.127), through explication of their discourses (Lea and Street, 2000, pp.3-4).

Genre analysis has made more transparent to the novice academic writer the expectations of disciplines towards academic literacies and the passing-on of disciplinary knowledge from expert teacher to novice student can be seen as an empowering opportunity to open doors to the discourse community (Swales, 1990, p.10). Moreover, advocates of critical discourse analysis point out that, while conforming to conventions can represent a constraint on voice and identity, as Ivanic (1998) has shown, this is only true if one chooses to accept the conventions without question. Students can be taught to bring a critical eye to bear on expectations of their work and negotiate conventions (Benesch, 2001).

**Writing issues**

When we turn from individual case studies to the wider Focus Group of 14 members, certain common issues emerge. Apart from the disconcerting reactions to the First Year experience including coming to terms with staff and discourse expectations and finding a writing identity, the group members also revealed a number of writing challenges: finding source material, integrating it appropriately and referencing it correctly, identifying common applications of disciplinary knowledge across subjects, and keeping within the word limits, all these within diverse approaches to the composing process.
Most of these issues seem to have been relatively short-lived, apart from learning to write concisely within the word limit. Input from lecturers when assignments were discussed in class and in feedback, group discussions out of class, reading friends’ writing and getting their feedback on one’s own work, reading within the discipline, and help from the library and other support services were all instrumental in resolving most of these problems for the group as a whole. Nonetheless, some individuals, such as Ben and Imogen and the LEMS students, experienced continuing challenges into the final year.

6.5 Discussion of findings overall
Together the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this study have presented a picture of undergraduate students’ writing in context, which allows us to discover relationships between their writing at an early point in its development, and their growing understandings of disciplinary approaches to knowledge through exposure to academic discourse and literacy. The findings have shown that the writing practices students brought to their tertiary study were diverse and their development inconsistent, writing demands varied between subjects and over time, and staff approaches to academic writing were influenced by personal attitudes and disciplinary requirements.

The extent to which students used the academic writing features brought out in the quantitative analyses, and the views that they put forward in the qualitative discussions and interviews suggest that certain rhetorical aspects of writing, especially organisation of ideas to promote coherence and present a clear line of argument, were promoted through the emphasis on disciplinary literacy built into their programme, and that students themselves were also conscious of the importance of establishing an ‘insider’ stance by using formal and specialist language for more academic audiences.

Gaps in academic writing practices were apparent. The findings suggest that students had little awareness of how language might be consciously and purposefully directed through syntactic as well as lexical choices to highlight the aims of the text, and to achieve conciseness and their own distinctive academic tone. Additionally, while students acknowledged that better writing attracted a higher mark, most were not prepared to attend to this aspect beyond organisation of ideas and surface features of cohesion. In essence, this lack of attention to these more advanced linguistic elements affected their achievement.
However, the purely linguistic aspects of academic writing, in particular, the syntactic and lexico-grammatical items, are not the field of the subject specialist teacher. This circumstance returns us to earlier issues on academic writing instruction: the when, the how and the why.

Evidence from reports on the First-Year Experience, together with the student narratives in the present study, show that the timing of instruction is important. Struggles with writing are a marked feature of student acculturation into university life and it is critical for student progress that these issues are addressed at the outset of their studies, with further opportunities for instructional input on writing provided on an ongoing basis.

However, there is clearly also room for the teaching of the academic competencies at an earlier level, for example, in national primary and secondary curricula, incorporating SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics) approaches, as Australian and some U.S, experiences have shown. At tertiary level, such specialist input may be most effective in programmes run in conjunction with specific papers or subjects, rather than through a broader approach which does not make explicit the differences within disciplinary genres (Candlin and Plum, 1998).

As to the why of academic writing instruction, it is clear that ‘essayist literacy’ (Lillis, 2000; Olson, 1977) is still the prevailing form in many disciplines and, even in symbolic fields of study, a requirement in the tertiary context for a range of disciplinary genres. In vocationally-oriented, applied disciplines, as we have seen, it gives way to language for the workplace over time but its function as an assessment tool at the beginning of study means that it acts as a gateway or a barrier to more advanced study. Hence attention to academic writing in all its aspects will enhance student achievement. Nonetheless, given a tendency in the wider academic community to see its instruction as simply providing a set of skills, it is useful to bear in mind Turner’s view on its role in university study:

> The focus on skills tends to value communicability over linguistic expression, but the fact is that how something is expressed is important. [...] Students need to be able to manipulate language in order to show their understanding of, or be able to negotiate/argue over, content, and therefore language proficiency is as important as content knowledge. (Turner, 2004, pp.103-104)
6.6 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has discussed the findings of the current study and related them to the wider literature, showing areas of convergence and divergence with recent studies, and setting the findings in a wider framework of issues around academic writing and its instruction.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Overview of the chapter
This final chapter looks back over the study to draw out the conclusions which emerge from the Findings and the Discussion. To begin with, the chapter reviews the aims and purposes of the research and each set of findings. The next section discusses their implications for teaching approaches and curricula, and student learning. The limitations of the study are addressed next, and the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research to enhance our knowledge of how students acquire and attend to issues of academic writing.

7.2 Summary of findings
This study set out to evaluate the role of academic writing in students’ academic success, using a mixed-method approach, which included quantitative linguistic analyses of students’ first-semester examination writing and qualitative analyses of student discussions and interviews over their second and third years of study. Mixed-method inquiries of this kind are not frequently undertaken but this approach allowed student texts to be studied within the wider setting of their cognitive and sociocultural experiences, in order to show how the use of academic features and students’ understandings and attitudes about disciplinary literacy practices are interdependent.

7.2.1 The acquisition and development of features of academic writing
The quantitative section of this study examined the writing of a group of 39 Business students in their first semester of study, through their Management examination essay answers. The analysis took the features of academic writing reported by Biber (2006) and Biber et al. (1999) and compared them with the cohort frequencies to establish the extent to which students had acquired features of academic writing. Included in the analysis was a comparison of the language and source material use of the Tesco case study attached to the examination questions.

The findings showed that even at an early stage in their tertiary programme, this mixed-language cohort of students was able to produce examination texts with a number of linguistic features consistent with established academic norms but that syntactically more complex sentence structures and lexico-grammatical forms tended to be absent from the writing of the majority of the group, despite individual
development in academic writing style over the following two years. The students were also shown to have some understanding of the conceptual principles of source use in writing to advance their arguments, but a restricted ability to paraphrase and integrate source material without verbatim borrowings from their source text.

7.2.2 Attitudes towards academic writing and their effect on achievement

The qualitative data for the study was drawn from discussions with fourteen Focus Group members, and interviews with seven of that group whose experiences over their three years of study were reported as case studies. The aim of this section was to gain insights into their developing understanding of academic writing during their programme which might be used to further pedagogical knowledge of academic writing acquisition.

The findings showed that students did not see academic writing as critical to success except at the highest level and that discourse requirements at times evoked an unsympathetic response in students which affected their approach to learning. The case studies also showed that academic writing played a lesser role in student writing as their studies progressed, while workplace communication received increasing emphasis in the latter part of the programme. Although group learning, both formal and informal, was an important part of writing and academic development, especially for the least proficient (LEMS) students, the prioritising of content knowledge and text organisation over language aspects in written work is consistent with the limited value given to academic writing in the minds of students.

7.3 Implications for teaching

As teachers, our goal is to promote the best learning outcomes for our students. However, the literature on student experiences in their first year of university shows that this is often a problematic process. Even the students in this study, working within an informed and sympathetic learning context, encountered difficulties and experienced stress in coming to terms with their new environment. In addition, the literature shows that the attention given to academic literacy in the BBIM programme is not yet a widespread practice and that many disciplines fail to engage with its explication and promotion.

The majority of students entering the university find it an unfamiliar and confusing world, especially in regard to writing. Student experiences of writing in general and of academic writing in particular are
varied at secondary school level and appear, from our students’ accounts, to depend to some extent on
the subjects taken and their content. So writers who have become familiar with essay-writing through
subjects such as Economics or History are likely to have less difficulty in expressing abstract concepts,
identifying and explaining cause and effect, or synthesising various sources of information to indicate
commonalities or divergences. Consequently they are also likely to have acquired a proficiency in
writing that has not been nurtured in students whose subject choices did not make this kind of
intellectual demand. Some students may have had little sympathy with self-expression through creative
writing in English or with responding to literary classics and discussing the issues they raise. They arrive
at university with differing degrees of familiarity with academic writing and varied reactions and
attitudes to writing tasks in general. The problem and the challenge at this point are to try to set all
students on a relatively equal footing in writing proficiency, understanding of the purposes of writing,
and the benefits of attention to writing.

A large part of the confusion on entry to university arises from bewilderment and uncertainty about
how one adapts to the expectations of the disciplinary community and its discoursal expectations.
Indeed it may seem to the outside viewer, and certainly to many students, that issues around
disciplinary discourse expectations actually create a barrier to learning. As a number of case studies
have shown, bewilderment may turn to loss of confidence, disillusionment and possible alienation from
the learning situation. Hence the greater the clarity that is established early in their study around the
underlying purposes of these conventions, the varying discourses assumed in each academic situation
and their individual nature, the easier the pathway of the student will be.

The role of specialist disciplinary staff seems an obvious answer to this problem. It is not, however, an
entirely straightforward solution. Not all lecturers see themselves as mentors inducting their students
into their discourse community. Objections may be raised to the inclusion of discourse discussion into
the curriculum on the grounds of time or lack of expertise. Moreover, the assumption that students will
acquire disciplinary knowledge and understanding simply through exposure to its practices appears to
be still quite common. Nonetheless, it is important to change staff approaches, so that they have the
awareness and the confidence to broach matters of disciplinary discourse expectations with their
students, to establish the role and valuing of academic writing within this context and to explicitly clarify
their own expectations. These will differ according to audience and task. Another important task will be
to spell out how their subject conventions are likely to vary quite distinctly from those of other subjects
within the discipline.
The aim of providing such explicit knowledge around disciplinary expectations of discourse is to persuade students to engage with these conventions, especially in respect of writing, in a positive and critical manner. Studies suggest a widespread negative view of academic writing amongst students, who may see themselves as prisoners of the discourse because of their ignorance of its practices, rather than as controllers of an empowering force which can increase achievement. A better understanding of discourse behaviours and purposes and their situated role within particular academic settings and with particular audiences would advance their understanding of how disciplinary knowledge is created and expressed through language. Equipped with these insights, students would be encouraged to apply the rhetorical and linguistic methods with which they can enhance their academic goals.

Clearly the subject specialist is best suited to take on the role of explaining the approach of the discipline to content and rhetorical knowledge, whereas exploring with students linguistic methods of improving their discoursal writing would lie with the language specialist. The task here is to show departments, faculties and institutions the worth of such an investment, and then to find effective ways of incorporating language specialists into subject teaching programmes, so that they are seen as part of the key to enhancing academic success. To do so, it will be necessary to overcome the widespread view of language instruction as a minor adjunct, dealing with grammatical accuracy, rather than an essential element of discoursal learning.

This sets a challenging but worthwhile task for English language and literacy teachers and for those in the university context who claim a respected place for writing in the building of disciplinary knowledge.

7.4 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are principally methodological and fall under several headings.

The first is the lack of generalisability, in view of the small sample of students taking part. There were 39 students in the cohort which provided the findings in relation to the use of academic features in the first semester of study, making it a small-scale study rather than a large one. However, when its findings show a number of commonalities with other studies, the possibility of generalisation increases. Studies on a larger scale to increase generalisability would also involve more researchers or would require complex computer programmes that are not available to the average researcher at this level of academic study. It is also relevant to point out that while access to larger corpora could have increased
the scale of the study, it would have set the study in a European, North American or UK context, and so removed the opportunity for examining writing in a New Zealand setting.

Another methodological consideration is the relative simplicity of the statistical techniques used. Raw scores for the MGMT191 cohort were reduced to percentages to allow comparability across items but were not subjected to further statistical processing. On the other hand, this appears to be much the same technique used by Biber himself in his 1988 study, so the examination of academic features followed a similar path in this respect. One regrettable omission was of individual figures for the cohort results, which would have given an indication of range. This omission was predicted from the beginning of the design process, as the manual undertaking of this task would have been too time-consuming, but the figures would have been a valuable addition to the picture of student writing.

Other omissions of possibly useful data to round out the study may be judged as limitations. This applies especially to the lack of comparable figures for the whole cohort in their academic feature use over three years, which might have provided more meaningful information than its restriction to the fourteen Focus Group members over two years. A problem here was that comparability across the cohort would have been compromised by the effects of the major chosen. Two of the majors provided considerable experience in sustained academic writing while the third, Accounting, required much shorter and rather more formulaic or numeric responses. Hence differences of experience in academic writing and of the availability of essay-length writing ruled out comparison at the third year level.

The debate over the different approaches to the validity of qualitative data has been explored in the Methodology chapter and will not be revisited here, but the coding of themes from the interviews and case studies might have produced a different result if a computer programme such as nVivo had been utilised. This point of difference must be acknowledged, though whether such a programme would have necessarily resulted in more reliable identification of themes is a debatable issue. An unfortunate outcome of the quantity of data emerging from the interviews and discussions is that many fine nuances of opinion and minor but interesting insights have been omitted, resulting in a somewhat simplified account of the student experiences. This is difficult to avoid and could be remedied perhaps only by follow-up studies, working more intensively with the same data.

Finally, a reference should be made to the status of the researcher as writing teacher. While I have attempted to address all the issues raised in this study in as objective a manner as possible, it is perhaps...
not possible to be completely neutral. However, the reasons given for the initial interest in the study topic will have made this status and possible bias clear. In addition, the insider point of view, which this position brings, is invaluable in considering writing issues and student insights into their experiences and may well outweigh the problem of bias.

7.5 Suggestions for future research
Possibilities for further research suggested by the study include larger-scale examinations of student writing using the features established by Biber, since these have the ability to identify where teaching of specific linguistic items might apply. Longitudinal studies could follow students over their programme, monitoring the development of academic features and indicating useful areas for instruction. Studies of intrasentential structuring which promote concise writing are rarely undertaken but would also be a worthwhile path to follow, since students have little awareness of how to achieve conciseness by syntactic means.

Another fruitful area for investigation is the conventional categorisation of users according to their first language, which may not be profitable or even relevant in view of the wide range of students who are competent writers of English, irrespective of their language background. In institutions where students increasingly come from many different cultural and educational systems and possess a very broad spectrum of proficiency in writing, research which examines the validity of these groupings could provide a sharper and more useful definition of student writing abilities, and encourage a fresh look at teaching curricula and the understandings upon which research studies are premised.

Finally, the situation of the non-native speaker teaching in an English-medium setting is not frequently studied from an academic writing perspective. As universities become increasingly multicultural in their staffing, the situation of such teachers may be problematic where a greater emphasis on writing standards is expected within disciplinary courses. The exploration of their views on the practice and teaching of academic language in their specialist disciplines would appear to be a necessary prerequisite to implementing new approaches to academic writing amongst the staff and student populations.

7.6 Concluding comment
Over recent decades, English-medium universities worldwide have been thrown into a competitive environment with a strong emphasis on economic goals, at the same time as they must adapt to a
distinctively new student demographic. Institutions must accommodate these changes while maintaining the values they see as basic to their academic community and its purposes. Because a high standard of writing ability is as much a part of students’ academic development as the building of specialist knowledge and intellectual capacities, it is integral to the value of the university experience. The development of these writing capacities, as part of the institutional approach to academic development, should therefore be viewed not as an aspect of the challenges inherent in change but rather as a contribution towards their resolution.
Appendix

MGMT 191

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
FIRST SEMESTER, 2005
Campus: Manukau, Northshore, Tamaki

MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Introduction to Business

(Time Allowed: THREE hours)

NOTE: You must answer ALL THREE questions.
The exam will be marked out of 100. Each question is worth equal marks.
The exam is worth 50%.
You must pass the exam in order to pass the course.

Q1. Tesco’s philosophy of sustainable quality of service (see case study attached) is based on “bonding the new approach with the organization’s ongoing renewal processes [to] ensure that this is no one-only exercise, having an affect on one generation but failing to affect the company’s DNA.”

Apply relevant aspects of your knowledge of Barney’s Resource Based View (RBV) of the firm and Porter’s framework for creating competitive advantage (Cost Leadership, Differentiation, and Focus), to analyse and evaluate Tesco’s business strategy for sustaining its position of a market leader in the UK retail industry.

Q2. Tesco’s change management programme (see case study attached) - a “blend of four complementary methods”: “brand alignment, interactive intelligence™, viral change and systemic consulting” - was not designed to “be done to Tesco people, but by, with and for Tesco people.”

Apply your knowledge of frameworks and principles of change management, to analyse and evaluate the role of HRM functions in managing the mind-shift of Tesco staff at all levels of the firm from ‘ever finer improvement of processes’ to a ‘customer centric culture of service excellence’.

Q3. Before the initiation of the “Living the Brand - For Real” project, Tesco’s Corporate Values espoused that ‘No one tries harder for customers’ and ‘Treat people how you want to be treated’.

Apply your knowledge of Schein’s Cultural framework and Senge’s Learning Organisation disciplines to analyse and evaluate the extent to which Tesco’s previously espoused values, indicated in the statements above, are deeply embedded into their employees’ mindsets and the new corporate culture as a whole.

ATTACHMENT FollowS
Living the Brand – For Real

The UK’s biggest retailer is making strides in customer service by working at the personal level. This is a story about individual attitudes rather than information systems, and how organizations change when change becomes catching.

Tesco is the UK’s most successful retailer. Its half-year profits announced in September 2003 were £628 million, and profits were expected to reach £1.65 billion for the year. The company has grown from being an efficient grocery operation to a one-stop supplier of everything from DVDs to children’s clothes, and from dental floss to computers. While we might associate supermarkets with baked beans, during December 2003 Tesco sold eight pairs of jeans every minute. To give some measure of its impact on daily life, £1 in every £8 spent in Britain goes to Tesco.

The company is often used by the media to symbolize the growing homogenization of the national scene, and the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of powerful retailers. The reality for customers, staff and leadership alike is very different. Tesco is, like any other customer-facing organization, powerfully aware of its role in the community and the value it represents for families. The company knows that its continued success does not just rely on excellent supply chain systems, judicious store siting and keen prices. Tesco is also a collection of 220,000 human beings, interacting minute by minute with customers, representing the store’s values and functioning as its effective market presence. The company is highly aware that its brand is very much more than its name. For Tesco, the concept of ‘living the brand’ is manifest in the attitudes and behaviours of each member of its vast staff. Customer loyalty is not primarily a function of schemes such as Tesco’s Clubcard, though such mechanisms undoubtedly help. Loyalty is, at root, driven by personal relationships.

Tesco’s firm intention to remain as market leader drives the company’s belief in customer service. Customer service can be a real differentiator for general retailers, and a powerful multiplier of sales. Tesco’s recognition of customer service as a key determinant of continued success coincided with two concurrent research projects commissioned by the company. The results of the first project showed that customers were not experiencing consistently warm and friendly service from Tesco. The second project’s results indicated that internal levels of staff morale were suffering in reaction to increasingly ambitious cost and efficiency targets in stores. As the company pursued ever finer improvements to its processes, so its staff took the strain – with an inevitable knock-on effect on perceived levels of service.

Tesco engaged a team from Trilogy, a three-member consortium of specialist consulting companies (Whatif, InterAction and Bridge), to help transform the quality of its customer service and raise it to the market-leading standard shared by Tesco’s business processes and commercial offerings. Trilogy brought a clear, crisp and compelling belief to bear on Tesco’s situation. The team maintained that in order to develop the emotional loyalty of customers through a rich experience of personal service, Tesco must create an environment that made staff feel motivated and valued. There would be no short cut to a customer service nirvana. Great service would have to be built store by store, person by person. Trilogy developed the Living Service Programme with Tesco in order to build an environment in which personal service would flourish naturally, touching the lives of every Tesco employee, and reaching beyond to the needs of its millions of customers.

ATTACHMENT CONTINUED
Reaching the heart

The board tasked a joint Tesco/Trilogy team with delivering a service-led culture to the retail business. Central to the change would be the concept that attitude differentiates good service from great service. The team would build the skills to demonstrate this concept in action, and develop a process to deliver excellent personal service for customers while simultaneously improving staff morale in stores.

The project was also clear in its aim that the change process would not be done to Tesco people, but by, with and for Tesco people. Staff members would be trained to deliver the process for themselves, and to make it their own personal property. The project was tasked with building a critical mass of people who would act as role models of great service right on the floor of every store.

The team developed the Living Service Programme, a 26-week process to be undertaken by 660 stores. The programme’s unique proposition is that a culture of service excellence for customers can only be built if the staff feel served by the organization. A revitalized, customer-centric culture cannot be grafted on to an organization, nor can it be magicked from thin air. Such a culture needs strong, flexible and consistent support from the organization. As emotional loyalty is inculcated within staff, it infects customers. ‘Living Service’ really does live and breathe, and touch the people who share in it.

The Living Service Programme has seven core components:

1. A dedicated Tesco coach, trained to be an internal change agent, is attached to the programme.
2. The programme includes in-store diagnosis of staff and customer needs.
3. Leadership development workshops are run to build a service culture for staff and customers.
4. The programme builds a Local Service Vision based on three unique Service Expressions.
5. Shop floor ‘firefighters’ are developed to embody great personal service.
6. Whole-store Energizer events enlist all employees.
7. Learning teams are created to sustain the momentum after the 26-week roll-out programme.

A philosophy of service

Trilogy used a blend of four complementary methods to design and deliver the programme. These are brand alignment, interactive intelligence™, viral change and systemic consulting.

Brand alignment is an approach to building market leadership by fostering companies with strong personalities. The approach derives from the work of Kunde (1999). Kunde believes that great companies are created by aligning the internal brand, or the experience of the employee, with the external brand, or the promise made to the customer. The brand alignment approach stresses the need for authenticity. In conversation with Tom Peters, Kunde explains:

"The word religion derives from the Latin religare – to bind something together in a common expression. Corporate Religion is that which expresses the soul of a company and supports the building of a strong market position. In order to make a Corporate Religion come alive you have to describe your internal organization as well as your external market. These internal values create an internal movement which delivers the whole heart and soul of the company. (Source: www.tompeters.com/cool_friends)"

ATTACHMENT CONTINUED
Trilogy partner InterAction was the source of the interactive intelligence™ principles used in the project. Chairman, K Bradford Brown’s techniques for ‘ Choosing your attitude’ were a core platform for the behavioural change delivered at Tesco, and a major means of empowering Tesco’s people. Much of the technique’s impact lies in simplicity and transferability, enabling individuals to change themselves and sustain change over time. This principle underlies the core message of the programme: ‘Everyone gains from giving great service.’

Viral techniques for spreading messages have gained a lot of attention in the marketing arena, particularly following the success of groundswell, word-of-mouth campaign for films such as ‘The Blair Witch Project’. Viral marketing encourages consumers to propagate messages through their personal networks, gaining quality attention not readily accessible to the originator of the message contents. Trilogy adapted the viral approach to the propagation of the new style of working. Early adopters had real power to shape the change process, and to make sure that the project’s themes were framed in the most effective, usable terms.

Generating momentum among 220,000 people requires a systematic approach, and the viral change technique acts as a powerful forward force.

Lastly, the team used a systemic consulting technique to embed the new approach in the organization through the processes of recruitment, performance management and communication. Bonding the new approach with the organization’s ongoing renewal processes ensures that this is no one-only exercise, having an affect on one generation but failing to affect the company’s DNA.

Each technique used in the project addresses the joining of personal actions with corporate objectives in a different way. The combination of techniques lent the project unique power and durability.

**Elements of delivery**

Tesco built a highly successful organization based on a strong head office team providing clear guidance and direction to the store network. This hub-and-spoke design works well as a way of coordinating supply and monitoring performance, but it does not support the empowerment of individuals needed to create excellent, personal customer service. The company needed an approach to leadership that encouraged greater staff ownership and discretion. Trilogy therefore developed a series of three-day workshops for all the retail business leaders. The shift in leadership practice across Tesco has been felt profoundly. One store manager says: ‘Staff feel that their managers are there for them. This has encouraged General Assistants (GA’s) to grab hold of the store and see it as theirs. The Director now expects the GA’s to set the tone as much as the management team.’

The 26-week roll-out process is owned by a cross-section of staff at every level, the critical mass being among GA’s. The in-store diagnosis tailors the approach to the issues that are particular to that store.

Part of the project’s philosophy is that people must lead themselves. From Tesco’s existing Corporate Values ‘No one tries harder for customers’ and ‘Treat people how you want to be treated’, three core Service Expressions emerged from the team’s work with staff and customers, which are used to support individual application of customer service principles.
These three expressions were:

- Know your stuff.
- Show you care.
- Share a smile.

The Service Expressions are easy to understand and remember. Couched in everyday language and free of any hint of spin, they help to foster warm, personal service as a natural part of daily activity.

**Living service and lighting fires**

Two new roles were created to guarantee total ownership of the programme and the achievement of sustainable culture change. A full-time role – Living Service coach – was created to deliver the programme to the stores and 80 Living Service coaches were recruited from all areas of Tesco’s business. According to one Living Service coach: ‘To our staff, this looks like a totally Tesco-driven process. Trilogy has built deep internal capacity for us coaches, and provides invaluable support in the background.’

The coaches are trained to embody the values and behaviours of the programme so that each store has known individuals responsible for acting as low-key but consistent role models. For example, coaches are trained in advanced attitude and listening skills so that they can genuinely empathize with customers and reflect back their attitudes and needs. Being able to ‘be in someone else’s world’ helps staff to interact with customers even in situations where they might traditionally feel helpless. So, for example, staff members are not empowered to change the price of products but they can choose whether or not to help someone who is looking quizzically at a range of products. Coaches learn to apply personal insight into customers’ needs, and because they do so every day in the real store environment, their behaviour infects others around them.

One of the project’s challenges was the obvious one: scepticism. Change campaigns that attempt to address hearts and minds immediately attract suspicion. People may also feel vulnerable to the importation of techniques that may appear to criticize their values or styles of interaction. Trilogy therefore made great effort to involve key decision-makers, and actively sought out sceptics. ‘You can’t just preach to the converted,’ says Trilogy’s Jane Sassienie. ‘Inside every cynic is a frustrated dreamer. There’s something there that they wanted, and didn’t get. We can help them to make it happen, rather than waiting for life to bring it to them.’

The programme was designed to improve commitment bottom-up as well top-down in the organization. Healthy and successful organizations have always valued the people in their front line. In many ways, the Living Service Programme is Tesco’s recognition, through committed investment of time and money, of that fundamental business truth. Tesco’s GA’s, who operate the stores’ checkouts and fill their shelves, were the key audience for the project’s messages, and they supplied the key agents of change.

The project therefore introduced a second novel role dubbed ‘firelighter’. Firelighters are change agents given skills to change themselves and the people around them. In each store, 5 per cent of the staff were trained as firelighters, creating a population of 20,000 committed, locally based champions of change. The firelighters were responsible for enlisting shop floor colleagues to the Living Service principles. They also performed as role models for personal
service, putting the principles into practice in their daily work. As one store director says: ‘The firefighters are the single biggest reason that the programme is having such an impact. The programme has switched on for the people that really matter, the customer assistants.’

Registering the impact

Tesco’s commitment to the programme is evidenced by its investment over several years. The board was impressed by the results of this investment and were prepared to increase investment halfway through the roll-out of the project in order to create more firefighters.

The Tesco/Trilogy team has been careful to measure the outcomes produced by the Living Service Programme. The full national roll-out was planned to be completed in the Autumn of 2004. Key Performance Indicators tracked for the first 30 trial stores gave clear initial indicators of the project’s beneficial impact. These early results set a trend for the national picture.

On the staff side, stores that had been through the programme outperformed others by an average of 20 per cent in all the key categories of an internal staff survey. These categories include morale, feeling listened to, helpful management, being first for customers, and enjoying work and celebrating success. Absence figures were down in the same stores, and staff retention was improved.

Among the project’s significant intangible benefits is the widely noted enhancement in the quality of dialogue and communication within stores. Staff report that the ‘them and us’ culture is practically a thing of the past, with deep effects on the work climate and employee attitudes to the company. There is now a more challenging culture both within stores and between stores and the centre. Staff now have greater involvement in the shaping of decisions, and know that their ideas and opinions are valued.

A further knock-on effect, and evidence of the deep-rooted nature of the change that has occurred, is a greater willingness to embrace other change initiatives. The happy experience of the Living Service Programme has helped to recalibrate people’s attitude to new initiatives. The development of the business inevitably means that staff will be involved in many subsequent changes, both at the macro and micro levels.

Perhaps most remarkably, Tesco is proud and excited to note that the programme has had a profound impact on individuals’ quality of life outside the workplace. One Living Service coach says: ‘This has been fantastic at work, but most important to me is that the skill of choosing my attitude has turned me from a grumpy, stressed-out guy into a dad who has rediscovered his spark.’

Customers are noticing a big difference in the atmosphere at Tesco stores, and in the attitude shown by staff. For their part, staff are enjoying work much more. One firefighter sums up the effect such a change programme can have on an individual and his career: ‘To be honest, before this I was considering leaving Tesco. The ability to choose my attitude has changed my whole life. I now enjoy my job and get on with my colleagues more. Now I’m thinking about going for a section manager position. It’s the best thing that’s happened to me.’

ATTACHMENT CONTINUED
The Living Service Programme is the result of a unique combination of approaches that is unlikely to occur within an organization. Driving cultural change from a personal basis is a novel technique, and not one that many companies would necessarily embrace. In this case, the mixture of elements created for Tesco added up to a holistic programme that the organization could put its faith in and roll out across the business. If it is doubtful whether such a package would be created from scratch within a large, established organization, it is even harder to imagine such a home-grown change programme gaining acceptance among its target population. Initiatives with truly innovative attributes may be treated with suspicion if they emanate from the organization’s leadership: their apparent oddity can be interpreted as a failure to understand the day-to-day reality of the business, and as confirmation of the leadership’s irrelevance. Equally, where innovative initiatives arise in the periphery of an organization, gaining endorsement from the leadership is often hard to achieve. One of the key enemies of change is the perception that change is being imposed by one group upon another. When the ideas, rationale and modelling of the change programme originate in an external agency, as in this project, it is often easier for the organization to swing its weight behind the programme.

Tesco took Trilogy’s concepts and made them an integral part of the company’s living fabric. By importing an approach, and taking complete ownership of its expression within the organization, Tesco managed to redirect the evolution of its culture in a way that keyed into its employees’ beliefs and motivations while focusing faithfully on the needs of its customers. This was a project in which the personal became the practical: a case of cultural change carried out at the human scale, person by person, and action by action.

Finally, the composition of the Trilogy partnership indicates one direction in which management consultancy is developing. By turning three competitive agencies into a creative partnership (WhatIf, InterAction and Bridge), the consulting group was able to cover different aspects of the process of change while also offering specialist skills in each area: they were masters of all their trades, rather than none. But perhaps most satisfying of all for those involved is that Trilogy’s team worked so closely and effectively with its client. As Sassiein says: ‘Trilogy was actually four partners, because of Tesco …’ But what’s in a name?

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