

# English for Academic Purposes

## *A New Perspective from Multiple Literacies*

Yulong Li<sup>1,\*</sup> & Lixun Wang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Linguistics and Modern Language Studies, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong, China

\*Correspondence: Department of Linguistics and Modern Language Studies, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, 805J, JCSQ, HKIED, Taipo, N.T., Hong Kong, China. E-mail: yulongli@s.ied.edu.hk

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### Abstract

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has now become a popular term, due to English becoming the global language of academia, the workplace, and higher education. At the same time, EAP has, since its creation, been influenced by the language theories of general language teaching and literacy movements. However, its concepts and approaches can, at times, appear too various for learners and practitioners to identify which course of action to follow, particularly when the inexperienced face a ‘jungle of jargon’. EAP researchers have been trying to define EAP, however, they are never in agreement. Therefore, a definition of EAP can prove problematic. This research will extract the commonality of the popular EAP approaches before placing them into a broader context of EAP development, language teaching and literacy history, and the changing history of the educational landscape; it will critically thematize the current EAP theories and aims in order to further examine the nature of EAP as multiple literacies, including academic literacy, disciplinary cultural literacy, critical literacy and digital literacy.

**Keywords:** *EAP; literacy; multiple literacies*

## 1. Introduction

The theories in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are chaotic, not only because there are (1) quarrels in defining EAP, (2) battles between schools, (3) mixed use of jargon, and (4) debate over instructions, but also due to the fact that a wide range of concepts have been attached to EAP: in addition to ELT theories, it has, since its creation, been influenced by theories including: “linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, communicative language teaching, writing across the curriculum, learning theories” (Benesch, 2008, p. 4), register analysis, genre analysis, systematic functional linguistics, writing in discipline (WID), American second-language composition; critical theory; and the new literacies (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Chazal, 2014).

## 2. The Warring EAP Theories

### 2.1 *Quarrels in Defining EAP*

In terms of the problems in defining EAP, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 34) define EAP as “any English teaching that relates to a study purpose”. However, Gillett (2004, p. 11) describes EAP as “the language and associated skills that students need to undertake study in higher education through the medium of English”. It has also been defined as having “the aim of assisting learners’ study or research in that language” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8). Considering all these definitions to be inadequate, Hyland (2006, p. 2) characterized EAP as a “specialized English language teaching grounded in the social, cognitive and linguistics demands of academic target situations, providing focused instruction informed by an understanding of texts and constraints of academic contexts.” However, this interpretation again fails to satisfy Gunning (2009, p. 16), who argues that “all tertiary English education should fall under the rubric of ESP/EAP”. In contrast, Hadley (2015, p. 23) later described EAP as “tertiary level English instructional training that enables learners to improve their language proficiency within higher educational institutions, irrespective of the country within which that instruction takes place”. The literature review

in this study aims to reorganize this list of EAP definitions, whilst recognizing that is not exhaustive, as EAP researchers are never in agreement.

### *2.2 "Battles" between Schools*

In terms of arguments between schools, some EAP concepts completely contradict others. For example, Benesch (2008, p. 60) signposted critical EAP as the protection of the 'interests of greater equity and democratic participation (of students) in and out of educational institutions' and argued that teaching without it would reduce the nature of being an EAP teacher: "EAP is at the point in history where it is ready to consider its ethics... Are they (EAP teachers) to be trainers, carrying out target aims uncritically, or educators... imaging students a more just world?" (Benesch, 2008, p. 130). On the other end, this view is challenged by Deane and O'Neil (2011, p. 32), who argue that, "WID, from this perspective (of critical EAP), be critiqued as being naïve, or even as complicit in disciplinary power and dominance and in silencing alternative voices and ways of doing... but we argue that they may be misplaced."

### *2.3 Mixed Use of Jargon*

As with the mixed use of jargon, an example of this is the term academic literacies. The terms EAP and academic literacies have been used interchangeably, and sometimes in reference to different concepts, due to the plethora of contributions from researchers of different backgrounds and standpoints, as can be seen from the following examples. (1) In New Zealand and Australia, McWilliams and Allan (2014) use the term 'embedding academic literacies', rather than EAP, to refer to the approach towards training students in academic English; (2) Wingate and Tribble (2012) and Lillis and Scott (2007) separate EAP and academic literacies, using the former to refer to text and the latter to practice; (3) Lea and Street (1998) consider academic literacies rather than EAP to be the broadest concept, containing all other elements of academic English; (4) Hyland (2006) is of the view that EAP is the overall concept and that academic literacies form only one approach. Academic literacies have been referred to as a plural form of literacy encapsulating disciplinary socialization followed by study skills (Hyland, 2006), an approach that has come under attack not only for its impracticality (Lillis, 2003) but also for its focus on ideology (Deane & O'Neil, 2011) as a result of its critical pedagogy orientation (ibid.), however, it is argued that these commentators have forgotten the very nature of Lea and Street's (1999, 2000) academic literacies, which refer to a system comprising more than simply critical pedagogy approaches.

### *2.4 Debate over Instructions*

For the debate in EAP instruction, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) define EAP as being required to teach the four macro columns of speaking, listening, interacting and literacy (namely reading and writing), with the addition of micro skills taught within each macro skill (for example being able to use a discourse marker when writing); and EGAP (for example generic skills transferrable through disciplines). This has subsequently imported the concept of ESAP (referring to the teaching of language related to a specific disciplinary discourse) (ibid.). Lea and Street (1999, 2000) imported the significance of the critical approach and disciplinary cultural socialization of EAP in addition to EAP's focus on skills. Deane and O'Neill (2011), proponents of WID (Writing in Discipline), confirm that language related to disciplines is an appropriate skill of academic writing, in a similar fashion to the view of Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) of ESAP. However, they dispute the affordance of generic skills and academic literacies. Bearing in mind the conflicts inherent between approaches to EAP instruction, Wingate (2015) suggested an integrated model of EAP that would absorb all the advantages from the previous approaches. However, with the development of ICT, Wingate's integrated model appears to neglect the affordances and new meanings created by new digital ICT, which Chun (2015) argues should be included in EAP.

## **3. Redefinition of EAP as Multiple Literacies**

In the absence of efforts to integrate these EAP concepts and approaches, it can be difficult for learners and practitioners to decide which course of action to follow, particularly when the inexperienced face a 'jungle of jargon'. This essay therefore extracts the commonality of the popular EAP approaches before placing them into a broader context of EAP development, language teaching and literacy history, and the changing history of the educational landscape. Stern (1983, p. 76) states that, "Knowing the historical context is helpful to an understanding of language teaching theories". This study thus aims to organize the schools and strands in EAP.

### *3.1 Under Traditionalism: Language as a System and EAP as Academic Literacy*

From Ranciere's perspective, modern education has undergone three theoretical stages: traditionalism,

progressivism, and criticalism (Bingham & Biesta, 2010). Traditionalism sees education as the dissemination of the common sense and knowledge required for people to live in society. However, such knowledge is regarded as authoritative and objective and is not gained from learners' experiences (ibid.). In such circumstances, language was from the early 20th century defined as and believed to be a system of structure, firstly by Saussure (Stern, 1983) and later by Chomsky (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), who argued that "a language is a highly integrated system" (Langacker, 1972, p. 18) with mutually connected and supported structural components (Stern, 1983). Following such a systematic structure, people could "combine phonemes to form words, words to form phrases, phrases to form sentences, and sentences to form spoken or written texts" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 5). From this perspective, learning a language is viewed as mastering autonomous and objective knowledge or codes containing each meaning produced by the writers or speakers (Stern, 1983).

Such a model consists of a belief in considerable similarity between language use across disciplines (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) and advocates English language skills as being generic and transferable across disciplines (Hyland, 2006) in EAP. For example, register analysis involves teaching sentence grammar in subjects (Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens, 1964); rhetoric analysis analyzes how sentences are connected in paragraphs to provide meaning (Allen & Widdowson, 1974); the broader scope of EAP emphasizes that similar academic English could be used across disciplines (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001); EGAP stresses there is a need to learn general English before learning English for specific purposes (Dudley-Evan & St John, 1998); whilst generic skills EAP or skill-based EAP is similar to EGAP (Lea & Street, 2000; Hyland, 2006). The enhancement of such approaches has been accompanied by an increase in the number of untraditional and international students studying at universities in the UK and the US (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2006). These students may experience difficulties with the English language and may find academic contexts unfamiliar, thus requiring EAP to teach a range of academic skills in addition to linguistic systems.

Generally speaking, in EAP under traditionalism, students not only learn English as a code and systems but also practice the generic academic skills required in order to complete assignments and dissertations at university. Such a description is identical to Henderson and Hirst's (2007, p. 26) traditional and neutral definition of academic literacy: "Academic literacy is just a set of skills that students must master in order to perform successfully as 'scholar'... its norms and conventions are considered unitary and monolithic". The current stage of EAP is therefore actually concerned with the teaching of academic literacy.

### *3.2 Under Progressivism: Language as Discourse and EAP as Disciplinary Cultural Literacy*

The second wave of the education model is described by Ranciere (cited in Biesta, and Bingham, 2010, p. 110) as progressivism, concerning the relationship between learners' private experiences and wider society: "the progressive orientation shares the desire to create a common body of knowledge that will enable the communication of citizens in the public sphere". Regarding knowledge as the communication between particular people in particular contexts has changed how people perceive language.

Contrary to the Chomskyan systematic structure of language, Halliday (1973) argued that language is not a fixed and autonomous code but rather has optional meanings that are subject to the interlocutors in particular contexts. The process of communication is not a process of meaning-containing codes but rather the interaction of locution (literal meaning of language), illocution (connotation of language), and perlocution (anticipated results of the language in contexts) (Austin, 1962). Language in context therefore not only concerns grammatical competence, but also, most importantly, sociolinguistic competence (Hymes, 1972).

A large amount of evidence regarding textual difference has been identified among genres in a number of different disciplines (Bracken & Oughton, 2006; Hyland, 2008, 2009). Different disciplines have thus developed their own professional discourse, making it challenging for those working outside the discipline to understand (Hyland, 2006). Wingate (2015) indicated that the use of English by different disciplines is entirely for the purposes of intra-disciplinary communication. This phenomenon of specialized knowledge for special institution formulates Foucault's idea of discipline as discourse (1979). Kumaravadivelu (2006) categorizes this spectrum of language as discourse.

As with EAP, in order to be proficient in the discourse, being able to communicate with peers requires genuine immersion and interaction (Wingate, 2015). In other words, it is necessary to become a participant member (Norton, 2003). Proficiency in a disciplinary discourse thus not only concerns whether new members are clear about the English language use of expert members, but also involves "an understanding of the disciplines' epistemology", "an understanding of the sociocultural context", and "a command of the conventions and norms that regulates these interactions" (Wingate, 2015, p. 13).

In practice, Hyland (2006) encourages the attainment of discourse membership by learning the specificity in relation to the targeting of individual disciplines in EAP instruction. A representative of this school of thought is disciplinary socialization, which encourages students to adopt roles as novice members of the discourse community, guided, modelled, and educated by more mature members (Lea & Street, 2000; Hyland, 2006). In addition to disciplinary socialization, researchers have also described WID (Deane & O'Neil, 2011); genre analysis (Swales, 1990); ESAP (Dudley-Evan & St John, 1998); and the narrow scope of EAP (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). However, Benesch (2008) has criticized such approaches as formulating an academic hierarchy of mature members with authority over the novice.

Many scholars also advocate another method of attaining membership via pedagogic discourse participation in EAP instruction. For instance, many EAP scholars insist on the authenticity of their disciplinary discourse; some have begun to use authentic research articles to teach EAP in a number of different disciplines, and others suggest that the subject teacher should team up with a language teacher to deliver specificity in the EAP class (Dudley-Evans, 2001; Deane & O'Neill, 2011; Wingate, 2015). However, this refers to discourse participation in pedagogical discourse (Woodward-Kron, 2002), and the potential results in terms of students' written work may differ from their writing in genuine mature discourse (Freedman & Adam, 1996). As Widdowson (1998, p. 707-712) said: "The classroom context serves a learning community, and the purpose of any discourse enacted therein is a pedagogic one. So whatever pragmatic activity goes on has to lead to the internalization of the language as a semantic resource."

These criticisms have produced another school of EAP as regards membership in a mature discourse (Woodward-Kron, 2002). According to Wingate (2015, p. 15), students' understanding of the epistemology of the discipline should take place through "interaction between experts and novice in the relevant social situation". Recognizing its usefulness, Benesch (2008, p. 60) organized an EAP course for those studying anthropology to help them become involved and to "organize themselves to create a more conducive environment for engaged learning". Similarly, Breen and Littlejohn (2000), Canagarajah (2002), and Purser (2011) all suggest increasing students' participation in the learning of a discipline in a number of different ways, albeit with little concrete pedagogy.

A disciplinary discourse, from the perspective of Giroux and McLaren (1994), could be a subculture group, as the members of the discourse may share similar norms and forms of behaviour that are valued by the discourse (Hyland 2009, 2012). Moll and Arnot-Hopffer (2005) states that behaviours are ruled by culture. In this case members are expected to share genre, register, and language. As a result of Hyland's sociological background, Hyland (2012) later added that the identity of a person is not something that grows out of him/herself, but is instead formulated in the confirmation of others; in the same vein, whether a person is a member of a disciplinary discourse community depends on whether he/she is recognized by other members. One of the criteria of confirmation is whether the person shares a genre and register of language with others.

Hyland's (2012) description of disciplinary identity is influenced by cultural literacy theory, in which identity is seen as a by-product of culture: "the development of identity is a result of interactions in social settings... how one engages with cultural symbols and tools, such as texts, how one interacts with others ... (lead to) who one becomes" (Clark & Flores, 2007, p. 10). Therefore, learners need to obtain knowledge of the culture of disciplinary discourse they belong to or prepared to get close to it; in other words, they are learning disciplinary cultural literacy. However, as Giroux and McLaren (1994) claimed such perspectives of culture cannot avoid being stereotypical or static, as everybody in the culture is different and people are likely to have overlapping memberships in many subcultural groups.

### *3.3 Under Criticalism: Language as Ideology and EAP as Critical Literacy*

The third wave of educational paradigm shift is criticalism, which is derived from modernism and post-modernism (Bingham & Biesta, 2010, p. 111). This exists as critical reflection on the previous traditionalism and progressivism, revealing them both as creating some degree of inequality in education; education creates hierarchies in knowledge (traditionalism) or in people (progressivism). The previous two education models are, according to Ranciere (cited in Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 111), making "truth ... to be found in the ideological and structural inequality that privilege some people and oppress others." The guiding principle of criticalism education is to unveil the ideological obfuscation before students obtain truth.

At the same time, a critical revolution has begun in the field of language education, such as the postmethod of ELT (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; 2006), critical literacy (Wray, 2007), and critical discourse analysis. These movements, based on criticalism, look at language as ideology (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Thompson (1990, p. 56) describes ideology as to "study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination". Literally speaking, language ideology aims to examine the dominance and inequality in and/or produced by language.

Similarly, according to Kroskrity (2000, pp. 8-18), to learn language as ideology is to let students have “the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interests of a specific social or cultural group... (to have) varying degrees of awareness of local language ideologies.”

In the domain of EAP, Lea and Street (2000) observe the dangers inherent in treating and teaching disciplinary discourse as static, and viewing students as passive learners to be socialised (Woodward-Kron, 2002). Similarly, Ivanic (1998) uses a large amount of evidence to show how learners’ heritage, identity, and context might be neglected and become voiceless in face of learning a new target discourse, and how students’ heritage, identity, and personal contexts are reciprocated in their EAP learning. Furthermore, a critical component in academic literacies (Lea & Street, 2000; Wingate & Tribble, 2012), and critical EAP (Benesch, 2008) aims to compensate for the limitations of previous EAP stages and to uncover the “mystifying epistemology and practices of disciplines, which may not be clear to students” (Deane & O’Neil, 2011, p. 32); this may involve helping students to gain a critical understanding of the discipline (Hyland, 2006), and questioning their academic status quo (Cherryholmes, 1988; Benesch, 2008). Because the practices and values of EAP are not innate, but are instead formed in response to sociocultural and historical factors, the tradition of disciplinary discourse should not be deemed sacred, but should rather be subject to challenge, regardless of whether it is part of a coercive following without disputes (Benesch, 2008).

The critical approaches in EAP are described by Morgan and Ramanathan (2005) as critical literacy. However, Wray’s (2007) definition of critical literacy makes such a description more understandable. Wray (2007, p. 2) argued that (1) critical literacy encourages students to investigate and question the “relationships between language and social practices that advantage some social groups over others”; (2) it admits that texts of whatever form are inseparable from “the cultural and social practices in which and by which they are constructed...the way we use language ... is never neutral or value-free”; (3) critical literacy makes students more willing to analyze and evaluate of phenomenon; and (4) it helps students become more attuned to social justice.

The critical approach of EAP goes against the hierarchy to prioritize experience and to demean newcomers (Lea & Street, 2000). This is well reflected in the first point made by Wray (2007): the critical approach confirms that EAP is a product of history and social economic development (Benesch, 2008). The second, with the objective that students do not act as passive receivers of knowledge but instead become linked with broader social realities (Chun, 2015), addresses the third point; which describes the benefits for students and society in the critical literacy described by Wray (2007). This is also described by Benesch (2008, p. 130): “EAP is at the point in history where it is ready to consider its ethics... Are they (EAP teachers) to be trainers, carrying out target aims uncritically, or educators... imaging students a more just world?” Therefore, EAP also teaches critical literacy.

However, this approach has been criticized for lacking pedagogy (Wingate & Tribble, 2012), its redundancy in spreading ideology (Deane & O’Neill, 2011), twisting the true meaning of academic literacies as students learn through participating in discourse activities (Wingate, 2015), and jeopardizing and deconstructing the discourse they should have entered or established (Haque, 2007). The EAP under the language as ideology emphasizes its function in raising students’ awareness of the formation of and fitting in to the discourse (Norton & Toohey, 2004; Hyland, 2012). In particular, Chun (2015) notes its affordance in linking the discourse and learning with a broader context and the wider world, stressing the necessity of it in protecting students’ rights to information.

In an even wider macro context, as English gradually becomes the lingua-franca of the world (Graddol, 1997; Hyland, 2006), scholars in countries with no historical relationship to English are commonly expected to publish in English to guarantee promotion (Hamp-Lyons, 2011). English is also implicitly taking over the cultural identity of its non-inner circle users, learning English as an language of ideology that maintains learners’ criticality as local-global citizens (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; 2012).

### *3.4 Under Digitalism: New Meanings of Language and EAP as Digital Literacy*

Along with the popularity of ICT and mobile devices, the Internet and mobile digitalism have become ubiquitous, making learning portable, affordable, accessible, situated, immediate, connected, individualized, and personalized (Melhuish & Falloon, 2010). Language and language teaching has also been influenced by this. Walker (2014, p. 581) states that “digital technologies are becoming part of the way that people communicate and part of the context in which language is used”, resulting in a “decline in more linear approaches to reading or more reflective approaches to writing” (Dudeney, Hocky & Pegrum, 2013, p. 14).

Apart from the obvious changes, meaning making in language has also been transformed: (1) people have to manage and understand language printed using electronic materials; (2) they are exposed to more language due to the

increasing amount of material available online; and (3) they can also contribute their language to sites such as blogs and Wikipedia (Walker, 2014). On the other hand, the form of language has also changed due to the existence and structure of presentation skills such as Powerpoint and Prezi, which require language to be consistent with the format of software (ibid.).

As with EAP, Cope and Kalantzis (2009, p. 175) thus suggest redesigning EAP pedagogies in order to nurture learners as “fully makers and remakers of signs and transformers of meaning” of the “multimodal discourses in textbooks, websites and classrooms” (Chun, 2015, p. 29). As early as 2002, Hyland and Hamp-Lyon (2002, p. 8) argued that EAP includes not only texts but also the ability to produce visual materials, as allowed by new digital technology, saying: “the ability to produce and understand text-visual interrelations is now an essential component of an academic literacy, and the EAP research is to understand and detail these meanings”. For example, students not only have to learn to produce oral academic language required in the form of Powerpoint or Prezi, but also to submit their assignment or ideas in the form of either an online discussion forum or e-portfolio (Walker, 2014), or using multi-media such as YouTube videos (Jewitt & Kress, 2010). In light of the widespread availability of digitalized materials and digital resources, EAP teachers should help students to select, manage, and understand resources (Walker, 2014), for example how to add markers or footnotes to e-materials, how to search materials from digital databases, and how to quote and reference e-materials (ibid.). Hyland and Hamp-Lyon also failed to mention the danger of online plagiarism, the possibility of purchasing assignments and collusion (Walker, 2014). EAP teachers teaching students how to use software like Turnitin should note the importance of teaching students how to maintain academic integrity digitally (ibid.).

The aim of these new elements in EAP pedagogy is, Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argue, to keeping abreast with the signs of meaning; in Chun’s (2015) opinion, to follow changes in academic language formation. Either way, it is necessary to level up the nature of literacy, because according to Dudeney, Hocky, and Pegrum (2013, p. 16), literacy is partially “grounded in language” and partially “connected with the communication of meaning.” To be specific, this involves levelling up digital literacy, which is characterized by White (2015, p. 24) as the literacy involving “all aspects of developing the knowledge, skills, competencies, confidence ... capabilities ... to make use of digital technologies in a productive, creative, critical, safe, and ethical way”. Consistent with these features of digital literacy is what EAP suggests to teach under the auspices of digitalism. Therefore, this strand of EAP is actually related to teaching digital literacy.

However, the ability of some EAP teachers to use technology still has the potential to improve. The obligations faced by EAP teachers include (1) preparing students to study in ubiquitous technology environments and (2) enhance their teaching by using the Internet and technology (Walker, 2014). Some researchers dispute the significance of the Internet in changing the landscape of learning. For example, Bowen (2012) claims that the Internet and new technology have simply added new tools for learning and are no different from paper and pens.

#### 4. Conclusion

Generally speaking, EAP involves teaching literacies of different kinds: academic literacy, disciplinary cultural literacy, critical literacy and digital literacy as concluded in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** The EAP Definition Framework

<b>Categorizations</b>	<b>Brief definitions</b>
EAP as academic literacy	In this approach, EAP focuses on teaching students necessary English language and study skills for them doing academic studies and research.
EAP as disciplinary cultural literacy	In this approach, EAP is teaching students some common knowledge, meaning of rituals, and epistemology confirmed by/ in a discursive culture, in order to help them learn and socialize into the discipline.
EAP as critical literacy	In this approach, EAP aims at giving students a broader concept about the discipline and academic world, so that they may have a clearer understanding of what they are learning without “blind” following, which in return could facilitate their learning.
EAP as digital literacy	In this approach, EAP is teaching students not only ICT skills for doing academic research but also helping them to adjust to the new academic media, which they may encounter in their future academic career.

The advent of this framework could work as a map for the practitioners when they refer to different, sometimes conflicted, EAP theories and strategies. It may also work as a check box for the EAP teachers to reflect on their curriculum and course to see the focus of their EAP teaching, and to prepare their EAP lessons tailoring for the needs of students. Comparing EAP to multiple literacies also reduces readers' cognitive processing of the meaning of EAP as a whole and as separate elements. Regarding to the theoretical contribution, as one of the limited pieces of literature review objectively analyzing different schools of EAP theories without tending to any authors, current study synthesizes the terminologies in EAP and extracts similarities across four general streams of literacy, which poses a panoramic picture of the field.

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