Teaching Academic Writing Through Awareness Raising: Students’ Views.

Ritgerð til BA prófs í ensku.

Linda Kristín Ragnarsdóttir

Maí, 2014.
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Abstract.

This thesis explores the views of Icelandic university students on how good their academic English writing skills are and to what extent they believe their writing skills have improved as a result of completing an academic writing course especially aimed at users of English as a lingua franca. Previous studies show that most university students claim that their English is adequate for university study, more than a third struggle which indicates a lack of training in Academic English. A writing program was established specifically aimed at those who use English as a lingua franca. The program includes intensive writing courses including a general academic writing course for all students in the BA program in English. One of the goals of that course is for students to become aware of the nature of academic discourse so that it may help them in reading academic texts as well. The goal of this study is to examine whether these goals were met and whether the students felt that their academic writing skills improved as a result of the general course. Pre and post surveys were sent to all students registered in the course. Nine of the 36 survey questions were analyzed for this study. The findings indicate that students believed that their writing skills had improved, with a slight improvement in reading comprehension as well.
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1. Introduction.

The purpose of the research project presented here is to explore the views of Icelandic university students on how good their academic English writing skills are and explore to what extent they believe their writing skills have improved as a result of completing an academic writing course especially aimed at users of English as a lingua franca.

A study conducted by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir and Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir (2010) shows that the majority of university students consider their English to be good or excellent. The everyday exposure to English through computer, television broadcasts and movies is a presumed reason for the perceived high proficiency of English by the average Icelander. There is however discrepancy between English skills, as schools emphasize basic conversational skills (often receptive) while the workforce and university education require formal productive English language and literacy skills.

This is borne out in Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir’s and Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir’s study as over a third of university students struggle with English and almost 60% say that their workload increases due to having to read textbooks in English. These findings raised the question of how students cope with academic writing at the university, or how good the academic writing skills of university students are according to their own assessment, and what measure might be taken to enhance student’s academic writing skills. This will be explored in this research paper.

The second chapter of this paper explores English as a world language and the difference between conversational English and English Academic Writing. The third chapter contains a description of the study and its results. The fourth chapter discusses the findings. In the fifth chapter some concluding words are to be found.

In the research project presented here, the goal is to explore the views of Icelandic students on how good their academic writing skills are, concerning students’ development as academic writers.
2. Conversational English versus English Academic language.

2.1 English as a world language.

Over the last century, English use has grown enormously and it may be said that English has become a global language. This is due to various reasons as knowing English gives access to better jobs, more information and participation in international affairs. English is taught as a foreign language all over the world, a large proportion of television programs and films broadcast around the world are in English and increased use of technology is a big contributing factor to the fast growing usage of English, as much of computer language is in English. In addition, English has become the language for communication in business, in the diplomatic field and in academia. Consequently, the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has increased in Universities around the world in recent years (Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir and Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir. 2013).

Below the spread of English will be described, world-wide, in the Nordic countries and finally in Iceland. Much of this communication is in conversational English, yet university study requires proficiency in formal academic English. Therefore the difference between conversational English (especially receptive conversational language) and English Academic Writing (which is productive use of language) will be described.

2.2 English around the world.

English has become, as mentioned earlier, a world language. Richard Mulcaster, a linguist and a schoolmaster made the following statement about 400 years ago: “The English tongue is of small reache, stretching no further than this island of ours, nay not there over all” (Melchers and Shaw. 2003:6). When this statement was made, however, English had already begun its takeover of the world. Historically, English spread from England, Scotland and Ireland to The Caribbean and North America in the early seventeenth century, Canada in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Australia and
New Zealand towards the end of the eighteenth century. In those regions English was established as the native language (ENL). The expansion of the British Empire furthermore contributed to the spread of the English language in Africa and Asia where it was established as a second language (ESL). In most of the rest of the world, English is taught as a foreign language as it has proven to be useful in international communication, used as Lingua Franca (ELF). (Melchers and Shaw. 2003: 6-7)

In order to distinguish and explain the spread of English world-wide, Kachru’s Concentric circle model will be applied. Kachru (1985) divided the English-using world by proposing three circles, which are “The Inner circle”, “The Outer circle” and “The Expanding circle”. Each circle represents a specific status for the English language, in historical context as well as the way it functions in various regions. An important factor in the usage of English depends on whether it is used as a Native Language (ENL), as a second Language (ESL) or if it is English as Lingua Franca (ELF), also referred to as English as an International Language (EIL).

2.3. English in The Inner Circle.

“The Inner circle” refers to the countries where English is the native language, the mother tongue (ENL). Historically, English originally spread around the world with people emigrating from England, Scotland and Ireland, carrying the language with them and thus the Inner circle represents the traditional sociolinguistic and historical bases of English in the regions where it is now used as the primary language. Furthermore, it can be said that the Inner circle represents the core of the English language as this is where it stems from. The countries belonging to “The Inner circle” are: The United Kingdom, United States, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Anglophone Canada and South Africa as well as some territories in the Caribbean and a few English speaking communities such as Tristan de Cunha and the Falkland Islands. (Melchers and Shaw. 2003: 42-126)
2.4. English in The Outer Circle.

“The Outer circle” refers to the countries where English has been established as the second language (ESL), holding an official status. Historically, this is mainly due to the imperial expansion of Great Britain in Africa and Asia. English is not the native tongue in these regions, but rather serving as a useful lingua franca between language and ethnic groups. In the regions of “The Outer circle”, higher education, the judiciary and legislature as well as national commerce are likely to be carried out predominantly in English. Belonging to “The Outer circle” are most of former English colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, for instance Botswana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Ghana and non-Anglophone South Africa as well as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, colonized by the US (Melcher and Shaw. 2003:127-177).

2.5. English in The Expanding Circle.

“The Expanding circle” refers to the countries where English has become the widely used communicating language for international communication, lingua franca (ELF) or International Language (EIL), although it has no historical or governmental role. Belonging to “The Expanding circle” is more or less the rest of the world, the countries that neither belong to “The Inner circle” nor to “The Outer circle”. As “The Expanding circle” refers to English being used as lingua franca (ELF) or International Language (EIL), it becomes quite clear that the English learning in “The Expanding circle” differs from the English acquisition of “The Inner circle”, where English is the native language (ENL) and from “The Outer circle” where English is the second language (ESL) and holds an official status. (Melchers and Shaw. 2003: 178-193).

In “The Expanding circle”, all around the world, the use of English as lingua franca (ENL) is on the rise within the academic context. Many universities worldwide, and in particular the European ones, regard themselves as international institutions and promote themselves as such, providing curriculum in English, while stating the national language as being the official language of the university. By offering the curriculum to be
conducted in English, the universities aim to be competitive on an international level hoping to attract students which will contribute to the prestige of the university by their researches. In theory, this should be the ideal situation, as claimed by Coleman (2006:6): “for the first time in recorded history the entire known world has a shared second language of advanced education”.

However, it has been identified through well established research on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), that students need assistance in order to be proficient in conducting the formal written register of academia, thus gaining access to the academic discourse community. This applies to all students entering academia, being students from “The Inner circle” with English as their native tongue (ENL), students from “The Outer circle” using English as the second language or students from “The Expanding circle” using English as Lingua Franca (ELF) or English as an international language (EIL). English, as all other languages, has many registers and varieties and those can differ vastly within the three circles, “The Inner circle”, “The Outer circle” and “The Expanding circle” just as well as between the three circles. The varieties which are interesting for the purpose of this research paper are the informal conversational English versus formal English Academic Writing. These two registers will be described in the next section.

2.6. English as an Academic language.

English academic language is based on a formal register of English. The difference between formal and informal language is significant, as informal English conversational language uses loosely connected sentences and phrases, slang vocabulary and contractions and has an overall informal and personal tone.

In contrast, English academic language, especially written language, is a formal language using complex grammatical structure while tightly connecting ideas in specific patterns of organization and having an impersonal tone. (Prinz and Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2013.) Another important aspect in the academic language is the context is which it is
used. This is sometimes called a genre or a type of language used by a specific discourse community. Genre thus refers to a specific use of the language, used by people belonging to communities such as pilots, archeologists and meteorologists or academics. Discourse communities use the language in a way that makes it hard for people not sharing the knowledge to understand what the discussion is about, even if they speak the same language, theoretically speaking.

Many students in the “Expanding circle” come to university already proficient in informal English and are not aware aware of the difference in level of the English they know to the formal academic English required for academic study. This poses additional strain on students as they are not trained, from a language perspective, to cope with English in the academic context.

Most academic textbooks as well as the majority of publication of international journals within practically all fields of academia are in English. More and more courses are taught in English academic language is based on a formal register of English.

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Another important aspect in the academic language is the context in which it is used. This is sometimes called a genre or a type of language used by a specific discourse community. Genre thus refers to a specific use of the language, used by people belonging to communities such as pilots, archeologists and meteorologists or academics. Discourse communities use the language in a way that makes it hard for people not sharing the

2.7. English in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic countries belong to “The Expanding circle” as English holds no historical or governmental role in these countries. However, there is a wide exposure to
English in the Nordic countries in everyday life through computer use, television broadcasting and movies. This is a presumed reason for the perceived high proficiency in English and as the Nordic Language Policy (Deklaration om Nordisk Sprakpolitik 2007: 93) states that Nordic people “internationally speaking, have good English skills”. The parallel use of English and the Nordic languages is then promoted by the policy, saying “that it be possible to use both the languages of the Nordic countries essential to society and English as language of science” (2007: 93). In recent years, in the Nordic countries as in most of Europe, there has been an increasing pressure to conduct most of the University studies in English, as English as a lingua franca (ENL), has become almost the standard norm in universities around Europe. Universities want to compete on international level by offering the curriculum to be conducted in English, attracting the best students and researchers from around the world in order to promote the prestige of the universities. By offering the curriculum in English, the universities also aim for international research collaboration as well as contributing to academic journals which are in vast majority published in English academic language. (Hafdis Ingvarsddóttir and Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2013).

In order to strengthen their competitiveness within their universities as well as in the international academic world, Nordic academics seem to estimate that English is more beneficial than the use of their primary language (Ljösland 2007; Brock-Utne 2001). This, however, poses the question whether universities in the Nordic countries are prepared to undertake such a task. As the Nordic countries belong to “The Expanding Circle”, the general command of the English Language is that of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), informal conversational language (receptive language), while higher education institutions require the formal register of academia.

As claimed by Torday-Gulden (2008:209), investigations, both formal and informal, concerning the use of English at Norwegian universities revealed a “skills deficit”. Most academic and administrative staff in the higher educational sector in Norway, according to her, need special training for Academic Purposes.
Haastrup (2008: 205) states that without “the lecturing staff concerned being given training to upgrade their competence in English, and without any screening to verify that their language skills are adequate to the task” Denmark is going ahead with the process of internationalization. In Finland, similar pressure is being reported.

By recognizing the need to train academic staff in using the discourse language of English in academia, some universities in the Nordic countries have set up support units within their universities. For instance the Stockholm University and the University of Copenhagen have both established institutions supporting academic English use. The objective of the Centre for Internationalization and Parallel Language Use at the University of Copenhagen, according to their website, “is to contribute to the strengthening of the University’s international profile by supporting employees and students in meeting language-related challenges” (http://cip.ku.dk/english/about_cip/).

Support for text editing in foreign language publications has been given by the University of Helsinki since the 1980s (Ventola and Mauranen 1991).

Many universities state, as their future goal in language policies, that all graduate education as well as research activities are to be conducted in English. This applies to the University of Copenhagen, (http://www.e-pages.dk/ku/236/) and Copenhagen Business School (http://www.cbs.dk/Uddannelser) to name but a few.

English has gained a firm position within academia according to studies from all five Nordic countries (Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir and Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2013).

2.8. English in Iceland.

Iceland belongs to the “Expanding Circle” just as the other Nordic countries do, as English holds no historical or governmental role in Iceland. As in the other Nordic countries, there has been mounting pressure to conduct studies at the universities of Iceland in English, in order to compete on an international level. At university level, the medium courses conducted in English are increasing, 90% of textbooks are in English and most of the PhD thesis are submitted in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2013).
2010). As can be seen in the regulations governing professional advancement, publications in international journals written in Academic English are generally rated higher than publications in Icelandic journals. (http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/reglur_nr_263_2010) This substantially increases the pressure to produce academic papers in English. This adds to the indication that Iceland is on its way to follow the Bologna Declaration with stronger emphasis on English in Academia, following other European nations. (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf) Thus it can be said that Iceland is on the same track as the other Nordic countries where the use of English in Academia is concerned.

Exposure to English is high in Iceland, as well as in the other Nordic countries. The everyday exposure of English through computer, television broadcasts and movies is a presumed reason for the perceived high proficiency of English by the average Icelander. A study conducted by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir and Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir (2010) shows that the majority of university students consider their English to be good or excellent.

In the Icelandic school system Icelandic is taught as the first language (L1), in Primary schools, Danish has traditionally been taught as the first foreign language (L2). But now English is taught as the first foreign language (L2), beginning by law in the fourth grade. Many schools begin English language teaching as early as in the first grade (Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir: 2010). Once in secondary school most students other than language majors, are only required to take 3 semesters of English. Thus many Icelandic students have studied English for 8-10 years prior to university.

Although English is taught from an early age in Primary schools in Iceland the question arises whether students are well enough prepared to meet the demands of accessing textbooks in English when they enter University. At the University of Iceland, 90% of the curriculum is written in English. Many students having a good command of everyday English realize once at University that academic English differs (vastly) from the English they are knowledgeable about. This indicates a dissonance between focus in
English instruction at school on the one hand and the needs of Icelanders in further education on the other hand.

One of the studies conducted by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir: Exposure to English in Iceland (2011), was a survey to map out the exposure and use of English by the average Icelander. As has been indicated among applied linguists, different skills are required for producing language (writing and speaking) and for comprehending a language - in other words using a receptive language (reading and listening). Therefore the main aim of the exposure study was to analyze the nature of English encountered in everyday life, in order to assess the English proficiency of the average Icelander.

The study was conducted both as a quantitative study and as a qualitative study. The quantitative study represented a telephone survey of over 750 persons living across Iceland being asked about their use of and exposure to English. The study revealed that 86% of the respondents hear English every day, 19% of the respondents speak English every day and 70% of the respondents write English less than once a week.

The qualitative study represented 14 Icelanders from all walks of life keeping a diary for a day to define their use of English on an average day. The study revealed that the respondents, on average, spent 140 minutes a day listening to English, almost an hour reading English, close to 40 minutes speaking English and twenty minutes writing English.

Given the fact that the respondents came from all walks of life, it has to be emphasized that listening time ranged from 30 minutes to 5 hours, mostly by watching and listening to TV shows and movies. Speaking time would range from 0-240 minutes. While most respondents spent no time or only a few work related minutes to speaking English, one of the respondents was an actor and had to recite monologues in English in his acting class that day. Concerning reading, six of the respondents were students and read academic books, apart from that most reading was done online, browsing social network sites and looking up information. From the writing point of view, two of the respondents chatted and wrote online blogs (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir. 2011).
The result of this study indicates that the average Icelander receives more than he produces in terms of the English language production. The results of this study are confirmed in a former study done by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir and Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir (2010), where they approach students’ reaching higher educational level beliefs in coping with English at university. Even though the study shows that most university students claim their English to be good or excellent, the students also admit to added workload while working within two languages. This indicates dissonance between the use of informal and formal language for Icelandic students graduating from secondary schools in Iceland and reaching the higher educational level, mostly conducted in the English academic language.

The logical conclusion would be a lack of training in reading and writing academic English, ergo the secondary education is not adequately preparing a large percentage of students for the next stage of education. With this in mind, the English Program at the University of Iceland established a writing program specifically aimed at those who use English as a Lingua Franca. The program includes intensive writing courses, one is a general academic writing course for all students in the BA program in English. This course is followed by two optional genre specific courses, one on writing in Linguistics and the other on writing in Literature. The first general course is a writing course, but one of the goals is for students to become aware of the nature of academic discourse so that it may help them in reading academic texts as well (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, personal communication). The goal of this study is to examine whether these goals were met and whether the students felt that their academic writing skills improved as a result of the general course. The study will be described in the next chapter.
3. Methodology.


The goal of the study presented here is to try to ascertain if it is effective to teach academic language skills through awareness raising, specific demonstrations and practice.

3.2. Background questions.

In 2010 the English department of the University of Iceland sent electronic questionnaires to all students enlisted in ENS203G at the University of Iceland, which registered 215 students. Out of those 215 students only 106 completed the course. The questionnaires were both pre and post surveys.

In the pre survey there were 81 respondents in total 52 females and 29 males.

Age distribution was as follows: 3 students were born between 1950-1959, 5 students were born between 1960-1969, 9 students were born between 1970-1979, 60 students were born between 1980-1989, 4 students were born between 1990-1992.

Age distribution by birth year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990+</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The age ranged from students born from 1950 to 1992. The largest age group was that of students born between 1980-1989, 60 in total.

Of the respondents 48 were first year students, 10 were second year students, 6 were third year students and 17 had been at University for four years or more.

Out of the 81 respondents of the pre-survey, 58 students listed English as their main field of study, 9 students came from the School of Humanities, 5 students came from the
School of Engineering and Natural Sciences, 3 students came from the School of Social Sciences, 1 student came from the School of Environment and Natural Resources, 1 student listed being at home, 1 student listed Nothing as the main field of study and 1 student listed Not sure as the main field of study.

When asked if they had lived in an English speaking country after the age of five years old and if so, how long the answers were as follows:
55 students answered no.
26 students answered yes. The time they lived in an English speaking country: 3 students for 1-3 months, 8 students for 4-11 months, 8 students for 12-23 months, 3 students for 2-5 years and 4 students had lived in an English speaking country after the age of five for more than 5 years.
Time spent in an English speaking country:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>55</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The post-survey questionnaire was sent at the end of the semester to the 106 students who completed the course. The post questionnaire got 27 responses.
The participants in the post-survey were 6 males and 21 females.

Age distribution was as follows: 2 students were born between 1950-1959, 6 students were born between 1970-1979, 17 students were born between 1980-1989, 2 students were born between 1990-1992.
Age distribution by birth year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the respondents, 13 were first year students, 7 were second year students, 5 were third year students and 2 had been at University for four years or more.
Out of the 27 respondents of the post-survey, 23 students listed English as their main field of study, 2 students came from the School of Humanities, 1 student listed being at home and 1 student listed Nothing as main field of study.

When asked if they had lived in an English speaking country after the age of five years old and if so, for how long the answers were as follows:

18 students answered no.
9 students answered yes. The time they lived in an English speaking country: 2 students for 1-3 months, 4 students for 4-11 months, 3 students for 12-23 months, 0 students for 2-5 years and 0 students had lived in an English speaking country after the age of five for more than 5 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>1-3 mths</th>
<th>4-11 mths</th>
<th>12-23 mths</th>
<th>2-5 years</th>
<th>5 years +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. Data collection.

The same questions were asked in both the pre- and post survey.
Respondents were asked 36 questions in all. Here only nine questions were analyzed. The first four asked about their proficiency in English. They were the following:

- How good is your spoken English?
- How good is your comprehension of English academic texts?
- How good is your understanding of spoken English?
- How you would rate your English writing skills?

For each of these four questions they had the following response options:

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent
The fifth question asked students to estimate how many papers they had written in English before starting this course. Respondents had the following response options:

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-7
- 8+

To the sixth question of how much of the overall English education in secondary school had been spent on writing instruction, respondents had the following response options:

- 0%
- 10%
- 25%
- 50%
- 75%.

The last three questions asked:

- if they were able to structure their writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor
- if they could produce clear, concise and well organized text
- if they could write academic text.

The response options were:

- strongly disagree
- disagree
- neither agree nor disagree
- agree
- strongly agree.

In some instances response options were left blank.
4. Results.

Results are presented in eighteen tables. Nine show the answers of the pre survey, nine show the answers of the post survey. Each table presents one question.

4.1. Pre survey results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1: How good is your spoken English</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were quite confident concerning their oral use of English with 88% rating their spoken English from good to excellent. Very good or excellent received 58% of the replies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2: How good is your comprehension of English academic texts</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

64% of the students rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be very good to excellent. 90% of the respondents rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be from good to excellent.
Poor  Fair  Good  Very Good  Excellent

Q3: How good is your understanding of spoken English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students giving each answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding of spoken English received 99% as being good to excellent. In the very good to excellent category, the percentage was 77%.

Q4: How would you rate your English writing skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students giving each answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results concerning the writing skills were somewhat different with 77% responding their skills to be from good to excellent. The very good to excellent category received 34%.

Q5: Can you estimate how many papers you have written in English before you started this course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-3</th>
<th>4-7</th>
<th>8+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students giving each answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-3</th>
<th>4-7</th>
<th>8+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents writing from 4 papers to more than 8 before starting the course were 70%.

Writing less than 4 papers in English before starting the course were 30%.
Q6: How much of the overall English instruction in secondary school was spent on writing instruction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Overall Instruction</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>25%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students giving each answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Overall Instruction</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>25%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On how much the overall English instruction was spent on writing instruction, 37% responded with 50% or more. The other 63% replied with 25% or less.

Q7: I am able to structure my writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability Response</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students giving each answer.

| Ability Response       | 2   | 10  | 25  | 42  | 2   | 0   |

On being able to structure their writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor, 54% responded by agreeing or strongly agreeing. Neither agreeing nor disagreeing were 31% of the respondents.
### Q8: I can produce clear concise and well organized text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On being able to produce clear concise and well organized text, 45% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Neither agreeing nor disagreeing were 42%.

### Q9: I can write academic text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On I can write academic text, 38% agreed or strongly agreed. Neither agreeing nor disagreeing were 40% while 20% disagreed and strongly disagreed.
4.2. Pre survey - analysis.

When the pre survey was analyzed, it revealed that 99% of the students rated their understanding of spoken English to be good to excellent, 77% of the students claimed their understanding of spoken English to be very good to excellent. On how good their comprehension of English academic texts, 90% of the students rated their comprehension to be on the scale good to excellent, with 64% rating their comprehension to be very good to excellent.

In their oral use of English, 88% rated their spoken English to be good to excellent. The very good to excellent response was 58% of the received replies.

This indicates that Icelandic students are not as confident with their oral use of English as they are with comprehending both spoken and written English.

Analyzing the writing experience revealed that prior to the course ENS203G, 40% of the students had written more than 8 papers in English, with the remaining 60% having written none to seven papers in English.

Interestingly, 63% of the students claimed that 25% or less of the English instruction at secondary school had been spent on writing instruction.

When asked about how they would rate their English writing skills, 66% of the respondents claimed it was from poor to good, 34% responded that their writing skills were very good to excellent.

When asked if they were able to structure their writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor, 54% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed while 46% neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed and strongly disagree.

On if they could produce clear concise and well organized text, 54% of the respondents disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed. 36% agreed, 9% strongly agreed.

When asked if they could write English academic text, 60% of the respondents ranged from strongly disagree to neither agree nor disagree.
4.3. Post survey results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1: How good is your spoken English</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were quite confident concerning their oral use of English with 89% rating their spoken English from good to excellent. Very good or excellent received 59% of the replies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2: How good is your comprehension of English academic texts</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55% of the students rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be very good to excellent. All (100%) of the respondents rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be from good to excellent.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q3: How good is your understanding of spoken English</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding of spoken English received 100% as being good to excellent. In the very good to excellent category, the percentage was 78%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4: How would you rate your English writing skills?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results concerning the writing skills were somewhat different with 85% responding their skills to be from good to excellent. The very good to excellent category received 44%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-3</th>
<th>4-7</th>
<th>8+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q5: Can you estimate how many papers you have written in English before you started this course</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents writing from 4 papers to more than 8 before starting the course were 67%. Writing less than 4 papers in English before starting the course were 33%
Q6: How much of the overall English instruction in secondary school was spent on writing instruction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>25%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The number of students giving each answer. | 2 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 0 |

On how much the overall English instruction was spent on writing instruction, 22% responded with 50% or more. The other 78% replied with 25% or less.

Q7: I am able to structure my writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The number of students giving each answer. | 0 | 3 | 1 | 20 | 3 | 0 |

On being able to structure their writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor, 85% responded by agreeing or strongly agreeing. 4% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.
On being able to produce clear concise and well organized text, 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q8: I can produce clear concise and well organized text</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On I can write academic text, 74% agreed or strongly agreed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q9: I can write academic text</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students giving each answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


When the post survey was analyzed, it revealed that 100% of the students rated their understanding of spoken English to be good to excellent, 77% of the students claimed their understanding of spoken English to be very good to excellent. On how good their comprehension of English academic texts, 100% of the students rated their comprehension to be on the scale good to excellent.

In their oral use of English, 89% rated their spoken English to be good to excellent.
The very good to excellent response was 59% of the received replies. This indicates that Icelandic students are not as confident with their oral use of English as they are with comprehending both spoken and written English.

Analyzing the writing experience revealed that prior to the course ENS203G, 41% of the students had written more than 8 papers in English, with the remaining 59% having written none to seven papers in English. Interestingly, 77% of the students claimed that 25% or less of the English instruction at secondary school had been spent on writing instruction. When asked about how they would rate their English writing skills, 56% of the respondents claimed it was from poor to good, 44% responded that their writing skills were very good to excellent.

When asked if they were able to structure their writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor, 85% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed while 15% neither agreed nor disagreed or disagreed. On if they could produce clear concise and well organized text, 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. 26% of the respondents disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed. 4% left this question blank.

When asked if they could write English academic text, 74% of the respondents ranged from agreeing to strongly agreeing, with 23% responding with strongly disagree, disagree to neither agree nor disagree. 4% left this question blank.

The results from comparing the pre survey and the post survey shows that student’s views concerning their spoken English has not changed considerably, as 88% of the respondents from the pre survey rated their spoken English to be from good to excellent and the same applied to 89% of the respondents from the post survey. The understanding of spoken English received very similar results in pre survey and post survey, as 99% of the respondents from pre survey rated their understanding of spoken
English to be from good to excellent where all respondents (100%) of post survey rated their understanding of spoken English to be from good to excellent.

When asked about their comprehension of English academic texts, 90% of the pre survey respondents rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be from good to excellent whereas all respondents (100%) from the post survey rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be from good to excellent. This shows 10% improvement of comprehension of English academic texts.

As was to be expected, the results concerning how many papers respondents had written in English prior to the course were similar, with 70% of the respondents of pre survey having written four to eight papers in English prior to the course while 67% of the post survey respondents having written four to eight papers in English prior to the course.

The results on how much of the overall English instruction in secondary school had been spent on writing instructions was interesting, as 63% of the respondents of the pre survey replied with 25% or less while 77% of the post survey respondents replied with 25% or less.

The rating of their English writing skills improved as 77% of respondents from pre survey rated their English writing skills to be from good to excellent, compared to 85% of the post survey respondents rating their English writing skills to be from good to excellent. In this category, there is an improvement, according to their own assessment. The results show that there is a remarkable improvement in the student’s ability to structure their writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor. In the pre survey, 54% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. In comparison, 85% of post survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Improvement is evident when pre and post survey answers are compared in being able to produce clear concise and well organized text: 45% of the pre survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed while 70% of the post survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

In the final question of the survey, the difference of replies between pre and post survey respondents is most interesting. The question “I can write academic text” received 38% of agree or strongly agree by pre survey respondents, while post survey respondents replied with 74% agreeing or strongly agreeing.
The results support a study concerning the exposure of English in Iceland, conducted by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir (2011). In the study, it is pointed out that the exposure of English in Iceland is more of the receptive kind, as the average Icelandic hears and reads more English than he produces by speaking and writing. Thus the comprehension of spoken and written English is better than the production of both spoken and written English, according to the responses in both the pre and post survey. It is also quite interesting to notice how the course ENS203G improved the writing abilities of the students, according to their own assessment.
5. Summary of findings.

5.1. Comparing the results.

Comparing the results from pre and post survey reveals the following (for a more visual effect, bar charts have been included)

Question one: How good is your spoken English? The responses from the pre survey revealed that 88% of the students rated their spoken English to be from good to excellent, very good or excellent received 58% of the replies. The post survey had very similar results, with 89% of the students rating their spoken English to be from good to excellent, very good to excellent receiving 59% of the replies.

![Bar chart showing comparison of pre and post survey results for spoken English proficiency.]

Question three: How good is your understanding of spoken English? There was hardly any difference. In the pre survey, 99% of the students rated their understanding of spoken English to be from good to excellent. In the post survey, the understanding of spoken English was rated as good to excellent by all (100%) of the students.
Question two: How good is your comprehension of English academic texts? The results showed that in the pre survey, 90% of the students rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be from good to excellent. In the post survey, all students (100%) rated their comprehension of English academic texts to be from good to excellent. The post survey indicates student’s improvement of comprehension of English academic texts by 10%. This is interesting as it suggests that writing instruction may also improve reading comprehension.
Question four: How would you rate your English writing skills? 77% of respondents from the pre survey rated their English writing skills to be from good to excellent, thereof 34% of the respondents rated their English writing skills to be from very good to excellent. From the post survey, 85% of the respondents rated their English writing skills to be from good to excellent, thereof 44% of the respondents rated their English writing skills to be from very good to excellent. In this category, there is an improvement in the students English writing skills, according to their own assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate your English writing skills?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good - excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question five, Can you estimate how many papers you have written in English before you started this course? The answers were similar in the pre and the post survey, with 70% of the students in the pre survey writing from four to over eight papers in English before starting the course while 67% of the students in the post survey had written four to over eight papers in English prior to the course. The small difference here seems to suggest that improvements in writing are not because the respondents in the post tests had simply more experience in writing. On the contrary, those finishing the course appear to have had less writing experience in their secondary education years.
Question six: How much of the overall English instruction in secondary school was spent on writing instruction? There was a slight difference between the answers from the pre survey and the post survey as 63% of the respondents from the pre survey replied with 25% or less while 77% of the post survey respondents replied with 25% or less. This could indicate one of two things.

1. That those who felt that less than 25% of secondary English instruction had been spent on writing instruction were more likely to finish the course or

2. Their understanding of “writing instruction” altered during the course, leading to a higher percentage perceiving the instruction as having been less than 25% in secondary school.
Question seven: I am able to structure my writing to complete papers in approximately the length or number of words specified by the instructor, the responses from the pre survey were that 54% of the students agreed or strongly agreed while neither agreeing nor disagreeing received 31% of the responses. In the post survey, 85% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed while neither agreeing nor disagreeing received 4% of the responses. Concerning this question, there is a remarkable difference between the pre survey and the post survey responses.
Question eight: I can produce clear concise and well organized text, 45% of the pre survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed. The post survey showed that 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. The difference of responses between the pre survey and the post survey indicates a significant improvement.

Question nine: I can write academic text, the pre survey shows that 38% of respondents agree or strongly agree while the post survey shows that 74% of the respondents agree or strongly agree. The students had improved considerably from the pre survey responses to the post survey responses.

By analyzing the pre and post survey, it is possible to assume that the ENS203G course was highly beneficial for the students as their writing skills improved considerably, according to their own assessment. (See results and differences from pre survey and post survey responses from questions seven, eight and nine.) As such a limited time is used on writing instruction in secondary schools (see results on questions five and six), students apparently are less prepared for writing English (producing language) than understanding
spoken English (receiving language). As the proficiency in academic writing improves it seems to have a knock-on effect of improving comprehension of English academic texts, as indicated by the comparison of results for question two (How good is your comprehension of English academic texts?) which was one of the intended secondary effect of the course.
6. Concluding words.

The findings of this study are that students benefit from academic writing instruction. The pre and post surveys from the ENS203G course reveal that the students mostly benefitted in the area of production of language, as their writing skills and their confidence in these skills were enhanced. The benefit was most remarkable in questions two, seven, eight and nine in the survey, as these showed the most significant differences pre- and post-course. The improvement in the comprehension of English academic texts between the pre and post surveys could be (as mentioned earlier) a knock-on effect of the course, but one must not lose sight of the fact that these students had also been exposed to and worked with academic texts in their chosen field of study for an additional semester, which would also lead to a perceived increase in their understanding of such texts.

The fact that the percentage of those having written from four to over eight English papers prior to the course is lower in the post survey, combined with the substantially higher rate of those that felt less than 25% of secondary school English instruction had been spent on writing instruction indicates that the respondents in the post survey did not have the advantage of more experience with written English in secondary school.

The last three question were aimed more directly at the effectiveness of the course, as they specifically targeted writing skills. The increase in the students’ perceived ability to produce clear, concise structured text to the correct length ranged from 25% to 31%, while the perceived ability to produce the more general “academic text” showed a 36% increase. Producing texts with clarity and structure to the required length is a mental and organizational ability not necessarily transferred to a second language and many students would have felt confident in their ability to achieve this after secondary education, shown by the relatively high percentage of pre survey respondents feeling relatively confident in this area. The course will have improved these skills and in some
cases just fine-tuned them. Producing academic text in English is, on the other hand, entirely language orientated and this is the area in which only 38% of these university students felt competent. The ENS203G course was designed to teach academic writing specifically to those who use English as lingua franca (ELF) and judging by the students’ greatly increased confidence in their ability to write academic texts, it would appear that it is indeed effective with the additional bonus of increasing reading comprehension (as intended).

English has many registers and genres. It can be hard for those not belonging to a specific discourse group to comprehend discussions or read publications, even if in their own language as the language is used in a specific way. Academic English and Academic English Writing is a genre that is classified as formal language. Students need assistance in order to gain access to the academic discourse community. This is developed through practice and instruction, both as first as well as subsequent languages. (Prinz and Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2013).

It would be advisable to introduce and incorporate Academic language much earlier in the English education in Iceland and dedicate more time to writing instruction. When it comes to expressing their point of view in writing, many students encounter difficulties as the structure of Academic language is quite different from the conversational language they learn. The ENS203G course has shown that writing abilities of the students have improved, according to their own assessment.

It is a weakness in the study that the post survey had fewer respondents than the pre survey. It would be interesting to conduct the survey with the criteria that ALL pre survey candidates take part in the post survey. The responses of those who did not finish the course would be of great interest as a comparison – did their perceived writing skills perhaps improve as well? What and how much of an advantage do the students get from the ENS203G course as opposed to those who simply had a year’s intense exposure to English academic texts and having to produce university level writing without such instruction? It would also be interesting to have an objective assessment of the students’ abilities in parallel – they may believe they are better academic writers, but are they? That remains to be answered by the next study.
References.


