An investigation of linguistic and cultural variation in the understanding and execution of academic writing tasks

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: ....

Date: ....

OPSOMMING

In hierdie tesis word twee literêre bekeringsverhale waarin die historiese werklikheid deur die skrywers weergegee word, met mekaar vergelyk: die *Confessiones* van die vierde eeuse kerkvader Augustinus, en *Surprised by Joy* van die twintigste eeuse skrywer en geleerde C.S. Lewis. Om Augustinus se bekeringsverhaal histories te kan plaas teen die agtergrond waarin hy geleef en tot bekering gekom het, word 'n uiteensetting gegee van die Christelike godsdiens as 'n sosiale fenomeen in die Antieke Wêreld. 'n Kort lewensbeskrywing van Augustinus en Lewis en 'n oorsig van die weg wat elkeen se bekering gevolg het, dien as agtergrond vir die bespreking en vergelyking van die twee bekeringsverhale. Die navorsing word gestruktureer aan die hand van bakens wat Augustinus op sy bekeringsweg uitgelig het: persone wat 'n beduidende rol gespeel het, gebeure wat hom beïnvloed het, innerlike konflik wat hom voortgedryf het. Die tesis toon deur 'n analise op grond van inhoud en tematiek aan dat daar duidelike ooreenkomste is tussen die bakens op Augustinus se bekeringsweg en dié op Lewis se bekeringsweg.

ABSTRACT

Two literary conversion narratives with much historical detail, are compared in this thesis: the *Confessiones* written by the renowned fourth century church-father, St. Augustine, and *Surprised by Joy* written by the twentieth century writer and scholar, C.S. Lewis. In order to understand St. Augustine's conversion to the Christian faith, Christian religion as a social phenomenon in the Ancient World is discussed. As background for the discussion and comparison of the two conversion narratives, a brief biography is given of St. Augustine and of Lewis, as well as a description of each one's course of conversion. The research is structured in terms of beacons that St. Augustine identified during the course of his conversion: people who played a significant role, events that influenced his life, and inner conflict that spurred him on his way. By means of an analysis regarding theme and content, it is shown that there are clear similarities between the beacons identified by Augustine and Lewis in their conversion narratives.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the conceptualisation and execution of macro-textual features of academic writing of students in an EAP course. An assumption is that students have difficulties in producing academic writing. The study investigates participant's conceptualisation of academic writing and compares it to what they do in constructing their own academic texts. It finds that there is a difference between what they *say* and what they *do*. Their focus is generally on micro-textual level, i.e. on the level of words, phrases and sentences, which masks difficulties on macro-textual level, i.e. on the discursive level of linguistic units larger than the sentence. Furthermore, the hypothesis that differences between English L2 students and English academic norms are culturally determined, is found to be much less valid than is mostly suggested in the literature that deals with rhetorical structure of English L2 writing.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die konseptualisering van makro-tekstuele eienskappe van akademiese skryfwerk en hoe hierdie eienskappe beliggaam word in skryfwerk van studente wat 'n kursus volg in Engels vir Akademiese Doeleindes. Daar word gewerk met 'n aanname dat buitelandse studente met Engels as tweede taal probleme ondervind met die skep van akademiese tekste in Engels. Die studie ondersoek deelnemers se konseptualisering van akademiese skryfwerk en vergelyk dit met wat die deelnemers doen in hulle eie akademiese skryfwerk. Daar word bevind dat daar 'n verskil is tussen wat studente *sê* en wat hulle *doen*. Hulle fokus meestal op mikro-tekstuele vlak, dus op grammatikale eienskappe van woorde, frases en sinne, en verberg so dikwels probleme op 'n makro-tekstuele vlak, dus op die vlak van talige eenhede groter as die sin. Verder word die hipotese ondersoek dat waar skryfwerk in Engels-as-tweedetaal-norme gebruik wat vreemd is aan wat gebruiklik is in Engelse skryfwerk, dit toegeskryf moet word aan talige en kulturele verskille. Hierdie hipotese blyk heelwat minder geldig te wees as wat gesuggereer word in aanvaarde literatuur oor die retoriese struktuur van Engels tweedetaal skryfwerk.

Contents

1.   **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

1.1   **Introduction**

All over the world, English-medium tertiary institutions welcome students whose first language is not English (commonly referred to as L2 students), into their programmes. Such English L2 students[1] often experience more difficulties in learning than their English L1 counterparts. Many of these difficulties can be characterized as linguistic difficulties related to the fact that programmes are offered in English. These students and their difficulties have become objects of study for researchers in linguistics and in education, with a view to discovering the nature and possible causes of various difficulties related to knowledge and use of language, and to help L2 students to overcome such difficulties. L2 students' linguistic problems occur on the level of any one or a number of skills of language use, i.e. in reading, speaking, listening or writing. This study focuses on academic writing skills in English of L2 students at tertiary level.

Two opposing popular beliefs underlie the study of English as an L2 at tertiary level. One is that foreign students developing English for academic purposes share a relatively privileged background, where families value good education and where they had access to privileged school systems. All foreign students enrolled at Stellenbosch University have completed at least two years of tertiary study in their own countries. It is often assumed that they have been exposed to an academic writing style that is universal to the extent that it can be transferred to their English academic writing. This would supposedly minimise particular cultural and linguistic influence.

Another, contradictory, popular belief is that these students are obviously very different from one another and from South African students, coming from

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[1] The term "English L2 student" will be used throughout to refer to students whose first language is not English, but who are following an academic course, and producing academic writing in English, their L2 .

different cultures and different linguistic backgrounds. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis holds that language and culture are "inextricably related so that you could not understand or appreciate the one without a knowledge of the other" (Wardhaugh 1992:218). What follows from this is the view that speakers see the world differently because they have different languages with different structures with which they describe the world (Wardhaugh 1992:220).

It is useful to consider the term "speech community" to help develop an understanding of the students and their writing, that will be the subjects of this study. Wardhaugh (1992:118) discusses the complexity of the term "speech community" and, amongst other observations about terms, he stresses that "a speech community is not co-terminous with a language". Even though the scope of this study does not allow discussion of much detail, it is important to mention that the term "speech community" involves many other terms which are also complex and problematic, for example "group", "language variety" and "norm"(Wardhaugh 1992:118-122). If such concepts are used here to talk about speech community, it is with the understanding that they are themselves loaded concepts, in that they are used to refer to a wide variety of phenomena.

Hymes (in Wardhaugh 1992:121) claims that there is a difference between belonging to and merely participating in a speech community. "An individual must therefore belong to various speech communities at the same time, but on any particular occasion identify with only one of them" (Wardhaugh 1992:122-123). The notion of 'intersecting speech communities' is illustrated by Wardhaugh when he says that if one talks of the "target language" of an L2 learner, then English would be a "moving target" in London, for example, as London does not represent a single speech community (Wardhaugh 1992:124).

1.2   Terms of reference

Terms used in this study are defined as follows:

1.2.1 Culture

Culture is an extremely complex term. In his investigation of the concept of culture, Atkinson (2004:277-289) rightly expresses concern over contrasting rhetoric across cultures while the concept culture has not been theorised adequately within the field of rhetoric for English L2. He refers to a definition of culture by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), scholars in intercultural communication, but contends that their definition still contains a "'received' almost pre-theoretical notion" (2004:279). So far, applied linguistics mostly works with a received notion of culture that is treated as unproblematic, as Atkinson (referring to Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) indicates when he assumes that separate societies each have their own culture (2004:280). One such rather vague, and thus minimally useful, definition of culture is "the ways in which one group or society of humans live that are different from the ways in which other groups live" (Guirdham. 1999:48).

Notions of 'culture' that seem relevant to contrastive rhetoric are contained within more recent theories about culture. Postmodern views draw our attention to the hybrid nature of culture in the 21st century. Culture is a mixture of influences from globalisation, world capitalism and neo-imperialism. (Atkinson 2004:280). To illustrate this, a former student in the EAP course was a Swiss citizen, born in Colombia, adopted by one Swiss and one American parent who worked in the DRC for Doctors Without Borders. His "cultural identity" is complex and not necessarily completely unusual.

Current cultural theory pays attention to the politicised nature of culture. It is useful to be sensitive towards the ideological "power-involved force" of mass culture. Most students in an EAP class today would be exposed to the influence of popular culture through technology, for example. (Atkinson 2004: 281-282).

Then there are theories that juxtapose culture as a product and culture as a process. If one sees culture as a product, something like writing would be the

artefact that is produced. However, such artefacts must be understood as by-products of historical processes which change and are non-systematic. Atkinson explains that the "notion of identity" can be seen as "culture as process" and

> it assumes a more or less postmodern, decentered, disunified individual who, at the same time as she is subject to multiple (and often contradictory) sociocultural influences, is also somehow able to creatively use these influences to shape herself into something resembling an agentive actor (2004:282).

It is easy to see how the above description could apply to any student by looking at him or her through these theoretical glasses. But this is especially appealing in a South African context where it is not uncommon for people to resist identifying with only one unit or community in society.

Theory about "big culture" versus "small culture" links up with the above. If national culture is "big culture" and classroom culture is "small culture", the two would intersect in a typical EAP classroom. In research about big and small culture, Holliday (in Atkinson 2004: 281-282) studied culturally appropriate teaching methodology in EFL classrooms and he pointed out that teachers must take into account the "complex and overlapping social institutions" that play a role.

1.2.2 Cultural discourse

By "cultural discourse", this study combines the definition of "discourse" – "[a]ny coherent succession of sentences, spoken or written" – with "cultural" to mean coherent opinions expressed orally or in writing by a particular group (Matthews 1997:100).

1.2.3 Rhetoric

The term "rhetoric" is used here according to Crystal's (2003:400) definition of it as "the processes underlying successful argument and persuasion".

1.2.4   Language skills

Conventionally, language skills are placed into four categories: speaking, listening, reading and writing. This study focuses on writing, as one such skill, which on its own is not necessarily unproblematic.

Most crudely, it is not meant here as handwriting, but then it is also not content or structure or activity only. 'Writing' is a product of thoughts derived from study, which is used as a vehicle to convey such thoughts. In an academic context, writing communicates to a specific audience of which the writer is aware at the time of writing.

Paltridge (2001: 55-56) gives a history of approaches to EAP pedagogy in which he tracks the change in emphasis that was placed on aspects of writing over time. The current emphasis in academic writing is on a combination of writing as a product and writing as a process. The context in which writing is produced remains important and students are therefore encouraged to understand the notion of 'academic genre' and how context co-determines such genres. Sentence-level accuracy in writing is important but on its own it does not constitute what writing is about; the audience and purpose of the written text are an important part of this language skill (Paltridge 2001: 55).

1.3   **General background and aims**

The Unit for English in the Language Centre at Stellenbosch University offers courses in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for foreign students wishing to study through the medium of English. Students who register for these EAP courses are from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This study will compare the understanding students have of academic argumentation to the students' adherence to conventions of academic argumentation they are taught in the EAP course. This investigation of foreign students' understanding and execution of academic argumentation is intended

to lead to a better understanding of their difficulties and needs, and to result in suggestions for a more effective writing component for EAP courses.

The focus of the study is on writing because often students who feel competent and confident in their speaking abilities, have difficulties in their written assignments. As students are largely evaluated on their written work, a capability to write well plays an important role in a student's overall success in their academic work. Weideman (2003:163) claims that

> [w]riting is critical because, in mass education settings, such as in many first-year classes, this is the only communication channel open between lecturer and student, the only opportunity that the average student has to make an impression of fledgling academic competence, or the converse.

The students who are the subject of this study are largely third-year or post-graduate students, and not in large first-year classes. Nevertheless, they are studying in a context in which writing plays an important role in continuous assessment, which correlates with Weideman's comment of student writing being a critical channel of communication between students and lecturers.

Experience in the EAP course indicates that students experience difficulties on micro-textual level (which refers to sentence structure and spelling) as well as macro-textual level (which refers to rhetoric, argumentation or larger units of discourse). Students who register for EAP courses often feel frustration on two levels because i) they know they lack the linguistic competence to express their knowledge or views, where linguistic competence refers to their micro-textual performance and ii) they lose marks in their general academic work because of shortcomings in their pragmatic competence (performance on macro-textual level).

Although researchers often associate problems with student writing as ones on a micro-textual level, there also seems to be a reasonable tolerance on the part of lecturers for micro-textual errors in smaller tasks or assignments written by

foreign students. They often report that their lecturers encourage them to focus on the content of their writing and that the same lecturers penalise them less severely. But, where students' arguments are unclear, their grades reflect it. Kaplan (1966:3-4) points out that students receive feedback which states that their work lacks focus, cohesion or organization and he claims that "these comments are essentially accurate. The foreign-student paper is out of focus because the foreign student is employing rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader" (1966:4).

1.3.1   The EAP course and the students

This study investigates (i) the work of EAP students in the writing component of the EAP course, and (ii) what their work discloses of the conceptualisation of academic argument. The following gives the framework in which students' written work is produced in the EAP course.

1.3.1.1 The EAP course

The aim of the EAP course is to address the needs of students from non-English linguistic backgrounds when they demonstrate their academic skills. The course focuses on speaking, grammar, reading and writing skills. For the purpose of this study, the writing component will be described in more detail.

Brown's (1998:1-7) work on "linguistic conventions that define literacy in a speech community" is useful in this study for its specific use of the term "English", because the use of English norms in contrast with other language or cultural communities could be problematic where English includes a variety of English used in, for example, the United States of America, Australia, India, England and South Africa. The EAP course follows English norms for writing proficiency then, used in the way Brown defines it. Instruction material is based on sources like: Mouton (2001), Weideman (2003), Greetham (2001), Du Toit, et al. (1995) and Sotiriou (1993), which deals with academic writing norms.

The EAP course starts at a point where most students are assumed to begin to need help and moves through aspects of academic writing, one aspect building on the previous one to reach a point where students have accumulated sufficient information to execute an academic essay according to English norms. The writing component of the course progresses from looking at structure and cohesion on paragraph level to identifying and writing a coherent and cohesive text. The most important aspects of the course are:

- paragraph structure, which centres on the different kinds of sentences in a paragraph and various ways of organising information in a paragraph,

- coherence and cohesion, which looks at discourse markers and theme and rheme, and

- different possible structures of an argument, starting with the structure of the classical argument.

Attention is given to introductions and conclusions. The triad, namely introduction, body and conclusion, is also discussed. Most of the time it is the students who mention the "triad" when they are prompted for information on the structure of an academic text. The idea is that students participate as much as possible in discussion so that the course is a series of workshops rather than lectures. Aspects like paraphrasing, hypothesising, hedging and referencing are introduced at relevant points in the course.

In short, the writing component of the EAP course aims to improve students' ability to construct an academic text that meets the expectations and criteria of English academic writing norms.

1.3.1.2 Students in the EAP course

The students who attend the EAP course are from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They are also from various fields of study, which dictates that the EAP course should be generic. The students who were evaluated and observed for this study were from the Netherlands, Germany, Gabon, Sweden, Norway, South Korea, China, Japan and Libya. Their

respective fields of study included Engineering, Economics, Law, a variety of Business fields, Tourism, Psychology, Education and Polymer Science.

Altogether about 40 students participated in the study. They were not from the full range of possible backgrounds, nor were their numbers equally spread across the different cultural and linguistic communities represented in the international student population of this university. Nevertheless, the variety and number of representatives of the cultural groups are sufficient to give interesting and reliable information on the problems that are in focus. The larger groups represented in this study are from Gabon, Germany and the Netherlands. Other smaller groups represented are from Sweden, Norway, South Korea, China, Japan and Libya. No attempt is made to put data of a single student from a certain linguistic or cultural background on an equal footing to that of a group of ten or fifteen students from another background; however, as the study is qualitative rather than quantitative, all collected data has been included in the study for interest's sake and to indicate questions which could be explored in further study.

1.4   Assumptions, research questions and hypotheses

This study has a practical and a theoretical component. Practically, it will investigate student essays on academic writing. The investigation will, on the one hand, be about the students' understanding of what academic writing should be like and, on the other hand, how they express themselves in such writing. Theoretically, the study investigates literature on academic writing and tries to present an overview of the debate about the influence of culture on academic writing.

In this study, it is assumed that in English academic writing, L2 students registered for the EAP course do not manage argumentation well. From this assumption, based on two aspects of experience, namely (i) the reason why students register for the EAP course and (ii) from teaching on the course, the following four research questions arise:

Question 1

How do these students, who are "lay" in terms of academic writing theory, understand the conventions of academic writing?

In answering this question, the aim is to discover what students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds understand by academic writing in order to compare their opinions and understanding of this to the English writing norms they are expected to use and are introduced to during an EAP course. These opinions will be obtained by means of a writing task they do on academic writing, a short questionnaire and informal interviews.

Question 2

What kinds of texts do these students produce in constructing a piece of academic writing?

The writing task mentioned under Question 1, is intended to be informative on two levels. First, on a practical level it allows students to demonstrate academic writing abilities by delivering a written product. Second, on a meta level, students are given an opportunity to express their understanding of academic writing in the writing task. An answer to Question 2 will be found in evaluating the first aspect of the writing task, considering textual aspects of the work they produce.

Question 3

Is there a difference between what the students say should be done and what they do in their own academic writing?

It is important to acknowledge that there may exist discrepancies between what students have learnt about academic writing and what they do when they write. In fact, it is likely that all student writing has, to a greater or lesser extent, inaccuracies and inappropriacies that partially demonstrate the author's knowledge of textual requirements. Such discrepancies will be identified, analysed and explained later in the study. An answer to Question 3 will give

12

insight into the specific discrepancies that typically occur in English L2 student writing.

Question 4

What are the textual features of academic writing of English L2 students at tertiary level in comparison to the norms and conventions of English academic writing, taught in the EAP course?

In student writing, micro-text difficulties are so conspicuous that in assessment on the level of the academic discipline, the lexical and syntactic errors mask rhetoric/arguments, thus rhetorical difficulties of students are neglected. The literature that was consulted for this study and that is discussed in the literature review, claims differently. The literature claims that indeed micro-textual difficulties mask macro-textual difficulties to the extent that important aspects of differences on a macro level were for long not attended to. In the literature, specific reference is made to rhetoric because there are differences that need to be mapped. For example, Brown (1998:1-3) discusses how protocol differs across cultures and she uses Kaplan (1966:9) as a basis to show the differences in rhetoric between cultures.

The hypothesis here is that lexical and syntactic difficulties indeed often mask difficulties that lie on a rhetorical (i.e. macro) level. However, the perspective of Brown, Kaplan and other researchers in the same field will be interrogated to determine whether in fact rhetorical difficulties of students are culturally determined or whether they are of a more generic nature.

Question 5

Are there culturally determined differences between English L2 students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in (i) their understanding of academic writing conventions and (ii) actual academic writing?

The variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds represented in the group of students who participated in the study is extensive enough to allow for a comparison of the students' understanding of academic writing conventions, on the one hand, with their performance of academic writing, on the other hand.

The data collected from students' essays, questionnaires and discussions are analysed, discussed and any tendencies regarding differences or similarities are pointed out and explained in the chapter on results obtained from the study.

The hypothesis here is that the conceptual differences which students express, correlate with linguistic and cultural differences they bring to the EAP course, but that these differences are less extensive than received literature suggests. The students are from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. When each student's concepts of academic writing is compared to norms taught in the EAP course, the student's cultural and linguistic background is considered a key factor with which his or her concepts are correlated. An attempt will therefore be made to determine whether culture and linguistic background play a marked role in students' concepts of academic writing.

In answering Questions 4 and 5, possible explanations are sought for the similarities and differences between the understanding and execution of particular tasks by different students, as they are apparent from the analyses of English L2 students' written work.

The data collected and examined for similarities and differences, will be used in answering the research questions. In addition, information from the literature study is important for analysis and interpretation of the data and for placing it within a larger scholarly framework. Any conclusions that are drawn from such explanations have to take into account the limitations of this study, which are discussed in the chapter on methodology.

1.5   **Research methodology**

For this study, data is gathered from four different sources, namely a controlled writing exercise, a short questionnaire, informal interviews or discussions and an essay from the students' own field of study. These instruments are briefly described and discussed below.

1.5.1   Controlled essay

As a point of departure, students are given a writing task in their first EAP class. They are asked to write about academic writing before they have received any input on the topic from the EAP course. The rationale behind this is that at this point students' opinions on academic writing and the way they write an academic text will reflect information that they bring with them from their respective cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

1.5.2   Informal discussions and interviews

One of the instruments used in this study is discussion or informal interviews. Discussions on academic writing occasionally occur during a class and these are encouraged, because information gained through them is valuable to the study. Informal interviews are arranged with cooperative students who show an interest in discussing academic writing and cultural differences. More information on these appear later in this paper.

1.5.3   Questionnaire

From extensive discussions, a short questionnaire was developed to formalize some of the information that emerges from the opinions across a range of students and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The questionnaire is filled in near the end of the EAP course when students can compare what they were taught before and what the EAP course teaches them on academic writing.

1.6   **Outline of the research**

Besides the introduction given here, this thesis comprises four more chapters. The literature review in Chapter 2 introduces the research that has informed this study and will be used in analyzing the data. Chapter 3 gives the research design and the methodology that was followed in data-gathering and will be used in the analysis.

Results obtained from the students' essays, questionnaires and interviews or discussions are analysed and interpreted in Chapter 4 in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. In this part of the study, the connections between the literature and the results of the study are shown. The hypotheses explained and discussed earlier are proven or disproven. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with an interpretation of the results of the study. The value and relevance of the study are shown and suggestions for further research are made.

2. **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1   **Introduction**

This study essentially examines, where it can be identified, cultural and linguistic influences of the L1 on academic writing of English L2 students. It investigates this by comparing what students understand by 'academic writing' and what they do when they produce academic writing in English. The literature review will show that most research in the field of academic writing by English L2 students focuses on the products of writing of L2 writers. That is to say, most research interest to date has been on what students do in producing academic texts. Less research focuses on the thoughts of L2 writers that underpin their academic writing. Riley (1995:115-135) is one of the exceptions, as will be seen below in a discussion of his research on "Students' beliefs about writing and the writing process". This chapter offers a representation of what pertinent research into L2 academic writing investigates, what recent findings are, and how such scholarly work relates to the study reported in this thesis. Specifically, the work of authors interested in macro-textual aspects of student writing is of interest here.

To begin, I shall review previous scholarship in this field by referring to research related to contrastive rhetoric in one way or another. Contrastive rhetoric is "an approach that studies the differences in rhetoric between English second language (ESL) students' writing and the English written work of students who are native-speakers of English" (Liu 2005:2). All preliminary literature that was read for this study pointed to Kaplan's work of 1966. This is a seminal work in the field, which originated in his interest in foreign students' difficulties in writing in English. His claims in his first article on contrastive rhetoric in 1966 include the "doodles" that are meant to graphically represent different kinds of reasoning, or "movement", in writing (Kaplan 1966:15). Kaplan's claims are recurrently referred to by scholars in contrastive rhetoric who build upon his approach to this particular topic.

Sometimes Kaplan is severely criticised for treating non-English argumentative writing as "incorrect" or for dealing with English argumentative writing as a mode superior to writing in other languages (Brown 1998:3). Researchers such as Connor (Connor & Johns 1990), Brown (1998:3) and Petrić (2005:213) use Kaplan as a basis for their own theories regarding observed differences in academic writing of English L1 students and that of students who are speakers of other languages. Kaplan is used for comparison of English L1 authors and English L2 authors (whose first languages are not English). The following section gives a summary of the main ideas of, first, researchers who study relations between culture and academic writing and, second, researchers who study academic writing norms and conventions for advising teachers and students of academic writing in English, where students are English L2 speakers.

2.2   Research on the relationship between culture and academic writing

The introduction to this study refers to the fact that English L2 students often present with linguistic difficulties when they study at English-medium tertiary institutions. The chosen focus of this study has been identified as one centred on problems in academic writing beyond the micro-textual level. The study intends to investigate whether there is cultural variation in students' academic writing and in their understanding of what academic writing is, that may also be reflected linguistically in their work. Much of the research on academic writing by non-native speakers of English indicates an influence of their L1 culture on academic writing. Researchers point to this influence in various studies such as ones on the cultural influence of the L1 on L2 writers, native-speaker reader expectation of L2 authored texts, paragraph structure of L2 authored texts and typical problems experienced by English L2 writers (Connor 1996, Brown 1998, Čmejrková 1996, Riley 1996).

2.2.1   Cultural influence

Within the field of contrastive rhetoric, research centres on typical problems that L2 writers encounter while producing English text. According to Connor

(1996:5), "by referring [the L2 writers] to the rhetorical strategies of the first language … [c]ontrastive rhetoric maintains that language and writing are cultural phenomena. As a direct consequence, each language has rhetorical conventions unique to it". Connor's interest in L2 education as well as in contrastive rhetoric, stems from her own experience as a learner of English who developed an awareness of the influence of her culture on her writing. Connor explains that "'writing' sounds different in English from how we write in Finnish" (Mieko 1997:1).

Both English readers of texts produced by L2 writers and English L2 writers of English writing often share the "commonsense view" that the difference between native and non-native English writing can be traced back to difficulties experienced at sentence level (Ventola & Mauranen 1995:195-196). Difficulties experienced on text level refer to micro-textual difficulties, as explained in Chapter 1. This view stems from the belief that if one has mastered the vocabulary and syntax of a language, one basically has mastered the language. It follows that a writer who produces perfectly grammatical sentences will also be able to construct coherent texts or larger units of meaning. According to this view, "written text above the sentence level" is "universally shared across languages" (Ventola & Mauranen 1995:196). Then mastery of macro-textual features are taken not only as a reflection of how well a writer is able to construct an argument; it is even taken to reflect how well the writer thinks. But, at text level, regardless of argumentation, there are apparent "culturally different preferences" (Ventola & Mauranen 1995:196). This implies that in the dominant Anglo-American publishing market, writing from outside this community is evaluated in terms of Anglo-American preferences such as "an ability to construct texts which seem to flow logically on the surface". If writing is then found to be inadequate according to such norms, the writer is criticised for poor quality of reasoning. Nevertheless, Mauranen claims that research has in fact established that "texts are shaped by their cultural origins even if they participate in international discourses like those of the different disciplines, and that it is specifically in the structural and

rhetorical features beyond the boundaries of the sentence that the resulting different writing styles present themselves" (Mauranen 1995:196).

One can identify differences between texts originating from two or more cultural backgrounds, but it is not necessarily easy to establish whether they correlate with cultural differences. Shaw (2003:355) opposes Mauranen in this respect, when s/he shows that even though many differences can be identified between Danish and English academic articles, cultural difference is difficult to pinpoint. Moreover, Mauranen and Bondi (2003) comment on Shaw's study pointing out that "culture appeared to have little influence on the subjects' writing". The subjects referred to are the respondents of the research projects.

Building on results of contrastive rhetoric findings, Petrić (2005:213-228) investigated culturally based elements of writing, such as the occurrence of the thesis statement, its position and its sentence structure. Previous contrastive rhetoric research, she claims, establishes that culturally based elements of writing are "characteristic of the writing pattern of a language and/or reinforced through educational practices" (Petrić 2005:215). With regards to the definition of "culture", she chooses to work within Holliday's distinction between large culture and small culture, according to which large culture "refers to the received view of culture, which sees it as a national culture, while small culture pertains to 'any cohesive grouping' such as a group of students in a course" (Petrić 2005:215). This links up again with Kaplan's (1988:191-192) view that students and writers in general are products of their education and that education is, in turn, part of a culture. Consequently, writing is influenced by culture.

Riley (1995:115-135) shows that cultural influence on academic writing can be observed through being aware of and studying what he calls "representations". He uses the social-psychological and sociolinguistic meaning of the word which refers to "group knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and values" (1995:117). Riley gives typical examples of representations about language learning like: "Girls are better at languages than boys are" or "The

Dutch are very good at learning English" – all popular beliefs that influence how people think about learning languages. In his study, he considers how the representations of French-L1, third-year English major students influence their communicative competence in writing in English. He indicates that their representations influence their approach to learning and he specifically investigates the nature, sources and effects of such representations (1995:115).

2.2.2   Reader expectation

Kaplan (1966:3-4) argues that much negative feedback students receive on their academic writing is related to their use of argumentation/rhetoric that is unfamiliar to the readers who evaluate the writing according to set norms. In other words, the lecturers who mark the students' writing expect standard English academic norms to be used in the writing. When this is not the case, students are apparently given bad marks for unclear or incoherent writing. It seems plausible to say that the research indicates a cultural influence on both the reader and the writer which interacts at the point where the reader reads a text with certain expectations and the writer, having written within her own cultural norms, does not meet the reader's expectations. Brown (1998:6) explains how readers may prematurely dismiss writing when it does not follow the "protocol" expected by the reader. Academic protocol may be understood as the rules which guide and restrict academic writing in a particular linguistic group (Brown 1998:1). Connor (2004:271), who has published widely about contrastive rhetoric and L2 writing, quotes Atkinson as he speaks about the impact of contrastive rhetoric on EFL writing:

> The contrastive rhetoric hypothesis has held perhaps its greatest
> allure for those in nonnative-English-speaking contexts abroad,
> forced as they are to look EFL writing in the eye to try to understand
> why it at least sometimes looks 'different' – often subtly out of sync
> with what one might expect from a 'native' perspective.

Atkinson's description of the difference an English reader may pick up in an L2 text is characteristic of research studying contrastive rhetoric, in the way it

expresses the degree of complexity involved in identify exactly what the disparity between English norms and L2 norms is.

Connor in an interview with Mieko (1997:2) states that teachers of writing ought to raise students' awareness of the expectations of their readers. This is one of the reasons why scholars find contrastive rhetoric useful to teachers and students. By being sensitive to cultural differences in writing conventions and aware of the conventions and expectations of one's reader, one becomes more adept and so also empowered in the writing process.

The difference in power between reader and writer in certain genres is illustrated by Jackson, Meyer and Parkinson (2006:264) in a study on the writing tasks and reading assigned to undergraduate science students. They explain how the reader of a research article represents the discourse community, which makes such a reader the more powerful of the two, since the writer needs to show that she is aware of the reader and of the discourse community norms. They go on to explain that this relationship is reversed in the textbook genre, because the reader is normally the "newcomer to the discipline" (Jackson et al. 2006:264).

In her research on differences between Russian and English writing patterns, Petrić (2005:215) notes that, because of certain language features, Slavic languages are "reader responsible" rather than "writer responsible". So, the responsibility of understanding the text lies with the reader. Yakhontova (Petrić 2005) describes it interestingly when she compares Russian and Ukrainian academics with American and British scholars, and then claims that "[Russian and Ukrainian writing] tends to tell rather than sell" (Petrić 2005:215). According to Čmejrková and Daneš (Petrić 2005:215), this does not mean that reader and writer do not cooperate. It means that the expectations of the two participants differ from those that answer to English norms. The reader is expected to make a bigger effort when engaging with the text. Similar claims were made by Kimball. He states that researchers who investigate Japanese writing, identify a variety of conventions that "dispose

Japanese rhetoric toward placing responsibility with the reader for understanding the meaning of a text" (Kimball http://www.fauxpress.com/kimball/res/aca.html).

The notion of 'reader or writer responsibility' correlates with cultural dimensions or variables like "high-context" and "low-context", a distinction developed by Hall in research on how the use of context varies in the communication of different cultures (Thatcher 2004:316). In a "high-context" culture, of which Japan is said to be one, communicators rely heavily on the context for meaning and therefore good writing contains elements which point out the social context's influence on the meaning. If we take the Japanese context as an example, good writing by an English author for a Japanese readership would then use conventions which make the social context clear to the reader so that the reader understands the text better (Thatcher 2004:316). "Low-context" cultures tend to value writing which contains devices to make the meaning explicit regardless of the social context. In this way, rhetoric is used for example, to guide the reader through the text and along the argument. Such writing is writer responsible, as the onus is on the writer to ensure that the message is received by the reader.

A consequence of creating an academic text that is reader responsible, is that such a text will be deemed reader-unfriendly by readers from typical "low-context" or writer-responsible cultures. In a discussion on research about the differences between German and English scholarly writing, Ventola (1996: 161-162) reports that even when German scholars write articles in English, "they are not automatically read by their Anglo-American colleagues, who may at times find their texts reader-unfriendly". Perhaps one may say, therefore, that reader expectations are influenced or motivated by writing norms, which are in turn influenced by culture, because readers understand and appreciate the academic writing norms adhered to by the cultural group to which they belong.

2.2.3 Paragraph structure

In his effort to discover the differences between the students' writing and lecturers' expectations, Kaplan particularly studies the paragraph structures of students' writing. He expresses the view that "[t]he understanding of paragraph patterns can allow the student to relate syntactic elements within a paragraph and perhaps even to relate paragraphs within a total context" (1966:15). Even though there are a variety of "textual elements" – as Petrić (2005:213-215) calls them – based on culture, only the element paragraph structure received attention in this study. Therefore, only the work of scholars who specifically study paragraph structure is referred to here.

In comparisons between writing instruction in English and other languages, researchers explain that emphasis differs. For example, learning to compose good academic paragraphs is a priority in English and American writing instruction. Čmejrková (1996:143) points out that although Czech students are taught grammar and orthography, they are not practically taught about stylistics or "[t]he idea of systematic cultivation of writing skills". Instead, their instruction on stylistics is theoretical and good writing is seen as a talent; very different, Čmejrková claims, from the notion in English and American instruction where writing is seen as a skill that can be learnt (1996:142).

Mauranen (1996:198, 200-201) studies discourse competence in the light of thematic development. She states that theme and rheme operate on sentence level, paragraph level as well as text level. The examples in her study are mostly paragraphs as she reasons that paragraphs indicate organisation of a text (global organisation) which follows from the organisation within the paragraph (local organisation). In other words "changes in thematic choice signal boundaries, and frequently coincide with paragraph boundaries" (1996:2001).

2.2.4   Typical problems experienced by L2 writers

Of course, all research on L2 language competence or contrastive rhetoric is directly or indirectly about the difficulties that L2 users experience when using English. However, some scholars focus their studies more specifically on such difficulties, thereby indicating the link between culture and writing clearly. The two previous sections, namely Reader expectation and Paragraph structure, are indeed typical problems experienced by L2 writers but they are discussed separately because of the size of the body of literature about them.

Tertiary institutions are an example of an environment where writers are challenged to use and improve their linguistic competence. First-year students, while they may have been competent at producing school writing tasks, learn to write within the norms of the tertiary institution or the genre of the academic field they have chosen. Graduate students experience learning curves when they start to write theses or research reports and post-graduate writers must often learn to write good journal articles. These learning curves are often steeper for L2 speakers because of linguistic difficulties.

Like Kaplan (1966), English (2002:1) also points out that the feedback on written work which students receive is vague and not self-explanatory. Lecturers may comment on students' essay "structure", but studies indicate that lecturers themselves find it difficult to explain what they mean. Problematic writing is seen as something to be "fixed" by, for example, a writing course. However, if the content of the writing course is completely removed from the student's academic course, the student is not given a chance to grapple with what she is learning in her academic course, while learning to express it in writing. Take as an example Fang's (2004:335-346) study on scientific literacy. Because scientific language can be seen as a powerful tool with which one can "make meaning", Fang sees it as vital that subject teachers are aware of the linguistic features of scientific language so that they can help students to talk and write about science according to the required genre norms.

In the learning curve of a certain academic level, there is movement from showing that a student understands knowledge to creating knowledge through the use of argumentation or rhetoric. At the graduate level, students are faced with the challenge of showing that they understand their subject matter in a way that adheres to the particular rhetoric of formal genre, while arguing convincingly. And all of these are performed for expert readers (Tardy 2005:325). Consequently, student writers need rhetorical knowledge which Tardy defines as:

> [t]he part of genre knowledge that draws upon an understanding of epistemology, background knowledge, hidden agendas, rhetorical appeals, surprise value, and kairos (rhetorical timing), as they relate to the disciplinary community in which a given genre is situated.

Expert writers understand that they are writing in a certain social group and also for that group, something which advanced academic literacy demands from student writers (Tardy 2005:327). If all of this applies to English first-language writers, then it follows that it is a source of difficulties for L2 writers.

Paltridge (2002:125-127) argues that instruction material on theses or dissertation writing and postgraduate research is inadequate in some regards. He compares published advice and actual practice and finds that there is more variety in actual texts and sometimes even "distinct mismatches" between the two. Moreover, with the huge number of international, L2 students who study in English, the published advice on academic writing ought to cater for students from backgrounds where very different conventions are used in academic writing (Paltridge 2002:125-127).

Looking at students' difficulties in academic writing from another angle, Riley (1996:122-125) discovers that students themselves are not always very clear on what they find difficult. Even after they were exposed to an English course in which emphasis was placed on topics like coherence, cohesion and connectors, students said that their biggest problem was a lack of academic

vocabulary. This made them find and use inappropriate "academic synonyms" while their writing suffered more on text level. This study performs a similar comparison between students' understanding and opinion of how (and perhaps even what) they should write, and the way they actually perform.

As was explained earlier in this section, Riley works from the assumption that students' "representations", or beliefs and attitudes about writing, influence their process of learning to write. Even if students' representations are perceived to be naïve, inaccurate or confused, they are relevant and useful, because they are the filter through which students absorb knowledge. Riley warns that representations do not go away, even if ignored, and that is why teachers should be sensitive towards representations and both teachers and students could try to "harness" them for a more effective learning process (1996:132-133).

2.3   **English academic writing norms and conventions**

There is undoubtedly a vast body of literature on the norms of English writing. For the purposes of this study, only a few publications are used as an example of instruction material available. These publications underlie the content of the EAP writing course offered at Stellenbosch University and represent the norms which the subjects in this study are compared with.

This study does not make any claims regarding knowledge about academic writing norms in languages and cultures outside English. Any mention made about non-English conventions in writing is part of the discussion of previous research and therefore based on the claims of scholars in the field. Also, when English academic writing norms are described, it is with the understanding that they may or may not be universal and that they may be neither unique to English nor superior to other languages or cultures.

The research which was reviewed above contains aspects of academic writing that correlate with English academic writing norms and conventions. These

may be grouped according to the structure of the analysis of this study in Chapter 4, and will be discussed below, under the headings: Criteria for evaluation, Paragraph structure, Discourse markers, coherence and cohesion, and Using logic and structuring an argument.

2.3.1   Criteria for evaluation

One of the ways to pinpoint the norms and conventions that teachers and students of academic writing may want to aim at mastering, is to look at how writing is evaluated. This spans across a spectrum from student writing, on the one hand, to scholarly writing meant for publication, on the other hand. Some criteria are found to be universal across these genres. For example, Starfield (2000: 104) lists the following aspects of marking criteria for academic writing for which a student who fulfills these requirements receives a distinction.

- Shows well-organised, reasoned understanding of topic and its relevance
- Clarity of expression – excellent
- Accurate use of grammar and spelling
- Fluent use of academic discourse
- Shows innovation in dealing with theory

The list of criteria above is comprehensive, covering norms and conventions from word level up to the level of the argument of the text. Argument or rhetoric, which is of particular interest for this study, is often taught or evaluated using the concept of logic. Typical advice given to writers may include, for example, a recommendation to concentrate on structure before style, i.e. make sure that sentences and paragraphs are in the correct order. O'Connor (1991:87-88) explains that for writing to be logical, the argument should run logically through the text, from the hypothesis to the conclusion. The writer should remind herself of the initial reason for writing the text and decide whether she has succeeded in her intention. Following that, the writer should check the logic and truth of the argument and ensure that everything contributes to it. The notions of 'logic' and 'structure' are discussed in more detail below.

Advice for publishing scholars includes reader-friendliness of the text. Kirkman (1992:145) used a body of sample texts accompanied by questionnaires and interviews to discover which style expert readers prefer. He confirms that readers consistently choose scientific writing which is "direct, active writing, judiciously personalised when appropriate" (Kirkman 1992:145). Writers do receive contradicting advice on this matter. Student writers or even unsure L2 scholars are concerned that their writing might be unacceptable to other scientists if it deviates from "traditional style". Studies have focused on the use of the personal pronoun in academic writing and most academic writing instruction advises writers to remain objective by avoiding the use of the first person. Another aspect that is usually pointed to as contributing to academic style is the use of the passive voice instead of active writing. It is said to make the writer appear objective and therefore more credible (Du Toit et al. 1995:293).

2.3.2   Using logic and structuring an argument

Logic is put forth by culture and is therefore not universal. It underlies rhetoric, which is then also not universal but influenced by culture. By "culture", here, one may understand a variety of groups, genres or generations within a given national culture. The rhetoric in English academic writing is said to follow linear, classical logic – the Platonic-Aristotelean sequence (Kaplan 1966:2-3). Contrary to this, some linguistic and cultural groups prefer nonlinear conventions which may be seen by English readers as "circular" and therefore "illogical" (1988:112). This links up with what was said earlier about the expectations of the reader of an academic text. If a reader comes from a culture where linear arguments are the norm, she would expect an academic argument to be linear and, if it is not, would possibly criticise the writer as incompetent or uneducated.

Instruction material asks for logic and sound argumentation. It proposes the outline of the classical argument and teaches linguistic devices, like discourse

markers or cohesion through theme and rheme, which contribute to the flow of rhetoric (Du Toit et al. 1995, O'Connor 1991:88).

An important point that Kaplan and many other researchers after him make, is that being able to compose sound academic argumentation in one's own language does not automatically lead to an ability to do the same in another language. Also, an ability to create correct sentences does not mean an ability to create a text. Mastery of syntactic structures is vital for composition writing and if difficulty is experienced on sentence level, it often interferes with the argumentation of the text (Kaplan 1966:3-4).

In his discussion on logic and the linear sequence of thought that English speakers and readers expect, Kaplan seems to make an easy transition from talking about text to investigating paragraphs. He proceeds to illustrate contrastive rhetoric by studying the way writers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds compose paragraphs. These are then contrasted with paragraph development in English (Kaplan 1966:4).

2.3.3   Paragraph structure

The norms and conventions of paragraph structure in English are that paragraphs usually start with a topic sentence which states the general content. These are followed by sentences that strictly support the topic sentence in order to follow a linear train of thought that may end in a conclusive sentence, or lead to the following paragraph. As Kaplan (1966:6) puts it:

> There is nothing in this paragraph that does not belong here; nothing that does not contribute significantly to the central idea. The flow of ideas occurs in a straight line from the opening sentence to the last sentence.

As paragraphs are seen as units of thought, they ought to treat single topics or aspects of topics. That is why students are advised to have one main idea per paragraph (Mouton 2001:128, O'Connor 1991:88). With regards to ordination, English writing conventions consider subordination as stylistically more

mature than coordination (Kaplan 1966:8). Sentences in paragraphs will thus often be structured in a hierarchy (Costanzo 1993:102).

According to Kachru (1988:113), most texts on rhetoric suggest that paragraphs should be edited for "clarity" and "completeness", which in turn involves clear topic sentences and logical, linear development through the paragraphs.

2.3.4   Discourse markers, coherence and cohesion

Enkvist is quoted as saying that a well-formed text has "semantic coherence as well as sufficient signals of surface cohesion to enable the reader to capture the coherence" (1990:1). This is taken to mean that discourse markers, for example, aid cohesion on paragraph level as well as text level, which brings about textual coherence. Other ways of creating coherence in a text include planning sentences that point to organization in the rest of the paragraph or text, transition sentences that link a paragraph with the previous one or the following one, theme-rheme progression that improves logical flow on the surface, or division of paragraphs that may support cohesion.

Wikborg states that "[t]he structural importance of paragraphing is thus inversely related to the number of alternative topic structuring signals to be found in a text" (1990:137). This is something to keep in mind when evaluating students' academic writing, because even though students are taught and advised to use paragraph division, they may not use it but there may be alternative structuring signals in their texts which should be acknowledged.

2.4   **Conclusion**

As a limited-scope review, this chapter overviewed some researchers that study how culture is represented in academic writing. Researchers' views seem to complement one another in support of the claim that culture influences the way people write. Academic writing is studied from different

angles; the rhetoric and writing conventions of a variety of cultures and languages are contrasted with English, very often for pedagogical reasons. Many scholars are or were teachers and try to help L2 students. Even though some of the research is on academic journal articles, for example, the aim is often still to address L2 writers' difficulties in producing academic texts in English and for an Anglo-American audience.

This review found that most research focuses on what writers produce, and not really on what they think about their writing. Student writers' understanding of what academic writing entails, is one of the aspects examined later in this study in an attempt to contribute to research on the topic.

Apart from focus on theoretical aspects of cultural influence on academic writing, much research also investigates practical issues. The third part of this review concentrates on literature about English academic writing norms and conventions. The literature provides criteria for the evaluation of student writing.

3.   **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

3.1   **Introduction**

The research questions addressed in this study are articulated to determine (i) how the L2 students in this study understand the conventions of academic writing, (ii) how the same students construct a piece of academic writing, (iii) whether there is a difference between what the students say should be done and what they do in their own academic writing, (iv) whether there are differences in understanding of academic writing conventions and in actual academic writing, between English L2 students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and (v) what explanations can be presented for the similarities and differences that have emerged from the analyses of English L2 students' work?

In this chapter, there is a brief reference to research methods which have been used elsewhere and that are applied in this study to investigate the specific aspects of writing that are under scrutiny. The data in this study, which is collected in a EAP course at a tertiary institution, is analysed and interpreted according to methods which were discovered in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

English L2 students attending an EAP writing course are the respondents whose written work forms the core of the data. The situational context is the EAP classroom, and the written work comprises discourses on textual features and conventions of academic writing within student-generated essays. The content of these texts are as interesting to the project as the structure of the essays themselves. Both the products of student writing and the content covered can be classified as forms of 'discourse'. The rhetoric that students use in their writing reflects their own cultural discourse, and what the students say about academic writing reflects cultural discourse from another perspective. The terms "rhetoric" and "cultural discourse" are used here within the limitations set out in "Terms of reference" in the introduction of Chapter 1.

Besides the form and content of written assignments, sources of information that will assist in answering the research questions are a short questionnaire, feedback from student discussions and interviews with students. These methods of data collection identify this work as a qualitative study.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the particular hypotheses that underpin the search for answers to the research questions given in Chapter 1 and then refer to the research methods used to test the validity of these hypotheses.

3.2 **Hypotheses**

The focus of this study is on one aspect of academic English, namely processes of writing as they are disclosed in products of such writing, and more specifically the writing of an academic argument. The research project investigates differences in understanding of the concept of academic argumentation among students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Two main hypotheses that were developed from the main research question are:

- Difficulties of English L2 students on a lexical and syntactic (micro-textual) level are more conspicuous than difficulties that lie on a rhetorical (macro-textual) level. Such micro-textual difficulties often mask macro-textual difficulties that occur in the argument structure of students' writing.

- The conceptual differences which are apparent in the writing of English L2 students and those set as norms, correlate with linguistic and cultural differences between English L2 students. Nevertheless, these differences are less extensive than received literature suggests.

In Chapter 2, reference was made to some of the theories and findings that researchers have developed around argumentative academic writing. Some of the literature concerns comparative studies, and some concerns the difficulties of students in academic writing in English in comparison to mostly implicit norms, and some suggests ways to help students or to improve writing

instruction. On the whole, it can be safely said that when students from non-English cultural and linguistic backgrounds do academic writing in English, there will be difficulties in argumentation. It is therefore assumed that the student writing under scrutiny in this project will show difficulties in English academic writing on a micro and macro level. Our interest is primarily in what happens in certain aspects of the macro level.

3.2.1   Hypothesis 1:

Conspicuous micro-textual difficulties mask less conspicuous macro-textual difficulties

The first hypothesis which is to be tested, refers to the way in which teachers in academic disciplines often recognize grammatical "errors" on a lexical and syntactic level more readily than the "errors" on an argumentative level. Such conspicuous errors are often given more attention in feedback than the errors in argument structure. This leads to a popular perception that English L2 students need to be assisted largely with improving linguistic competence on the lexical and syntactic level. The literature discussed in Chapter 2 claims differently. Brown (1998:1-3) discusses how academic writing protocol differs across cultures and she uses Kaplan (1966:9) as a basis to show the differences in rhetorical structures between cultures. The particular contribution of their work is that they encourage more dedicated investigation of the macro-textual, discursive patterns of student writing. My hypothesis relates to this perspective of Kaplan (and others mentioned above) by investigating specifically English L2 students' conceptualization of academic conventions and their execution of the "rules" of academic writing, in order to reveal their views on and skills for constructing academic texts. I shall test the hypothesis that there is as much need for attention to macro-textual aspects of a text as to micro-textual aspects; attention to micro-textual aspects only denies the prevalence of difficulties on the level of rhetorical structure. It is important here to recall that the "cultural differences" that authors such as Kaplan and Brown identify in English L2 writing, need to be considered with a clear understanding of the complexity of the concept of 'culture' as is referred to in Chapter 1 and will be discussed again later.

Primary data collected from students in the process of answering the research questions here, are their own academic argumentative writing. In the short essay which they write at the beginning of the course, they explain their own concepts of academic writing. Additionally, students complete a questionnaire on their views about their own academic writing. This data is supplemented by information gained through informal discussions and interviews. The assumption is that all this data provides an idea of the students' concepts of academic writing, which can be compared to the norms taught in the EAP course.

3.2.2 Hypothesis 2:

Conceptual differences which correlate with linguistic and cultural differences are less extensive than received literature suggests

The students are from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. When each student's concepts of academic writing are compared to norms taught in the EAP course, the student's cultural and linguistic background is considered a key factor with which his or her concepts are correlated. An attempt is therefore made to determine whether culture and linguistic background play a significant role in students' concepts of academic writing. Since the seminal work of Kaplan (1966), much scholarly attention has been directed at the different rhetorical patterns followed by different language groups and in different cultures. They have encouraged and provoked sensitivity to aspects of rhetoric that are culturally determined and that have a marked effect on English L2 writing. A hypothesis which follows, therefore, is that the conceptual differences which students' writing assignments express, at least to some degree, correlate with the given linguistic and cultural differences. My hypothesis here is that cultural and linguistic differences are perhaps emphasized more than is justified, and that this leads to difficulties in clear argumentation not being addressed sufficiently in teaching English L2 academic writing.

3.3   **Research Instruments**

Although this study will test the hypotheses set out above in par. 1.1 and 1.2, as a qualitative study, it will also develop them. The different data is therefore measured, not only to test the hypotheses, but to attempt possible explanations for them and to develop questions from them that might be useful in developing EAP courses and materials. For this study, data is gathered in three different ways, namely a controlled writing exercise, a short questionnaire, and informal interviews and discussions. These instruments are briefly described and discussed below.

3.3.1   Controlled essay

As a point of departure, students were given a writing task in their first EAP class. They were asked to write about academic writing before they had received any input on the topic from the EAP course. The questions they were asked to answer are as follows:

> What do you understand by "academic writing"? Explain what would
> be considered as good academic writing and why it would be
> considered so. Is an academic text divided into different parts, and if
> so, what are those parts? Write your answer in the form of an
> academic essay, as you understand it.

For this study, the student writing collected in the essays was analysed on two levels: (i) an analysis of various macro-textual features such as the paragraph structure and rhetoric they used, and (ii) an analysis of what they said they understand by "academic writing", i.e. their concepts of academic writing. The essays were taken in and checked. Copies of the essays have been kept and the originals were returned to the students. Grammatical (micro-textual) inaccuracies in the writing were corrected, and English academic writing norms were mentioned where it pertained to specific problems in the essays. When the essays were handed back, students responded spontaneously to the teacher's comments and discussed issues surrounding academic writing and the difficulties they experience.

3.3.2 Questionnaire

From extensive discussions, a short questionnaire was developed to formally collect relevant information about students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The questionnaire collected biographical information like the name, age, country of origin and home language of each respondent. Students were asked to provide a nickname to be used as pseudonym for those who preferred anonymity. The biographical information was used to establish the likely cultural background of the student as well as the linguistic background of each. A student from the DRC, for example, may have been educated in French, but his or her home language may be Fong. A student's age or level of current studies may give an indication of his/her exposure to academic writing, which could have influenced his/her competence in English academic writing. The questionnaire is attached as an appendix.

3.3.3 Informal discussions and interviews

Because of the nature of EAP classes, discussion is encouraged when it occurs spontaneously. Planned discussions often do not materialise because students do not feel like talking, are not interested in the particular set topic, are absent for various reasons, and so on. Therefore, when students who were respondents in this project spontaneously discussed issues useful to the researcher, notes were made to capture their opinions. One of the instruments used in this study is discussion or informal interviews. Informal interviews were arranged with cooperative students who were interested in discussing academic writing and cultural differences.

3.4   **Data collection methods**

Students that enrolled for the EAP course were informed of the study and were asked for permission to use their written work, their completed questionnaires and information gained from discussions and informal interviews. Those students who participated were invited to hand in written work from their academic courses which the researcher edited and discussed in a private

consultation. These benefits were offered in return for the students' participation as well as for the insight this gave in their application of EAP content outside of the EAP context. Respondents received this offer very positively, evidently because they had enrolled for the EAP course in the first place to improve their writing.

3.5   Data analysis

3.5.1   Controlled essays

Essays written under controlled circumstances were first analysed with a focus on argumentation. This included aspects which Brown (1998:4) calls signaling devices, i.e. opening the discourse, introducing a new point, sequencing, illustration, qualification, generalising, summarising and concluding. The thesis statement and its position was studied (Petrić 2004:221), and finally, also the paragraph structure. Attention was given to areas where students may do things differently to what an English reader may expect (Brown 1998:6). In other words, the analysis focused on rhetoric or argumentation and factors that influence these. Even though this study was not concerned with inaccuracies on sentence level, they were noted because inaccuracies on sentence level might influence the way a reader perceives a text. Often, texts are seen as unclear or inadequate because they contain grammatical inaccuracies (Brown 1998:6).

Second, the same essays were analysed for information on students' concepts of academic writing. The rationale for this procedure was to gain insight into English L2 students' conceptualization and execution of academic writing from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the researcher can analyse the student essays according to chosen criteria and, on the other hand, the student is given a voice which may explain choices that were made during the writing process. Such additional information proved to be very valuable in this study because its aim was precisely to understand the reasoning, or rhetoric, which students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds follow.

3.5.2   Questionnaires

The questionnaire served a similar purpose to that of the discussions and interviews. It provided additional information and gave a controlled input that assisted in the analyses of written tasks and in comparison of the work of students from different backgrounds.

3.5.3   Informal discussions and interviews

Information gleaned from discussions and interviews was analysed for consistency with the written tasks. According to Patton (2002:467) information collected in this manner can provide evidence supporting or contradicting the findings of an essay analysis. Some information that was gained in this manner at the start also contributed to the design of the questionnaire.

3.6   **Limitations**

This study has certain limitations that need to be kept in mind when examining and interpreting the obtained data. First, the variety of cultural groups included in the study may be too limited to allow wide generalization of the results. Particularly, the majority of respondents were foreign students, who apparently come from educational environments vastly different to those of South African students who have an indigenous African language as L1. Second, as there was an imbalance in the numbers of students per cultural group, i.e. only three nationalities/language groups had more than eight representatives, the results may have limitedly validity for the lesser represented groups. Third, results may be slightly skewed by a tendency of students to structure their work in one way or another due to them wanting to give "correct" responses. Information from interviews, discussions and the questionnaire may therefore not reflect the actual concepts of students, but rather what they think the lecturer may want to hear. However, with the variety of instruments used, this effect could be limited. Also, discrepancies would have shown up, had information in the questionnaire not correlated with

the findings of the writing analyses. Such discrepancies would also have provided interesting or useful results.

Objectivity can be compromised when the researcher is related to the respondents as a teacher. However, following Haraway (in Malterud 2001:484) 'objectivity' should be interrogated, as this is a contentious notion even in much more formal qualitative research. All knowledge is partial and situated and "researcher's effects" should be carefully accounted for. Researchers doing qualitative studies often employ their preconceptions and expectations to choose areas of investigation and to develop hypotheses. Due care was taken during the analyses to limit as much as possible interference of researcher's perspectives that could skew the analyses and interpretations.

4.   **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS**

4.1   **Introduction**

The main focus of this study is on traces of culture in academic discourse as they are reflected in students' writing as well as in what the students say about academic writing. This dictates that the analyses presented here amount to a form of discourse analysis. Discourse Analysis particularly analyses spoken or written texts beyond sentence level (cf. Cook 1989, Levinson 1983). However, the analyses here are done not according to conventional discourse analytic methods used to disclose cohesive devices available to L1 speakers, but rather according to methods suggested by scholars interested in teaching and developing academic writing for English L2 students. In such analysis, features of academic writing on sentence level will be shown to play a role as well.

The analysis process followed here is one that extracts information from written texts that apparently rely on linguistic devices which contribute to coherence and overall organization of material in an academic essay. The process is one of selecting, reducing and abstracting relevant and apparently significant data that may reveal underlying patterns of argumentation in texts, as well as connections between knowledge of textual features and use of such features. From these patterns and connections, it should be possible to draw explanations of what is given in the data.

This analysis aims to investigate conceptions of writing and then to compare what students say to what they do. Tables are provided for quick referencing in the comparison between different students, different dimensions or indeed the different methods which were used to measure data. In each of the measurement instruments, i.e. the essay (content and structure), the questionnaire, and the discussions, a set of dimensions were identified and subsequently used in order to compare students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In analyzing the essay, for example, the following five dimensions are used to characterise what students say about what they understand by "academic writing":

(i) Academic language,

(ii) Thesis statement,

(iii) Triad,

(iv) Logical argument, and

(v) Cohesive and coherent paragraphs.

The same set of dimensions is used to analyse the structure of the essays. Data obtained from the discussions and interviews are also classified according to the above-mentioned dimensions.

In using the questionnaire data, profile-building data is used as dimensions for comparison of various aspects raised in the research questions, pertaining to the possible effects of cultural difference. This will be discussed in more detail below.

The sample comprises students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, in terms of numbers, three groups dominate, namely the Dutch, the German and Gabonese groups. These consist of eight to twelve students each. There are also smaller groups of three Swedes, two Danish, and two Afrikaans L1 South Africans, and a few individuals namely a Chinese, an Emirati and a Mexican student. The group also included a Korean and a Libyan student, but their data could not be used for this study because their English proficiency was not adequate yet.

Data of the individuals and of the cultural groups is tabled separately, thus comparison between cultural and linguistic groups is possible. Where differences amongst individual respondents and cultural/linguistic groups were insignificant, however, no particular distinction is given. Sometimes students are referred to or quoted, and then their nationality is given, but on the whole

the analyses indicated that it would be more sensible not to discuss each group separately. This point will be elaborated on in the conclusion.

4.1.1   Summary of results

Before a detailed discussion of the analyses and what they disclosed in terms of the research questions, I will present a summary of the results in table format. This is done to give a quick overview of the full set of outcomes, and for easy reference later on. Table 4.1 gives this summary of the results obtained from the essays and questionnaires which the subjects submitted. Valuable information that was obtained from discussions and informal interviews is discussed under a separate heading. The summary in Table 4.1 consists of key words pertaining to the criteria which were used in analysing the data. The table shows what each student said about academic writing in his/her essay and questionnaire, as well as what the same students did in their diagnostic essay (and often also in other course work essays with which I assisted them). Only key words are used to refer to conventions and norms. For example, if the key words "logical argument" appear under the heading of what students say, it means that logical argumentation is a component of what the student understands to be 'academic writing'. It is then interesting to check whether a student who has the key words "logical argument" (e.g.) under the heading of what students say, also has these key words under the heading of what students do. That would indicate a correlation between students' conceptualisation of academic writing and what they do when they themselves construct an academic text. This procedure was followed throughout in order to answer research questions 1 - 3.

Information gained from two questions in the questionnaire appears under the heading "Academic writing: L1 compared to L2". In questions 16 and 17, students were asked to compare the academic writing they produce in their own language to that which they produce in English, as well as to compare academic texts they read in their own language to academic texts they read in English. They were specifically asked if, to them, the structure appeared to be the same and to explain what similarities they find, or whether the structure

appeared to be different and then what differences they find. The key words "same" and "different" are tabled for quick comparison with the above-mentioned data. Discussion of the results follows in sections 2 and 3 below.

Table 4.1 – Summary of results

Name, nationality and field of study	What students say about academic writing		What students do in academic writing
	Essay	Academic writing: L1 compared to L2	Essay
Richella Dutch Law	Academic language Thesis statement Triad	Same	Academic language No thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Jan Dirk Dutch Law	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument		Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Sofie Dutch Law	Academic language (difficult words, higher level) Triad Logical argument	Same	Informal language Thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Linda Dutch Law	Academic language (academic vocabulary and complex sentences) Clarity	Same	Informal language No thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Leonore Dutch Industrial Psychology	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument	Same	Informal language Thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies

45

Rose Dutch Law	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument (use signal words)		Informal language Logical argument Triad No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Cleome Dutch Marketing	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Superficial triad No logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Pigie Dutch Psychology	Academic language Thesis statement Triad	Same	Informal language No thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Liam South African Education	Academic language Thesis statement Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Cohesive and coherent paragraphs No thesis statement No triad No logical argument Non-interfering inaccuracies
Garreth South African Theology	Triad Logical argument	No answer	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Anders Swedish Engineering	Academic language Triad Logical argument	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Interfering inaccuracies No cohesive and coherent paragraphs
Maral Swedish	Thesis statement Triad	Same	Informal language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Alia Swedish Engineering	Academic language Thesis statement Triad	Same	Informal language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument

			No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Aleksander Norwegian Psychology	Academic language Triad	Same	Informal language Thesis statement No logical argument Triad No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Ida Norwegian Philosophy	Academic language Thesis statement Triad	Different	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Khalifa Emirati Polymer Science	Academic language Thesis statement Triad	Same	Academic language No thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Anonymous 2 Gabonese Education	Academic language Thesis statement (at the end) Triad Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Different	Academic language Thesis statement (at the end) No logical argument Triad No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Delpiero Gabonese Education	Academic language Triad Logical argument	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Esquire Gabonese Education	Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language No thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Hugues Gabonese Education	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Triad Logical argument No thesis statement No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies

Marcel Gabonese Education	Academic language Triad Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Anonymous 1 Gabonese Education	Academic language Triad	Same (qualified)	Academic language Interfering inaccuracies No thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs
Mbeang Gabonese Education	Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Interfering inaccuracies No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs
Diane Gabonese Education	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Thesis statement No triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Armand Gabonese Education	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Triad No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Bliss Gabonese Education	Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
M.C. Gabonese Education	Thesis statement Triad Logical argument	Same	Interfering inaccuracies No triad No thesis statement No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs

Mad (Daniel) German Business Economics	Thesis statement Discussion Argument and counter argument Triad	Same	Informal language No triad No thesis statement No logical argumentation No coherent and cohesive paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Sebastian German Business Economics	Academic language Triad		Academic language No thesis statement Triad No logical argument Coherent and cohesive paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Malte German Business Economics	Academic language Triad Logical argument		Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument No coherent and cohesive paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Mathis German Business Economics	Academic language Triad		Academic language No triad No thesis No logical argumentation No coherent and cohesive paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Victoria German Business Economics	Academic language Triad		Academic language No triad No thesis No logical argumentation No coherent and cohesive paragraphs Interfering inaccuracies
Helena German Business Economics	Academic language Thesis statement (implied) Triad		Informal language No triad No thesis statement No logical argumentation No coherent and cohesive paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies
Hannah German Music	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs	Same	Academic language Thesis statement Triad Logical argument Cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies

Gill Chinese Business Economics	Academic language Thesis statement Triad	Same	Short paragraph, ignoring all rules
Germain Mexico Engineering	Triad	Same	Two paragraphs, ignoring all rules
Grace Gabonese	Academic language Triad	Same (qualified)	Academic language Triad No thesis statement No logical argument No cohesive and coherent paragraphs Non-interfering inaccuracies

4.2   **What students say about academic writing**

In this section I shall discuss in more detail the outcomes of analyses of the various instruments in relation to how they illustrate the respondents' conceptualization of academic writing.

4.2.1   Essays

Analysis of student essays indicates that most of the subjects of this study, regardless of their nationality or specific first language, agree on a number of conventions which typify academic writing. The pattern to which the data was reduced in the analysis comprises the terms: (i) Academic language, (ii) Thesis statement, (iii) Triad, (iv) Logical argument and (v) Cohesive and coherent paragraphs. Particularly, the content of the students' essays was scrutinized to determine whether they use any of these terms or an equivalent which clearly was used with similar reference.

To illustrate, the Chinese student did not use the term "academic language", but described it as follows:

"In my opinion academic writing is formal writing. it should use the literary word and should be organized well. Therefore it is different from oral language."

4.2.1.1 Academic language

Under the term "academic language", the criterium I used to assess such a writing style, is similar to the guidelines given to students in EAP material. The material instructs students, for example, to:

- Avoid emotive language and informal expressions

- Put the main emphasis on the information that you want to give and the arguments you want to make, rather than on *yourself*.

Almost all of the students mentioned what is denoted by the term "academic language" in the table as a requirement of academic writing. While many students explicitly say that the *language* used is "academic", as opposed to informal language, some just say that the *vocabulary* is more sophisticated. For example, to indicate that s/he expected a degree of linguistic sophistication, a student would write (1) below, and to indicate specifically that s/he expected use of particular kinds of lexical items, a student would write something like (2) – (4):

(1)   "the use of appropriate style for an educated audience"

(2)   "using high words"

(3)   "difficult words"

(4)   "complicated sentences and words"

Nevertheless, there were a few students who stated that plain language should be used to ensure clarity.

"Objective language" was mentioned by a few[2] students as characteristic of academic language. They pointed out that first person singular pronouns ought to be avoided. In their own writing, many students then actually avoided using such singular pronouns. Nevertheless, many, including some of the stronger students, did not avoid it; such students did not describe expression of

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[2] Although a precise count is possible, this has not been done because the study is qualitative rather than quantitative. Numbers would in fact be misleading here, as the respondents are not representative of groups in a manner that can be expressed by numbers and percentages.

objectivity through more distanced formulation as a requirement of academic writing. The notion of expressing subjectivity through use of personal pronouns, or of expressing objectivity by avoiding such use of pronouns, is assumed under the heading "academic language" in the table.

4.2.1.2 Thesis statement

The term "thesis statement" is presented in the EAP material as: "a sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader. In the rest of essay, you gather and organise evidence that will persuade your reader of the logic of your interpretation."

About half of all the students in this study mention a thesis statement implicitly or explicitly. Some refer to a definition or explanation of the topic. When people indicate that a thesis statement should be present, they explain that it appears in the introduction, for example:

(5) "You end the introduction with a question." or

(6) "An academic text starts with an introduction where the main theme of the text is presented."

4.2.1.3 Triad

Almost the whole group of students state that structure is important in a piece of academic writing and they then proceed to explain the triad structure. Most of the use the words "introduction", "body" and "conclusion", but a few use words or phrases like "main part", "your opinion on the text with arguments for and against" or "development" instead of the word "body". Two students described a five-part structure, which resemble a report structure. It is on the whole clear that students agree on dividing the text into logical parts.

4.2.1.4 Cohesive and coherent paragraphs

Some students indicated that the body of the text should consist of paragraphs that

(7) "represent a unit of thought, beginning with a topic sentence developed within it" or

(8) "develop a subdivision of the topic"

From the group of Gabonese English teachers, one person states that

(9) "paragraphs are linked in order to connect the ideas"

and another explains how paragraphs should

(10) "be based on a topic sentence, followed by an illustration to support the main idea and a conclusion that ends the paragraph"

None of the other students in this study mentions paragraphing, even when some of them use perfectly cohesive and coherent paragraphs.

4.2.1.5 Logical argument

Fifteen students say something about a logical or linear argument. The phrase "logical argument" appears behind their names in Table 4.1.

(11) Hannah (German) says academic writing "has to follow a logical structure".

(12) Malte (German) claims that "the author has to take the reader with him", which probably best describes the notion of linear argument.

(13) Bliss (Gabonese) comments that "by clearly-cut parts it is implied that the writer should organise his work so that he evolves progressively", which seems to indicate a logical or linear argument.

(14) Another Gabonese teacher, Esquire, says: "not only being logical (for instance going from the general to the particular), the body of the essay will use facts to support the main idea",

(15) Jan Dirk (Dutch) does not refer to logic or linearity explicitly, but seems to imply it when he says that "you end the introduction with a question. At the end of the essay you will give a solution or answer for that question in your conclusion",

(16) Leonore (Dutch) says something very similar and also talks about persuading the reader of one's argument,

(17)   A Swedish student, Anders, clearly states that he thinks "good academic writing is when you can present information in a structured logical way" and

(18)   a South African, Garth, states: "The reason for a sound logical structure is to guide the reader through the argument of the writer."

4.2.2   Questionnaires

The questionnaires provide profile-forming data about the students and data that support their written and spoken opinions, and place these into perspective. The information about the different cultural and linguistic groups is combined here, like elsewhere, because differences do not correlate with different cultural and linguistic groups. Figures 4.1 to 4.7 graphically represent answers to questions 11, 12 and 14 to 17 on the questionnaire (questions 1 to 10 concern biographic information). Question 13 is discussed separately below.

With a few exceptions, students in this study indicated that they are generally not used to doing very much writing. They seemed surprised about the amount of essay, report or assignment writing they have to do studying at this university, and many feel resentful that such a large part of their marks are based on their written assignments. At the same time, most students claim that their English proficiency is on an Advanced level, as is depicted in Figure 4.1.
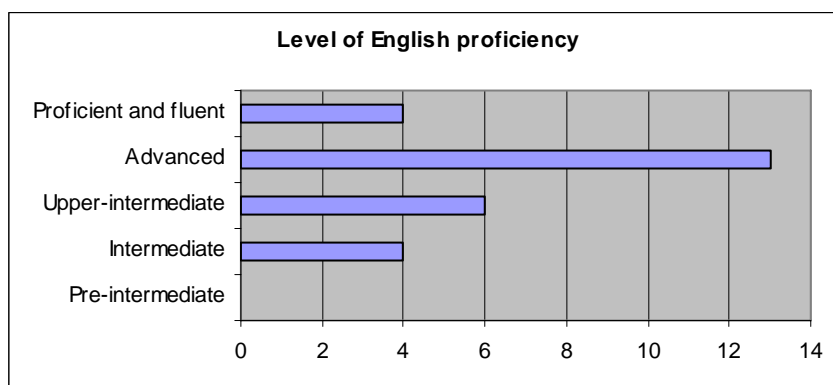

Figure 4.1 – Level of English proficiency – self-assessed

Figure 4.2 clearly shows that most students had been taught academic skills before enrolling on the EAP course. One German student, who is one of the strongest in the class and who wrote a sound, clear essay, explained that he would only be doing an academic skills course when he goes back to Germany, and therefore that the work of the EAP course was new to him.
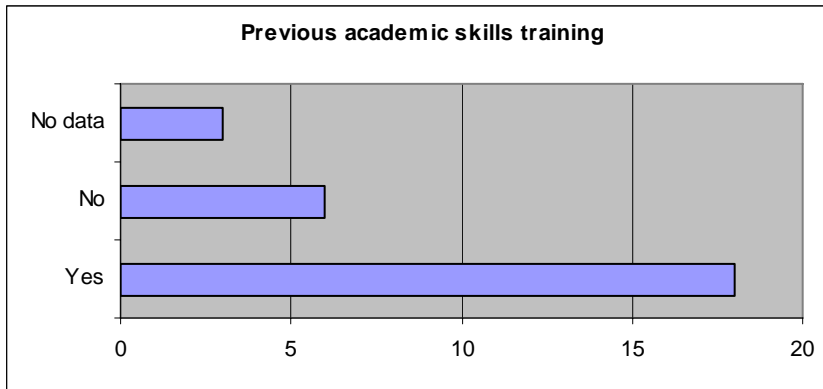

Figure 4.2 – Previous academic skills training

The questionnaire also revealed that the majority of students were previously taught to use structure in academic writing (Figure 4.3) and, according to Figure 4.4, the structure that was taught as appropriate for academic writing is frequently that of the triad, namely Introduction, Body and Conclusion. About half of the students also indicated that they were taught to be explicit, i.e. to explain everything rather than assume that their reader is informed. They were clear that it is important to show the reader how the writer moves from one point to the next and how these lead to the conclusion.
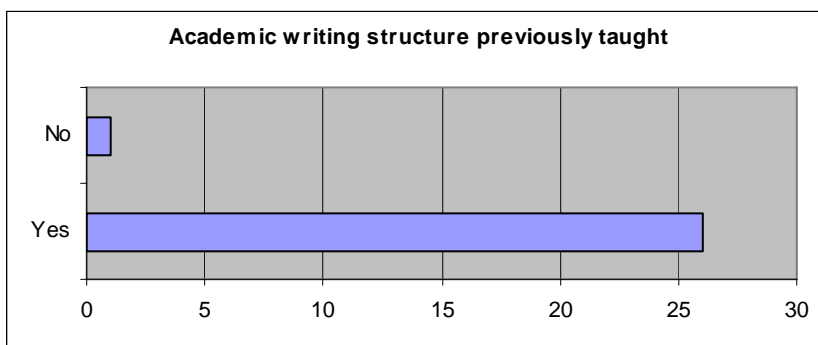

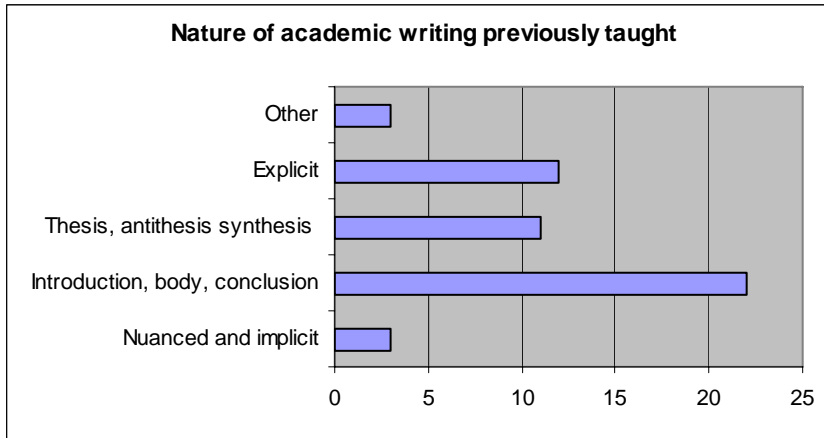**Figure 4.3 – Academic writing structure previously taught**

Figure 4.4 – Nature of academic writing structure previously taught

Students were then asked whether they think that language and structure are important to an academic text or whether they think it is only the content that really matters. Figure 4.5 shows that most students agreed on the importance of both language and structure, i.e. on an interaction between the two. To emphasise the point, students were asked in the same question, if marks should be deducted for language and structure inaccuracies. Half of them agreed and only a few said that marks should not be deducted.
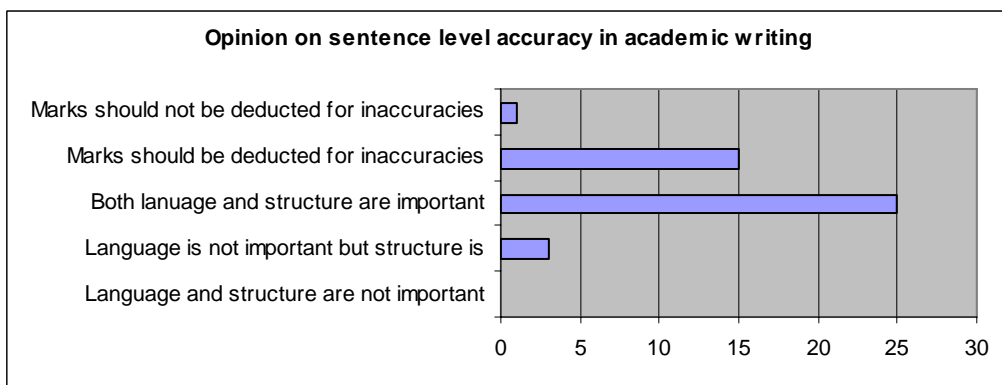

Figure 4.5 – Opinion on sentence level accuracy in academic writing

Question 16 (Figure 4.6) determines how students feel about their own academic writing in English as opposed to their academic writing in their first language. They were asked whether they think the two differ or whether they are the same. Again, the majority indicated that they follow the same pattern in academic writing regardless of whether it is in English or in their L1. Leonore (Dutch) explains that paragraph structure is definitely the same.

56

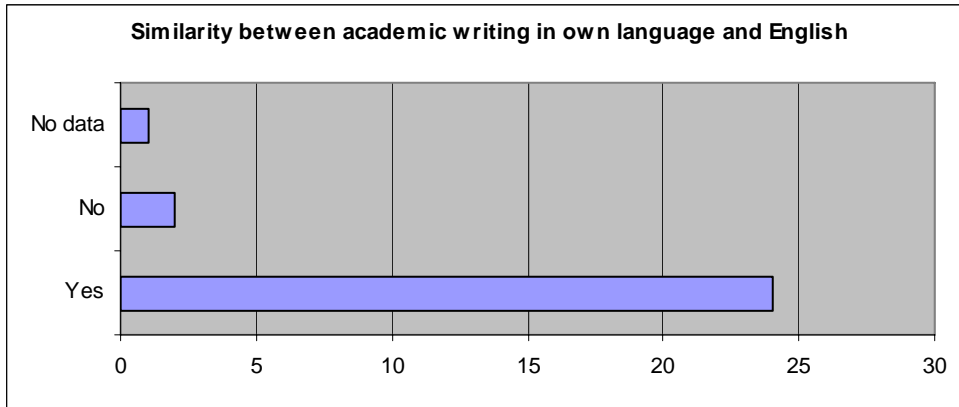**Similarity between academic writing in own language and English**

Figure 4.6 – Similarity between academic writing in own language and English

To discover whether students are aware of differences in style between academic texts in their first language and academic texts in English, they were asked whether they thought these two to be different or similar. Almost all the students said they were the same.
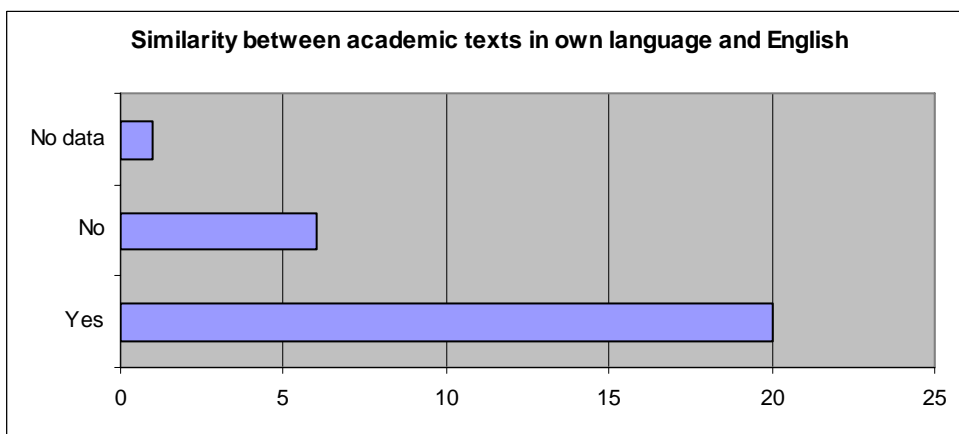
Similarity between academic texts in own language and English

Figure 4.7 – Similarity between academic texts in own language and English

4.3 **Interviews and discussions**

Students who attend the academic writing course are concerned about their own academic writing in English. Almost all of them say they lack academic vocabulary and by that they also mean formulaic phrases. They frequently ask to be given phrases they can use in their writing. They also acknowledge that a distinctive feature of their writing is incorrect idiom, because they translate directly from their own language into English. Thus, it seems as if students are

most concerned about their writing on sentence level, i.e. on a micro-textual level.

As regards anything higher than sentence level accuracy, like paragraph structure, cohesion or logical argument, students usually indicate understanding of the concepts and claim that they follow norms similar to those used in English when writing for academic purposes in their own language.

Significant comments that emerged during discussions and informal interviews are noted below. Interestingly, although elsewhere there were either no or very insignificant differences in responses from various language groups, here the comments can be discussed according to the three larger groups of the sample, as there were group-specific distinctions.

4.3.1   German students' comments:

"German academic writing is written in the most complicated way possible. Scholars try to confuse readers by sounding smart, using sophisticated vocabulary and very long sentences. Germans are not as service orientated as English, for example."

(19)   "English articles are easier to read."

(20)   "In academic writing one should use big words, academic language."

(21)   "When I write in English, I just cannot get the right words to use."

4.3.2   Dutch students' comments

(22)   "We are competent academic writers in our own language, - structure is not a problem, but in English we don't have the words to make transitions."

(23)   "We translate directly and then write badly."

(24)   "Vocabulary is the biggest problem."

58

4.3.3   Gabonese students' comments

(25)   "L2 writers are so busy focusing on accuracy that they neglect style."

(26)   "Academic norms and rhetoric is universal."

(27)   "You can see the difference between Kenyan, Nigerian and UK English, so you should also be able to see differences between different kinds of French writers and therefore a difference between English and French writers."

(28)   "Readers or listeners are disappointed by what they read or hear from us because it is not what they expect."

(29)   When looking at Kaplan's graphic interpretation of Asian, circular rhetoric, some Gabonese students said it resembles African rhetoric.

(30)   "We are competent. The Gabonese system is different to the South African system in that Gabonese teachers lecture to students and they have to keep up. South African lecturers take care that students participate, understand and attain academic goals through 'self development'."

4.4   **What students do in academic writing**

In this section, I shall discuss in more detail the outcomes of analyses of the student essays where they were measured against English academic norms and conventions that are taught in the EAP course as discussed in Chapter 2.

Of the 38 students who were respondents in this research project, the eight most and eight least proficient students according to their performance in the EAP course, were identified for particular attention. The choice was based also on how well students fared in the diagnostic writing task given to them at the beginning of the EAP course. In the strong group, there are three Germans, a South African, two Gabonese, a Norwegian and a Dutch student. The weak group is similarly constituted, made up of a German, a South African, two Gabonese, a Norwegian, a Mexican, a Chinese and a Dutch student. Their written performance is discussed under the five dimensions below.

4.4.1   Academic language, tone and register

Most students seemed to be aware of the need for formal, objective language (see reference in par. 4.2.1.1) in academic texts and also tried to use it in their own writing. Many of the weak group's students, however, used subjective, informal language. Often students used informal expressions, which they presumably heard somewhere, without realizing its inappropriateness.

To illustrate: This Dutch student indicated that "academic language" should be used in an academic text in the following way:

> "At my university, I followed a scientific writing course. I learned there some of the information that stands above. The focus of this course was the structure, the subject and the references. I think that it is important that you are able to write a good academic writing because you make a name as a person through your publications. And if your articles are good the chance on success is a lot bigger!"

4.4.2   Thesis statement

Seven of the eight strong students had a clear thesis statement. For example:
(31)   "In this essay I will explain what academic writing is and have a look at characterizations of good academic writing".

Only two of the eight weaker students stated their theses of their essays. A thesis was therefore stated by students from all the nationalities represented in the strong group. There is no correlation between the presence or absence of a thesis statement and cultural or linguistic groups according to this data analysis.

4.4.3   Triad

The triad, or Introduction, Body and Conclusion structure, was also used by seven of the eight students in the strong group and two students in the weak group. As regards the spread of using the triad structure across cultural or linguistic groups, the same situation applies as in 4.4.2 above.

4.4.4   Coherent and cohesive paragraph structure

Only about half of all the students divided their texts into paragraphs. Of the eight stronger students, six used conventional paragraphing and only one of the weaker students divided his text into conventional paragraphs. These paragraph divisions are frequently arbitrary, dealing with coordinate as opposed to subordinate ideas, arranged seemingly at random. Even though there is no transition or connector between paragraphs, they often start with what seems to be a topic sentence. The following sentences may still follow logically from the first (e.g. using the theme-rheme connection) but sentences after that do not follow logically. Very often sentences could be rearranged without a change in meaning of the student essay. This observation leads to the question of linear argumentation to be discussed next.

4.4.5   Linear argument

Of all the students, 13 produced a logical argument in their texts. A logical argument would be one that guides the reader from an opening statement through steps that follow one another to a conclusion which answers or confirms the opening statement. Such a logical argument could be traced in the essays of five of the eight strong students. None of the eight weak students' essays showed a logical argument. The essays were all scrutinized for signaling devices, i.e. opening the discourse, introducing a new point, sequencing, illustration, qualification, generalising, summarising and concluding. Apart from the absence of signaling devices, the essays often did not have proper conclusions. Superficial parts or paragraphs called conclusions do not follow logically from the reasons stated in the body. Sometimes there are no reasons for a conclusion that is given and often there are reasons, but they do not follow logically either and therefore do not lead meaningfully to the conclusion.

4.5 **Conclusion**

As Table 4.1 indicates, what students *say* about academic writing is very rarely what they *do* when they produce their own academic writing. Five dimensions of academic writing norms were specifically compared above.

Analysis showed that students may have knowledge of certain academic writing norms and conventions and may even have received instruction to this effect in the course of their education, but that they still do not implement these directives in their own writing. The use of coherent and cohesive paragraphs is a case in point. Roughly a third of the students mentioned paragraphs and what they said about paragraphs shows that they understand and appreciate how paragraph structure improves the structure of a text. However, only three of those students used coherent and cohesive paragraphs in their own texts. Interestingly, there are students who do not mention anything about suitable paragraphing as an important component of academic writing, but who use them adequately in their own texts. One may therefore conclude that students' knowledge about academic writing does not correlate with how they produce academic writing, at least in English L2 writing as was investigated here. This is true for students who say one thing and do another; it is also true for students who do well, but are not explicitly aware of their knowledge of particular conventions.

Analysis of the most significant academic writing dimension for this study, logical argumentation, produced similar results to those found in assessing students' understanding of what 'academic writing' entails. Fifteen students mention the importance of logical argumentation and thirteen students handed in essays that in fact did have a logical argument. However, only eight of these students both mentioned the importance of a logical argument structure and illustrated this knowledge in their written work. So, some students say it is important while they do not achieve it in the production of an academic text; others do not mention it, but produce texts with logical argumentation. The number of students in this study who finally produced logical argumentation is not yet a third of the whole group. This result therefore confirms an

assumption with which the study worked, namely that in English academic writing, English L2 students do not manage argumentation as successfully as is required (see par. 1.4 on p.11 above).

An issue that was not specifically tested or analysed, but which emerged strongly, is that of inaccuracies on lexical, syntactic and semantic level coupled with students' complaints of the difficulty they experience on this level. As was stated in the analysis above, students usually indicated that they have knowledge of academic writing norms and conventions, regardless of whether they adhere to them or not. Students' attitudes towards academic writing, which were picked up in interviews and discussions, often hinted at irritation or frustration with attention to macro-textual conventions while they were more acutely aware of their needs on a micro-textual level.

Information that emerged in the interviews and discussions, as shown above, pointed toward students' concern about "not having the right words". And, as shown, students ask for fixed phrases they can use in their writing. In other words, one may conclude that students see formulaic language as a magic vehicle that will successfully carry the content of their academic writing. They are thus either not aware of or not concerned about the difficulties they experience on macro-textual level; in contrast, they are well aware of the difficulties on micro-textual level. Granted, grammatical inaccuracies may interfere with the clarity of a text. Nevertheless, on the whole, the texts that were structured better through the use of coherent and cohesive paragraphs and signalling devices also contained many such grammatical inaccuracies but were still easier to read and made a better impression as a coherent argument.

The first hypothesis of this study claims that the mostly conspicuous difficulties apparent in English L2 students' writing present on a micro-textual grammatical level, rather than on a macro-textual rhetorical level, thereby masking the macro-textual difficulties. The results support this hypothesis. The above analyses confirm that differences apparent between written assignments of the English L2 students in this study and the academic writing

norms they are taught in the EAP course are on a lexical and syntactic level as well as rhetorical level. Not only do lecturers in academic courses often recognise and comment on the micro-textual "errors" more readily than on the rhetorical shortcomings; also the students themselves experience more frustration with micro-textual uncertainty than with rhetorical structuring. Interestingly, in the questionnaire students overwhelmingly rated their own proficiency in English to be at an advanced level (see fig. 4.1 above). Such proficiency would mostly be measured in terms of micro-textual skills. Thus, a particular contradiction becomes apparent: the English L2 students in the EAP course rate their overall proficiency in English rather highly, and yet require of the course to assist them exactly on that level rather than on a more conceptual argumentative level. At no point in any of the measuring activities (essay, questionnaire or discussion/interview) did any student refer to possible cultural aspects of rhetoric as a source of concern or frustration in the construction of English L2 academic texts.

Of course, as was indicated, some students managed to produce good argumentative writing in terms of the set norms. These were the stronger students from all the different groups in this study. Conversely, the essays of the weakest students of all the groups showed a similar lack of the same norms that the strong students followed successfully. Across the group of respondents, students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds experienced the same kinds of difficulties when they produced academic writing in English. They made the same kinds of errors, but these did not appear to be culture or language specific.

Students across all cultural and linguistic groups had very similar conceptualisations of what constitutes 'academic writing', and they had similar opinions about where their own writing difficulties lie. On the one hand, where a cultural and linguistic group was numerically well represented (e.g. the group of 11 Gabonese students), it was significant that the analysis showed variety within the group. On the other hand, across all groups, the analysis showed certain pronounced similarities. Many stronger students (i.e.

those who performed well in regular EAP assignments and in their own disciplines) from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds produced academic writing with similar rhetorical structures. And, a number of weaker students (i.e. those who performed less well in regular EAP assignments and in their own disciplines) from similarly different backgrounds also produced academic writing of which the rhetorical structure was relatively good. It is not always those who perform well on a micro-textual level who perform well in structuring a good argument.

The second hypothesis of this study claims that the conceptual differences which are apparent between the writing of English L2 students and the norms set in the EAP course, do not correlate strongly with linguistic and cultural differences.

The findings of this study indicate that culture, specifically national or linguistic culture, does not play such a significant role in the way students produce argumentative writing. The concept of 'culture' needs to be investigated and unpacked if one wants it to be useful in this context. It is therefore necessary at this point to refer not only to cultures that correlate with language and nationality, but also to the notion of 'culture of learning'. It is possible that in higher education globally a set of rhetorical norms and conventions are becoming imprinted, to the extent that one can assume patterns of academic writing that span certain national and linguistic barriers. Then differences that are apparent on rhetorical level may refer to students from different cultures of learning or knowledge.

5. **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

5.1   **Answers to research questions**

The results of this study answer all of the research questions articulated in the introduction in Chapter 1. Here I shall return to the particular questions and summarise the way in which the answer to each gives insight into (i) English L2 students' understanding of the conventions of academic writing, (ii) English L2 students application of academic writing conventions in the construction of their own texts, and (iii) differences in academic writing of English L2 students from different language and cultural groups that may be ascribed specifically to the cultural differences.

Question 1 asked how the English L2 students, who are "lay" in terms of academic writing theory, understand the conventions of academic writing. This question is interested in English L2 students' conceptualisation of conventions of academic writing, and specifically of the kind of rhetorical structure that is suitable to the genre of academic texts. The analyses presented in Chapter 4 considered five components of rhetorical structure, using them to assess the kind of understanding students have as underlying knowledge of argumentation structure, i.e. of macro-textual features of academic texts. The five components were (i) Academic language, (ii) Thesis statement, (iii) Triad, (iv) Logical argument and (v) Cohesive and coherent paragraphs.

In summary, it was found that three of the textual features appear relatively frequently in students' conceptualisation, namely those referring to 'academic language', 'thesis statement', and 'triad'. In addition students often included 'grammar' (i.e. a micro-structural feature not specifically tested here). This means that in conceptualising, most of the respondents agree that these three features are critical components of academic writing, and that grammatical form is not irrelevant. The two remaining aspects of the macro-structure, namely logical argument and cohesive and coherent paragraphs were mentioned by only a few of the respondents. This means that in

conceptualising, most are not sensitive to these rather important constituents of academic texts.

Question 2 asked what kinds of texts these English L2 students produce in constructing a piece of academic writing. The question is interested in whether the academic texts of the English L2 students actually are constructed according to the conventions students have conceptualised. The analyses in Chapter 4, still following the five components of rhetorical structure selected for analysis, were able to indicate which of the components actually occurred in student writing and which did not.

In summary, it was found that the frequency with which the identified textual features occur in the students' essays was limited. Only half of the respondents' essays displayed adequate application of the conceptualisation they had expressed in relation to the components of 'academic writing', 'thesis statement' and a 'triad'; also about half of those who mentioned 'grammar' as important produced writing with a fair level of grammatical proficiency. This means that many who had conceptualised these features, did not actually apply them. Again, in applying their understanding of 'logical argument' or 'paragraphing', very few students' writing met the basic requirements. Comparing these results to the results from the participants' conceptualisation of academic writing, it is clear that there is a substantial discrepancy between what students say and do.

Question 3 asked whether there are differences between what English L2 students apparently know about (English) academic writing conventions and what such students do in their own academic writing. The question refers to answers provided in questions 1 and 2, as it is interested in whether English L2 students are actually able to transfer the knowledge they have of academic writing conventions into actual exercises of academic writing. The analyses in Chapter 4 indicated convincingly that very few of the students who were respondents in this project, were able to construct texts in accordance with the macro-textual requirements they had themselves identified in conceptualising

the components of academic writing. In summary it was found that there are indeed differences between knowing conventions and following those conventions in practice.

Question 4 asked what the textual features of academic writing of English L2 students at tertiary level are in comparison to the norms and conventions of English academic writing, taught in the EAP course. The question is interested in the ability of English L2 students to construct an academic essay in accordance with the norms and conventions they have been taught explicitly in the EAP course they are following. This question is related to the interest of research question 2, where knowledge (conceptualisation) and use of writing conventions are in focus. The analyses in Chapter 4 indicated not only that the students were not good at translating knowledge about academic writing into the actual practice of academic writing, but also that students' were less acutely aware of difficulties on the macro-textual level than on the micro-textual. They not only requested more assistance on a lexical and syntactic level in the EAP, but also appeared to be frustrated by guidance on the level of generic features and rhetorical structure as they often felt it to be superfluous. Therefore, what was taught was rarely applied, and was not even found to meet expectations of what students felt they need to overcome their English L2 writing difficulties.

The hypothesis guiding the research on this question was that lexical and syntactic difficulties indeed often mask difficulties that lie on a rhetorical (i.e. macro) level. The perspective of Brown, Kaplan and other researchers in the field of rhetorical structure of English L2 writing was interrogated to determine whether in fact such masked rhetorical difficulties of students are culturally determined or whether they are of a more generic nature. The conclusion which analyses of the data leads one to here is that students as well as lecturers tend to focus more on micro-textual features of academic writing than on macro-textual features, and in the process neglect attention to rhetorical structure.

Question 5 asked whether there are culturally determined differences between English L2 students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in (i) their understanding of academic writing conventions and (ii) actual academic writing. This question is interested in whether difficulties English L2 students experience in finding an appropriate rhetorical structure for their academic writing, may in fact be ascribed largely to differences in cultural and linguistic conventions of academic writing.

The hypothesis guiding the research in this case was that the conceptual differences which students express, may correlate with linguistic and cultural differences they bring to the EAP course, but that these differences are less extensive than received literature suggests. The English L2 students, mostly of foreign origin, represented a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Although every student's cultural and linguistic background is considered a key factor with which his or her concepts are in some way correlated, the similarities and differences found in conceptualisation and execution of academic writing do not justify a strong statement that these differences are specifically culturally determined. The conclusion which analyses of the data leads to here is that emphasis on cultural difference can in some instances be a red herring. In order to integrate cultural difference meaningfully in an EAP course, one needs to investigate notions of 'culture' more thoroughly and perhaps more discerningly than is often the case.

5.2   The link between results and theory

Most of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 centre on research concerning the kinds of difficulties L2 writers experience in academic writing in English. Consequently, this study assumed that in English academic writing, students do not manage argumentation successfully. The largest part of the data studied for the analysis supports this position. The analyses in Chapter 4 draw on theoretical work relating to English L2 students' conceptualisation of academic writing and make use of theoretical constructs the literature provided for analysing macro-textual features of texts such as rhetorical structure. The following paragraphs elaborate briefly on this.

5.2.1   Structured paragraphs to create logical arguments

Scrutinising paragraph structure and signalling devices revealed problem areas relevant to students' success in argumentation. One of the problems is that students are not capable of structuring coherent, logical paragraphs. Sometimes this is because they were never taught how to do it, also a finding of research by Čmejrková (Ventola & Mauranen 1995:143), and sometimes students fail to transfer their learnt knowledge about paragraph structure into their writing in English. An example of this is found in the data obtained from one of the respondents, a Gabonese teacher and Education graduate. He talks about coherent and cohesive paragraphs in his essay and one assumes that he produces sound paragraphs in his L1, but he does not apply his knowledge in the English academic text.

As was explained in Chapter 4, students' paragraphs may start off well, with a topic sentence and another one or two support sentences, but then logic or linearity is lost because sentences which follow do not follow logically, i.e. there is no theme-rheme connection. This echoes what Mauranen (1996:198, 200-201) says about how theme-rheme connections operate on sentence level, paragraph level as well as text level. That is why, she claims, the organisation within the paragraph (local organisation), is connected to the organisation between paragraphs. Therefore, the whole organises a text (global organisation) meaningfully.

To evaluate students' paragraph production and their ability to maintain logical argumentation, the order of sentences and paragraphs were analysed. O'Connor's (1991:87-88) definition of logical writing was used as a guideline. Only a few successful student essays contained arguments that ran logically through the text, from the hypothesis to the conclusion. The majority of the student essays did not reflect such rhetoric.

5.2.2 Difficulties on lexical and syntactic level

The stronger students fared better in the production of academic argumentation than the weaker ones. The weaker students' essays were seen to contain inaccuracies on syntactic and semantic level to the extent that it interfered with coherence and therefore also with argumentation. Stronger students' inaccuracies of the same kind were not as substantial and did not interfere. However, from interviews and discussions it emerged that students are aware of these inaccuracies and these are their biggest concern when they have to write in English. This finding correlates with Riley's (1996:122-125) findings, as set out in Chapter 2. His students also repeatedly returned to their concern about their lack of academic vocabulary in English, even after having followed an English course in which emphasis was placed on topics like coherence, cohesion and connectors. A similar comparison was drawn here between students' understanding and opinion of how they should write, and the way they actually perform writing.

These findings relate to the first hypothesis of this study. Even though students are aware of and still produce many inaccuracies on lexical and syntactic level, this is not the only level on which their writing differs from the English norms they are compared to. Student writing differs from English norms on rhetorical level also.

5.2.3 The role of culture

All the data clearly point to the fact that the success or the difficulties students experienced in producing academic writing, and even the difficulties they expressed about their writing could not be directly correlated with their linguistic or cultural identities. Students from The Netherlands produced similar data to those from Sweden, Gabon or South Africa. This refutes the received view that the conceptual differences which are apparent in the writing of English L2 students and those set as norms, correlate largely with linguistic and cultural differences between students.

Speech communities, as discussed in Chapter 1, are not clear-cut and simple, which problematises linguistic or cultural identities. For example, Gabonese students could superficially be seen to be from a French speech community, but individuals from the group may have a complex linguistic repertoire which indicates membership of various speech communities. A person's home language may be Fong, while her language of learning at secondary level was French, and currently her language of learning in post-graduate studies at tertiary level, is English. A fellow member of her Gabonese community may have French as home language and as language of learning at secondary level, while currently he also has English as language of learning in post-graduate studies at tertiary level. His linguistic repertoire may have more in common with the Swede whose home language and language of learning is Swedish and who is following an academic semester in English than with his Gabonese counterpart whose home language and language of learning differed. This means that a greater variety may exist within a presumed "speech community", than between different speech communities.

Students' pre-tertiary education plays an important role in their linguistic performance. The group of respondents in this study was relatively small and yet they represented a significant variety of cultural and linguistic groups, i.e. European, Scandinavian, African, Asian and central-American. The large language group could be divided into smaller groups of weaker and groups of stronger students. These students were all presumably from very similar educational backgrounds. So, to explain their different levels of performance, one might have to look at the individuals' learning cultures, rather than linguistic or national culture to explain observed differences.

5.2.4   **The concept of culture**

Atkinson's (2004:277-289) study on the problematic notion of 'culture' in contrastive rhetoric is discussed earlier in this study (see par.1.2.1, 1.2.2). The findings presented above very clearly indicate that where culture is a factor in contrastive studies, a simple notion of national or linguistic culture is not sufficient. Variation in students' academic writing should perhaps be studied,

not in the light of linguistic and cultural variation, but in the light of learning culture or cultural variety within a single community. The differences on rhetorical level may refer to students from different learning or knowledge cultures.

If a study like this one should be conducted in the South African context, contrasting the academic writing of South African English L2 students from different educational or learning cultures, there is sure to be enough variety to make for an interesting study.

5.3   **Relevance of this study for EAP teaching**

This study intended to create an awareness of and sensitivity to the way L2 students experience the understanding and execution of academic writing tasks. The results of the study may remind teachers to aid their students in the process of skills transference. Being aware of students' concerns over inaccuracies on lexical and syntactic level, teachers could guide students to pay attention to macro-textual structure of their texts as well. Students should be assisted in understanding that even good micro-textual skills need to be combined with rhetorical structure that can carry the content of their writing better.

Perhaps teachers could investigate what stronger and weaker students have in common in order to help improve students' abilities. If the results of this study are meaningful, then students from a spectrum of cultural and linguistic backgrounds could be divided into newly defined cultural groups which are not national or linguistic. Breaking away from stereotypical grouping along national-cultural or linguistic lines, by grouping students according to, say, learning culture, could be a innovative and exciting change for students and teachers.

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7.   **APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE**

1.   Name: (optional)
2.   Nickname: (which I can use instead of your real name)
3.   Age:
4.   Gender:
5.   Country of origin:
6.   Home language
7.   Language/s used at school
8.   Language/s used at university
9.   How long have you been learning English?
10.   What are you studying now?

11. Why are you taking the EAP course?

12. Rate your own level of English proficiency.
A.   Pre-intermediate
B.   Intermediate
C.   Upper-intermediate
D.   Advanced
E.   Proficient and fluent

13. Have you been taught academic reading and writing skills before (in any language)?
A.   Yes
B.   No

14. Give an indication of how the amount of writing you do now, in your academic course, compared with what you had to do in other courses before, at this or another university?
A.   I used to write more before
B.   It is about the same
C.   More writing is expected of me now
D.   This is the first time I have had to write this much academic writing.
E.   Other. Please explain.

15. Have you been taught to use structure in writing or a certain way of writing academic texts?

A . Yes

B. No

If yes, what would best describe the structure? You can choose more than one description.

A.   Nuanced and implicit. In other words, the writer does not have to tell the reader everything. Some things the reader concludes by him/herself.

B.   Introduction, body, conclusion.

C.   Thesis, antithesis, synthesis: The thesis is a proposition. The antithesis is the negation of the thesis. The synthesis forms a new proposition.

D.   Explicit. The writer has to explain everything. It is important to show the reader how the writer moves from one point to the next and how these lead to the conclusion.

E.   Other. Please explain.

16. Which of the following statements about academic writing do you agree with? You can choose more than one.

A.   Language and structure are not important. As long as your content and facts are correct, the rest should not matter.

B.   Language is not that important, but structure is. Academic texts are structured in a certain way for a good reason and one should use that structure.

C.   Both language and structure are important. Everything should be correct and following the rules and norms of the institution you are studying at.

D.   Marks should be deducted from your assignments for language and structure inaccuracies.

E.   Marks should not be deducted from your assignments for language and structure inaccuracies.

17. Compare your academic writing in your own language to your academic writing in English.

A.   Does the structure look the same? Explain how it is the same.

B.   Is the structure different? Explain how it is different.

18. Compare the academic texts that you read in your own language to academic texts that you read in English.

A.   Is it the same? Explain how it is the same.

B.   Is it different? Explain how it is different.