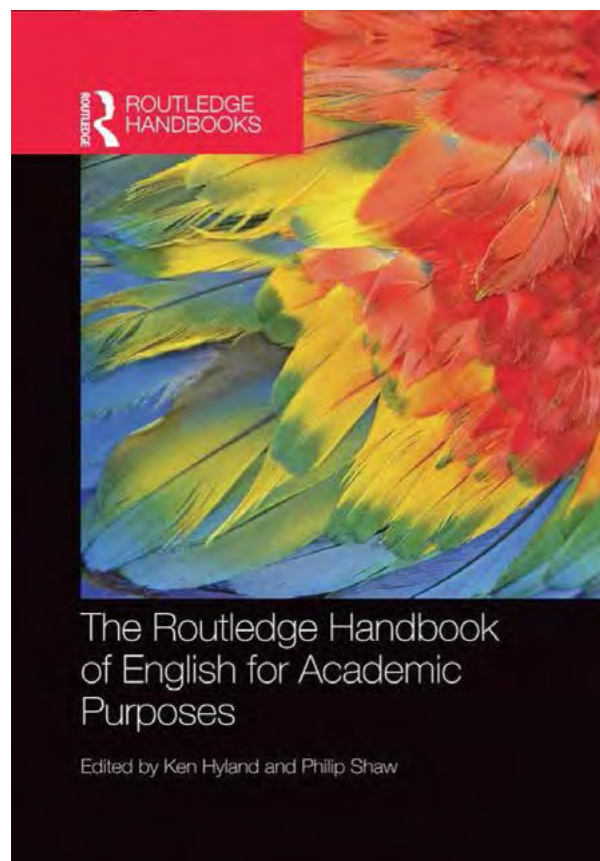


# BOOK REVIEW: THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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**Title:** The Routledge Handbook of English for Academic Purposes  
**Editors:** Ken Hyland and Philip Shaw  
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Notions of a handbook for any particular undertaking immediately raise the expectation that the text is one that the reader can browse, peruse and survey before selecting articles that are of interest or practical use. It is therefore the aim of this review to attempt to provide the potential reader an overview and orientation of the forty-five different contributions within the handbook. According to the publisher's cover blurb, this compendium provides an essential reference for EAP practitioners, claiming that each article delivers "a state-of-the-art review of the key ideas and concepts" pertaining to the discipline. However, on consideration of the readership of this journal, I wish to take a more pragmatic approach to discussion of the contents of this text, and examine how it can be of relevance to teachers, lecturers, researchers and academic managers working in China. Therefore, in addition to offering a more general synopsis of this wide-ranging text, where possible I attempt to focus more on issues and topics that may be more pertinent to the job of teaching EAP in China.

In introducing the set of forty-five chapters, the editors Hyland and Shaw remind us that EAP has gone beyond the job of preparing our students to cope with the academic and linguistic demands of attending institutions or taking courses that require working in the medium of English. The authors point out that EAP is now an interdisciplinary endeavour closely related to the field of applied linguistics, but one that also embraces broader ethnographic and pedagogic studies. However, it is pointed out that rather than suffering from "a possible overindulgence in theory" (p. 2), EAP is nevertheless still grounded in and committed to "research-based language education" (p. 2). I would advise that the reader hold on to that thought; as busy professionals seeking new and interesting ways to help our students, one could be forgiven for only seeking out texts with

more practical utility. The book does include numerous articles directly relevant to the EAP classroom and study skills, but it also raises important questions about the realities of the position of English as an academic lingua franca, an area of study that is of importance to China.

## ENGLISH AS AN ACADEMIC LINGUA FRANCA

Many articles in the handbook should prompt us to consider and provide principled responses to the fact that today the number of non-native speaker staff involved in the course management and teaching of EAP is increasing, especially in China (see Chapter 8). While the handbook fails to address the area of non-native speaker EAP staffing, notions of native speaker dominance are both implicitly and explicitly dealt with (see Chapters 3, 4, 7, 8, 17, 22). Moreover, the rising number of academic publications in all disciplines written by speakers of languages other than English also requires consideration from EAP practitioners.

In Chapter 4, Mauranen, Hynninen and Ranta point to the English language publishing rankings in the field of Science across the world; these tally in following order: US, China, UK, Germany, France and Japan. It is clear then that their assertion that "academic English has no native speakers" (p. 52) has considerable validity. Controversy and argument therefore arise as to who should be the gatekeepers of standards of language usage, style and expression, if it is not native speakers. While this handbook cites much of this contention, many of its chapters may dismay the reader as to the lack of useable practical research into this area of how universally acceptable language standards might change or evolve. Nevertheless, anyone seeking a comprehensive overview of the debate concerning the rapid spread of English as an academic lingua franca has a rich resource of references to draw on. As with all chapters in the handbook, a

comprehensive survey of the key writers and participants in each sub-discipline of EAP and applied linguistics is cited. The reader is also presented with an overview of developments and challenges in each sub-discipline.

Highlighting the challenges of addressing the needs of EAP students in a world where most readers and writers of academic texts are not native speakers, Hyland and Shaw discuss the often-cited criticism that EAP plays a part in reinforcing institutional power structures that privilege native speaker values and practices (see Introductory Chapter, Mauranen et al. Chapter 4, & Macallister Chapter 22). Such criticism includes censure of an academic system which allegedly imposes views of what constitutes acceptable language and patterns of rhetoric and argumentation. Such analysis also includes valuation of academic language as the propagation of Western cultural beliefs and notions of how knowledge itself is constructed. In this regard, in Chapter 3, Lillis and Tuck provide an overview of the relatively new field of Academic Literacies (now often referred to as "Ac Lits"). While the field has its roots in widening participation movements in the UK and post-apartheid South Africa, it now forms much of the basis of criticism of EAP education as one that focuses on "a fixed set of competencies which can be possessed or lacked" (pp. 31-32) resulting in negative "binary perceptions of learners as literate/illiterate" or "remedial" (p. 32). Ac Lit questions how students are socialized into the academic community and proposes that we rethink and transform all current practices to accommodate newcomers. In Chapter 17 an ethnographic approach to EAP is taken that, in the words of Hyland (2006), seeks "to achieve deeper understandings of the social influences on language use in EAP settings" (p. 68). Macallister in Chapter 22 takes discussion of academic English as

problematic further, referring to the use of Critical EAP which aims at revealing the hidden politics in Anglo-American academic discourse and practice.

In raising the above issues we can see that there are reoccurring themes that question the heart of what we do as EAP practitioners. This can be welcomed but as a handbook there may be an overemphasis on these issues. Few usable practical solutions are really offered. It is apparent that many solutions are hindered by ideology. However Mauranen, Hynninen and Ranta, in Chapter 4, go some way toward analysing possible directions of linguistic change that may occur in the future due to the proliferation of academic texts written by non-native speakers. Using corpora of non-native academic texts, they analyse the effect of a number of linguistic exponents on academic communication. They also cite the growth of non-native speaker gatekeepers or regulators of academic expression in their capacity as editors of academic journals. However, it is disappointing that concrete examples of different types of language usage to fully inform the discussion are minimal. It can be argued that research and discussion as to notions of correct vs incorrect or standard vs non-standard needs to be carried out. For this we need data and well-constructed research questions, with somewhat less ideological argument.

### THE POSITION OF ELT AND EAP IN CHINA

In Chapter 8 of this handbook, Cheng provides a useful overview of the position of EAP within tertiary education in China. While the article is perhaps overly descriptive, it does usefully point to the fact that EAP is undervalued in China and has failed to be sufficiently integrated into the ELT curriculum. For example, Cheng reminds us that all non-English majors at universities in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have to take English language

students requiring the ability to read or write within their subject-specific discipline. The need for more tailor-made EAP courses is highlighted by the fact that larger numbers of postgraduate masters and doctoral students are being required to publish in English-medium international journals as a part of their courses. Due to the fact that the number of postgraduate students in China is increasing, reaching 621,300 in 2014 (projected to pass one million in the next five to ten years), the importance of developing an EAP provision is clear. While calling for greater recognition of EAP across the Chinese university sector, Cheng advocates a move away from current exams such as the CET, or its reform at the very least.

### UNIVERSITY LECTURES

A number of articles in this handbook set aside examination of specific EAP skills. Chapters 14 and 24 specifically deal with university lectures. Since lectures are very often the predominant mode of delivery in China, these articles may be of more practical use to many readers. In addition the difficulties encountered by Chinese students in regard to coping with long stretches of academic monologue may also be a concern for those teaching in the PRC. Particular problems also pertain to students of lower levels of listening skills. Rogers and Webb in Chapter 13 discuss the need for greater attention on the teaching of bottom-up listening skills for lower level learners. While a combination of both top-down and bottom-up strategies are vital for weaker students, focus on the more direct teaching of note-taking skills is advocated. Research also points to the need for more input in regard to aural and visual cues. However, vocabulary size and knowledge is singled out as the most important element in improving bottom-up processing. Studies cited in regard to vocabulary size and the complexity of spoken discourse draw on data from British Academic Spoken English (BASE) and other corpora. Results reveal that to obtain

95% coverage, students need knowledge of about 3000 to 4000 word families together with input on proper nouns and marginal words. In addition, this needs to be complemented with subject specific input. The difference in difficulty across the various subject disciplines is, however, very significant and it is pointed out that blanket coverage of vocabulary through more English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) strategies may be of little help to students when preparing them for listening skill for lectures. Here the case for a genre or subject-specific approach to EAP is strong. Hyland in Chapter 2 offers extensive discussion on dilemmas over possible directions to take in regard to EGAP versus a more specialist genre approach and prompts us to consider the variety of literacies across higher education. As Hyland points out "EAP is most successful when it is tailored to meet the needs of the specific circumstances of students" (Chapter 2, p. 19).

In Chapter 13, Rogers and Webb also point to another useful aspect of research. They highlight the fact that Coxhead's AWL (Academic Word List) may be of limited use in improving comprehension of academic spoken text. But again this varies significantly by discipline. Another possible supplement to using the AWL is an exploration of the AFL (Academic Formulas List). For improvements in bottom-up processing this offers lists of formulaic expressions of high frequency with the additional benefit of being useful for writing also. Another useful resource is the ACL (Academic Collocations List). While it does not distinguish between collocations that appear in both written and spoken discourse, its focus is on combinations that are more common in academic speaking, such as lectures. Again application must be subject-specific to be effective. In Chapter 24 Camiciotoli and Querol-Julian recommend the use of authentic university lecture materials such as OpenCourseWare (OCW) ▶

(<https://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>). Here students can access video lectures on their specific discipline, including lecture notes and summaries that develop genre-specific vocabulary. Students can be encouraged to exploit these as part of self-directed e-learning. Using notes, commentary, transcripts and subtitles students can work at their own pace. However, I would argue that these materials are of more benefit if learner-training is provided as how to best proceed. But for lower level learners, the adaption of authentic materials is also an important consideration. In Chapter 43, Fredricka Stroller discusses how authentic materials can be frustrating and demotivating. Outlining various ways that authentic materials can be adapted, she provides useful commentary on the design and authenticity of task where materials and activities are sufficiently scaffolded to provide the appropriate support required for students to satisfactorily benefit from the use of both edited and unedited material.

### ACADEMIC SPEAKING

Basturkmen in Chapter 12 offers discussion in regard to possible directions for speaking skills in EAP curriculum design. From my own experience of teaching academic English and study skills in China, I believe her ideas could be applied to help improve both the linguistic quality and the academic content of our student's spoken discourse simultaneously. Basturkmen's focus is not just on learning to speak the target language but also on what she describes as speaking to learn. The notion here is that language and content should go hand in hand in the learning process; building subject knowledge and language should operate together. Importantly, the actual content of academic discourse forms a part of a student's socialization or disciplinary acculturation into their given discipline. Hyland in Chapter 2 also provides discussion in this regard with his reference to students' "ability to construct the disciplinary arguments" that

different genres employ (p.21). Readers interested in the production of teaching materials for academic speaking may also be interested in Basturkmen's reference to the use of fixed language expressions that express particular language functions (e.g. asking for clarification, agreeing, disagreeing, or giving reasons). Referring to the inadequacies and limitations of many such language exponents, Basturkmen points to ways in which authentic recordings of group tutorials and seminar discussions can be more beneficial for students. Such recordings draw on the complexity of real language as opposed to working with static lists of expressions, often encountered in textbooks. The authenticity of this language not only provides rich data for further research but can also form the basis of EAP classroom activities. Hopefully the reader can see creative possibilities here. Scaffolding activities emerging from the use of recordings and the analysis of transcripts can stimulate language learning (learning to speak), develop problem solving and critical thinking skills and activate the use of genre specific argumentation (speaking to learn). However, such materials may need to be modified for the lower language levels that we often encounter in China. If authentic recordings are too challenging, an edited or simulated version could be produced.

### CONCLUSIONS

It is often difficult for teachers, education managers and researchers in China to find books or articles that are of use in the PRC context. Here I have attempted to review a large handbook that is designed to provide an overview of current thinking in EAP. Given the number of publications coming from the PRC, as well as its millions of EAP students, I believe that China provides a platform from which important discussion about the place of English as an academic lingua franca can take place. It is apparent from the handbook that much controversy about the actual

form such a language might take is of concern. I have argued that for this discussion to continue productively, more concrete language data is required. I have pointed out that lectures more often than not form a large part of an EAP student's timetable. How students can better benefit from such a challenging mode of academic communication raises questions in regard to choices of the adoption of a more general or specific EAP curriculum (EGAP or ESAP). Finding better ways to teach academic speaking also highlights the need to make more principled decisions in the design of programmes. For China a better balance may need to be struck where both the more general aspects of language acquisition and more discipline specific academic discourse is accommodated. ○

### REFERENCES

Hyland, K. (2006). *English for academic purposes: An advanced resource book*. London: Routledge.

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