Xenolexia's positivity: the alterity of academic writing and its pedagogical implications

Beighton, C.

Xenolexia's positivity: the alterity of Academic Writing and its pedagogical implications

Keywords: Higher education; academic literacies; xenolexia; space; pedagogy

Introduction

Diversity in higher education (HE) has raised the stakes of academic writing practices, asking practical and ethical questions of the sector. Indeed, students' participation in the co-production of the HE experience is "full of tensions" (Kahn and Misiaszek, 2019, 588), and discussion of the issue continues, notably between those who see writing as identity work on one hand or as linguistic function on the other (cf. Wellington, 2010; Wingate and Tribble, 2012; McGrath and Kaufhold, 2016; Canton et al, 2018; Richards, and Pilcher, 2018; Murray and Muller, 2019; French, 2019; Zahn et al, 2020).

In a recent paper (Author, 2020) I challenged a central feature of this debate, namely the view that alienation accounts for many of the problems faced in academic literacy pedagogy (e.g. Flowerdew, 2020). Among many things, it ill befits the demands of difference and diversity in HE where change is the rule, not the exception (Haggis, 2006). **Academic text is just one area in higher education where diversity is central. The ecology of HE institutions and their relations with each other are in constant change; macro-economic demands and their disruption by political, demographic and biological change are exemplified by the Covid 19 crisis; the purpose, form and substance of writing change as trends emerge, styles evolve and priorities shift.** This is why I suggested that the novice's relation to text is xenolexic[1], describing the positivity involved in the productive foreignness of textual practices. It helps better understand the feelings students have that both the identity and the practices of academic writing are in some way foreign to them.

This paper complements these theoretical bases with lessons for academic writing pedagogies. I first briefly discuss xenolexia and its roots in neo-materialist philosophy, before discussing the methods used and data foregrounded in this study. My analysis then examines

---

[1] To be precise, xenolexia, defined as **"*confusion when faced with unusual words",*** was proposed for inclusion in the Oxford English Dictionary but rejected on the grounds of infrequent use. https://isismagazine.org.uk/2011/08/the-oed-word-room/ By recuperating it specifically in the context of academic literacy and pedagogies I hope to grant it more currency*.*

the attitudes, beliefs and practices of those involved and draws two conclusions which apply to both academic literacy and HE pedagogy more widely. First, I highlight *material* alternatives to idealistic or psychologistic beliefs (discussed below) about teaching and learning. Second, I suggest that the data here show how an understanding of how *affect* in pedagogy can enhance approaches to teaching and learning in HE.

To clarify these points, both conclusions draw on the way writing embodies processes of alterity or "becoming other". If we agree that writing processes necessarily implicate questions linked to identity, a number of questions arise. We should first ask the question "identical to what?" in positing the concept of an identity which in some way remains self-same over time. Similarly, if we are to speak of alienation, we need to establish "from what" we are alienated and to what extent this means we are "lacking" something. Alienation certainly enshrines a deficit model of learning and the learner, because it positions novice writers and their practices as "not-x". But w**hat exactly is this lack and where does it originate? What – if anything – does alienation mean if identity is necessarily subject to change?**

Xenolexia brings these questions together in an overarching theory of how writing, identity and becoming are imbricated as material processes. These processes are material in that they cannot be reduced to psychological processes (the conflation of psychologism). This is because they are not simply a question of how we see, think or feel matter but also of how matter shapes us, what Whitehead (1985) calls *prehension*. Any sense of dualism between individual perspectives and the active influence of material forces is denied. Thus idealism – the reduction of things to ideas – is replaced with an ontology of reciprocal determination which holds significant challenges for writing and indeed learning more generally. This reciprocity is what is meant by affect, and is discussed in more detail in the analysis below which provides an outline to the theoretical background to this paper**.[2]**

Xenolexia's positivity[3]

In an increasingly diverse HE landscape, **learning subjects'** ability to "give value and meaning to their own diversity in the texts they produce" is crucial (Henderson, 2018a,14). Henderson is stressing the importance of what the writer has to offer, not what they lack, and

---

[2] More detail can be found in Author (2016a; 2020)

[3] No reference to positivism in any form is either made, intended or implied.

xenolexia conceptualises this valuing and meaning-making ability by explaining things by positivity rather than deficit. This positivity has certainly been acknowledged by "multiple" literacy theorists (see, for example Masny and Cole, 2010; Turner et al, 2014), but xenolexia goes further. Rather than postulate identity in any form – the identity of learning subjects, the identity of a discipline, the identity of conventions or genre – it draws on a "neo-material turn" to help understand the essentially changing nature of things in this field.

"Neo-materialism" is a philosophical position which posits realism in the sense of a mind-independent reality composed of mobile, dynamic[4] entities. It expresses a shared dissatisfaction with anthropocentrism (expressed by forms of relativism, the linguistic turn in theory and social constructionism for example) and a desire to address the material conditions which apply to both humans and nonhumans.

To do so, it draws on a strand in western thought that views reality as consisting of ontologically inseparable entities (cf. Heraclitus, Spinoza and Nietzsche). It currently owes much to thinkers such as Bergson (2013a), Whitehead (1985) and Deleuze (1968a; 1968b) and so-called speculative materialists (e.g. Meillassoux, 2006; Brassier, 2007; Bryant, 2011). Recent writers, ranging from Elizabeth St Pierre (1997) and Karen Barad (2007) to Jane Bennett (2010) to Candace Kuby (Kuby and Christ, 2019), often stress the ethical implications of this post-humanism. If matter is a process imbricated in complex, shifting spaces rather than an inert substance appraised, represented or in some way correlated by the human mind, then as agents we have to recognise both the limitations of our agency and responsibility to all forms of being or alterity. This is a relational realism which stipulates the truth of relations against the relativity of truth (cf. Deleuze, 1985;1988).

A key property of such realism is its positivity: things emerge as a direct consequence of the relations they embody[5] and thus do not lack an "agent" or prime mover. On the contrary, neo-materialism places creativity and excess at the heart of being. No hypothetical substance, life-force or conceptual lack is needed to explain the stuff of experience. This creativity is material in that its affects and effects do not differentiate between the human and the non-human (see for example Bergson, 2013b, 42-52; Author

---

[4] The term is derived, via *dynamique* in French, from *dúnamai* in Greek. Meaning "I am able", it expresses the *potential* or *capacity* to do things, not the things themselves.

[5] Emergence is the (much abused) technical term which refers to the development of complex forms through simple rules. In far from equilibrium systems, chaotic or Brownian motion is often observed prior to the (temporary) establishment of phase transitions by attractor states, serving to underline a complex system's non-teleological tendency to order (Alhadeff-Jones, 2008; Mason, 2008; Fenwick, 2012).

3

2016a). Thus neo-materialism does more than theorise the grounds for existence of entities; it suggests ways of incorporating them into practice. To show how, I discuss the way xenolexia exemplifies a neo-materialist ontology and its "tropes" - the material and the affective - in ways which help both teachers and learners of writing in concrete ways. First, though, I explain the concept of xenolexia and its links to pedagogy.

From xenomelia to xenolexia

Xenolexia's positivity comes from this perspective, and its *ratio essendi* is perhaps best understood by analogy with a recently established, non-psychotic neuropathological condition known as xenomelia. Also known as "foreign limb syndrome" or BIID (Body Integrity Identity Disorder), subjects believe that one or more of their limbs is "an alien appendage" and seek amputation of divers body parts (Upadhyaya 2018, 34 see also Krafft-Ebing, 1894,162). Its aetiology includes erotic attraction to amputees (acrotomophilia) and sexual gratification by (self)-mutilation (apotemnophilia) (Brugger, 2013 et al). **Eroticism here needs to be understood in its etymological sense of desire, but as a desire without lack. Clearly not limited to sexual gratification, it is excessive in a double sense. First, the desire in and of xenomelia is not simply the wish to fulfil a specific want, but rather** a feeling of bodily "overcompleteness" and is thus a case of "less is more" (Macauda et al 2017). **Second, it exemplifies the kind of desire postulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1972) which, rather than pursue some mysterious, preexisting sense of being without, constantly creates and produces new feelings, bodies and affects.**

Xenolexia draws on this sense of excess to respond to the way in which academic literacy expectations can seem "foreign" to students and "alienating" to teachers. Relations between writer and text reproduce neither conventions not identities, instead changing through the complex, shifting relations that pertain between material bodies **which affect each other.** Its positivity challenges the perceived or constructed deficit which implies that students are basically passive entities (see for instance Badenhorst et al, 2015; Douglas et al, 2016; Henderson, op.cit).

From xenolexia to pedagogy

Applying these admittedly recondite points to pedagogy means finding ways of responding to these issues of deficit. If we accept that these are pedagogical problems, we must show how positivity and materiality counter them in pedagogical contexts. But we also need to be clear about what they mean, how they affect practice and what, if anything, we should do about it.

4

This can be done in several ways, but here I will take the commodification (of knowledge, of learning, of teaching, of students etc) as a starting point because it is emblematic of the kind of reification that xenolexia challenges. Researchers have of course regularly critiqued the tendency to commodify writing pedagogy as the acquisition of specific, clearly defined micro-sets of micro-skills (for example Wingate, 2015; Masika and Jones, 2016). One reason for this is that they tend to prioritise the formal properties of writing over content in order to facilitate the homogenization demanded by commodification. Conventional protocols about syntax, lexis and argument, structuring, punctuation and referencing take precedence over content, ideas or contribution to knowledge. Such priorities reflect the (mistaken) belief that writing skills can be transmitted as packets of information to autonomous learning subjects. They also assume at least temporary consensus of both what is required and how to teach it.

However, while this reduction may actually facilitate pedagogy and the governmentality of specific beliefs about literacy, it does not reflect any intrinsic property of literacy practices *per se* and thus represents a real danger (Hamilton, 2014; Henderson 2018a). in higher education systems, this reduction involves a very particular form of commodification. Traditionally, the experienced academic's may have sought to develop others' knowledge, whereas the novice may have been more focused on their own as a means to various ends, such as learning or assessment. Both can be subject to commodification as education becomes a marketable good. But the distinction between producer / consumer dissolves by knowledge co-creation, for example via academic literacies, be they digital or analogue. Rather than simply consume, the *prosumer* simultaneously produces and consumes goods and services, for instance when the student lends their voice to the creation and marketing of the student experience for which they have already paid (Ritzer, 2014; Author, 2017a).

The point is that writing is not a product created by an organisation to be consumed by an individual. Xenolexia reminds us that writing is a process and that beliefs about its properties remain necessarily contested and subject to change. Its positivity lies in accepting that the pressures to reify knowledge certainly exist, and that they can be useful in providing structures (of thought, of production, of dissemination) that can and should be used by the writer. But the reification of such structures happens subsequent to the fundamental alterity of writing and its essential capacity for otherness. And it is this capacity for alterity which actually produces writing, gives it value and makes sense of academic literacy.

Making sense in this way is the aim of this study, which, as the examples below show, belies this appearance of pedagogical consensus and the assumptions it articulates. More importantly, however, it also highlights clear lessons for pedagogy and practice which are outlined below.

Method

This project studies the perceptions of academic writing of students and teachers engaged in study at level UK HE level 7 and 8 (Masters and Doctoral level). Purposive sampling (n=33) was used to guarantee that all the participants were engaged in the field of postgraduate teacher education as students or teachers. In this paper, in order to interrogate specifically pedagogical beliefs and practices, I chose to focus on 9 out of the 33. These were students on a combined 2-year Masters in Education Leadership / PGCE[6] programme in a post-1992 HEI. Their views, I felt, would inform the pedagogical issues in so far as their roles, experiences and expectations of academic writing were extremely varied. As both teachers and learners of academic writing, they could comment on both theoretical and practical concerns and thus offer concrete suggestions in two important areas. First, as successful post-graduates, they were in a position to comment on the content of a contemporary HE teaching qualification. Second, as potentially influential vectors of practice in their teaching placements and longer-term teaching careers, they could also provide insight into the ideas that would accompany them into future education practice and management.

For the purposes of this paper, I opted to present just 3 interviews, a compromise which allowed me to discuss the data in reasonable depth, as is common when working in a qualitative, interpretivist research tradition. This approach also recognises at least a degree of diversity within the constraints of a paper such as this, and the three participants, Monique, Elsie and Daisy (all pseudonyms) were chosen precisely as an illustration of the latter. As will see, they had very differing views, experiences and points to make, allowing a deductive thematic analysis to both identify positive features of xenolexia and make more inductive points for future consideration in practice and /or research.

Formal consent was obtained from these students and opt-outs offered before face-to-face interviews were carried out, recorded and subsequently transcribed and systematically anonymized. My aim was to see what, if anything, can be gained from their experiences and perspective of academic writing pedagogy if we understand the latter through the lens of

---

[6] A Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is the UK's benchmark teaching qualification.

xenolexia's positivity. Their comments inform my analysis, below, and finally my conclusions about the pedagogical lessons to learn from tackling data in this way.

Data

For consistency, I used relatively structured interviews which followed the same pattern of four sequentially related questions: first, to define academic writing; second, to explain why it was important; third, to highlight barriers to the successful development of academic writing skills; and fourth, to suggest ways in which any barriers could be overcome.

Monique

Monique's definition of academic writing was typically clear:

> *I'd say it's a product of academic high-level research that's written for other academics mainly to convey the result of their thoughts and academic research*

Her reference to writing as a "product" aimed at "other academics" is telling. Writing, it seems, is an internal activity, carried out for and by academics for each other. This definition alone is suggestive about how Monique has come to understand the act of writing as "foreign". Carried out by other people, **("for other academics"/ "the result of their thoughts")** for other people she saw it as part of an in-group activity designed to constitute a closed group. She developed this view by adding that it is also a rite of passage, in her words a "a natural development from school level and [more advanced level] writing". But it's a rite of passage which, on reflection, doesn't seem to lead anywhere: one's writing "has got to go somewhere higher than that" and thereby "prove that you are studying at a high level". When she adds, "and that's what it is! Academic writing!" there is a sense that the whole activity is a self-justifying, closed system.

This may explain why, referring specifically to pedagogy, Monique struggled to find any examples of actually being taught successfully to write academically. She admitted that "I get that framework thing", referring to the use of writing frames in class sessions, which she found "really useful 'cos I find it hard". Otherwise, she could not remember any specific attention being given to the topic. Perhaps this echoes the circularity of the definition above, suggesting that input on writing did not seem useful to her because the goals, processes and identities on offer **seemed so closed to her.**

7

It would be tempting to suggest that Monique's evocation of a closed group reflects a sense of alienation as this group, owning as it does the keys to academic success, both attracts the student and demands that they become "other" in order to fit in: one definition of alienation. However, this does not fully account for Monique's views and practices. For example, when discussing barriers to the development writing skills, she quickly contrasted contradictions in the programme she was studying with her own writing skills. Academic writing, she said, seems largely invalid on programmes aimed at developing practical or vocational skills such as teaching, or, arguably, leadership. "It's very one-track" she said, because rather than pedagogical skill or knowledge, "its only just the writing that's being assessed". As a teacher, Monique linked this to problems of inclusivity, not least for those who are not already good at writing or have not already learnt to write in particular ways. Returning to her own experiences, she said

> *personally, I write very concisely and find it hard to write long pieces of work that needs a lot of focus, things like that. I think that it's very, some people will do really well at it and others just won't. (…) I'm not sure it's something that you can improve on, if it's not your style*

Monique seems rather fatalistic: if one has learnt to write one way, in one context, it is hard to adapt to new demands. **She gave the example of her own undergraduate work to argue that, having learnt to write one way, it was difficult, perhaps even impossible, to adopt new practices:**

> *From my own undergraduate degree, I never did anything more than two, three thousand words. My final product, I did eight weeks in a research lab and wrote a science paper on what I found out, and even my science paper was three and half thousand words, four thousand words something like that.*

The careful listing of formal details here underlines the perceived difference between what Monique had learnt to do and what she was now being asked to do, illustrating their difference, the difficulty in meeting the latter and a degree of resentment that, having learnt one way, new rules were now being imposed. What is interesting pedagogically is the way Monique sees a distinction between the advice given in this context and the kinds of skills needed in her new context. She was told to be "just very concise", "to the point", "no waffle" "not very long", "to the point". These traits of writing – surely a characteristic of any successful academic writing - seemed to Monique specific to her (scientific) field. But concision and relevance are fundamental to all academic writing and represent an invaluable set of positive skills for Monique to bring to her academic work. Failing to recognise this is perhaps the biggest barrier here.

Perhaps this misunderstanding, tied to a certain fatalism regarding improvement, helps understand Monique's reaction to adopting practices that she perceived as fundamentally different:

> That's was what I was used to. And I found it very difficult turning that on its head and I feel, doing the opposite trying to, I think I'm over-waffling to try and compensate.

Monique expressed some ambivalence to the problem. There was a little guilt in her responses: she accepted seeming set in her ways, and was uncomfortable about having problems with something that previously had come easily to her. Also, she said, the problem, should be easy to solve, and the fact that this was not proving to be the case was discomforting.

> Although it should be easy, maybe I'm very set in my ways, in this is what I used to do, and I used to do it very well, and now my grades are quite bad and I'm like "What went wrong? Interesting! (Laughs) I'm beginning to think about it now!

Again, alienation may account for the apparent sense of guilt here, but it struggles to account for the attitudes which accompany and complexify it. A sense of guilt, based on deficit, does not underpin her reflexivity, her awareness that the process is not complete, or her good humour throughout the interview. The reverse is far more likely, suggesting a more positive xenolexic approach in teaching that I return to below. Can teaching which fosters such good-humoured reflexivity about the challenge of meeting a seemingly strange set of new conventions help overcome such barriers?

Elsie

Unlike Monique, Elsie's academic background was in art and design, an area that she clearly continues to feel passionate about. Like Monique, she was very quick to respond to the initial question about the nature of academic writing:

> Academic writing is an approach to analysing an issue with a level of criticality and exploring that issue further, exploring the literature surrounding that issue, developing your own sort of conclusion based on that literature

Her definition is completely different to Monique's: rather than a product for an in-group, for Elsie, it is an "approach". It is a tool used to analyse and explore issues with the goal of

developing one's own position and ability to analyse further. She was clear therefore that academic writing is in itself a useful thing rather than just an assessment technique:

> *I think in that sense it has helped me develop my ideas and, sort of, my thoughts on a lot of issues, and I find exploring the literature really interesting and useful in aiding, sort of, that the critical fields and being able to analyse issues.*

Elsie's views of academic writing relied a good deal on the semantic field of space: "developing" or "exploring" ideas, "surrounding" issues, "approaching" problems and the "areas" or "fields" they constitute. It's possible that her interest in design is being reflected here, evoking the sort of xenolexic practices that actively seek out the different, the strange and the new: **deliberate and systematic reading of texts in both breadth and depth rather than, for instance, being satisfied by "reading and raiding" facilitated by online search tools; looking out for connections and inspirations in genres, people and places beyond those stipulated in course reading lists; deliberately identifying received wisdom and cliché and systematically looking for perspectives outside them. It is far from obvious that such practices are available to all students, but Elise's spatial references at least suggest that remaining inside given ideas may not lead to much learning.**

The ability to see this overarching truth may explain why Elsie, too, felt confident about writing and dealing with the process of writing and feedback:

> *I think it's quite difficult because I've always been quite lucky because it's always come quite naturally to me…Erm.. I guess it all comes back to, to practice, practice makes perfect and, sort of, the feedback that you get from each assignment*

Of course, the extent to which writing is in fact natural in this way is highly contestable, unless Elsie is referring to some sort of automatic "reaching out" associated with her artistic practices or, perhaps, the effects of deeper "reaching out" processes of xenolexia.

Whether this is the case or not, pedagogically speaking Elsie has clear memories of how teaching has helped – and hindered - her writing development. These include providing detailed feedback and models of practice:

> *The most I found is when you get assignments back and throughout the writing there has been comments throughout but sometimes you just get one at the*

> *end that's not so useful [and] I guess, looking at examples of good and not so*
> *good academic writing*

Elsie refers to the consensus mentioned above, according to which specific features of academic writing are identified as good or bad. That such consensus is a myth would perhaps be unhelpful to Elsie and the many students who seek clear, concise rules about how to write (and pass) assessments. I think that that such myths are expressed when Elsie refers to what she calls "criticality":

> *the criticality surrounding that, a certain issue, looking at both sides of ... the*
> *argument for and against something because it's very easy to say "this is*
> *wrong, this is wrong" and not looking at the ideas that might be for something*

This is a common view of criticality, albeit expressed in suggestively spatial terms[7] defined in academic writing as the process of stating two sides of an argument. Practitioners will recognise the traditional thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic which has so often been promoted as a model for argument. But here Elsie seems to be referring to just the first two steps (argument and counterargument) and, interestingly, suggests that the process is entirely non-synthetic[8]. **Being able to "present more criticality" mean that one acknowledges the existence of various viewpoints exist only to return to one's original standpoint and conclude that "for whatever reason, I still think this". Repetition replaces synthesis.**

Pedagogically, Elsie hints here at a quintessentially counterproductive teaching approach, which equates learning with reproduction of the subject. **As suggested by the discussion of commodification above, it can be pedagogically useful to assume that writing will simultaneously bolster identity and alienate. We reassure the the student's selfhood by juxtaposing it with the alien characteristics of, for example, academic writing, thus validating the subject's identity. However, assuming as teacher that we know what writing is, what the subject is and how they will relate is problematic at best. At worst the student actively rejects the teacher's attempt to reduce them to such a simplistic binary.** Elsie exemplifies this when referring to the practice of second-guessing the students' level of interest in and engagement with the course content:

---

[7] For an account of the importance of space in this regard, see Author (2020)
[8] Dialectical synthesis used here in the common Fichtean sense of a new state sublated from a previous opposition

> *It's quite interesting, because when we first started this course someone made a comment of 'you're going to have to start getting used to reading these really boring authors, or pieces of writing' (laughs), you still need to read them.*

Given the diversity of successful academic writing, this identification of the need to alienate oneself in order to adopt highly unattractive practices seems counterproductive as a pedagogical tactic. But it also does the practices in question a disservice: as with the caricature of the dialectic, above, it merely justifies the failure to either critique or create in a meaningful way.

Daisy

The third interviewee here, Daisy, was a language specialist. Originally from Germany, she has an extremely high level of fluency in English and significant and successful experience of the British education system.   As we will see, she had an articulate and contrasting understanding of the issues around academic writing pedagogy to those of both Monique and Elsie.

First, for Daisy, academic writing is defined as genre with specific conventions.

> *Academic writing, as I understand it, is writing in a specific form for a specific audience and the audience is academic. And so the writing follows certain conventions to do with structure, to do with terminology as well, subject specific or generally. And it's at a certain level of complexity*

Reflecting her own professional interests, perhaps, Daisy's definition relies on linguistic tropes of audience, form, conventions and specificity. It differs markedly from those of her colleagues, who saw it more in terms of its purpose (for Monique, as gatekeeper; for Elsie as exploratory tool). Defining writing in this way has the advantage of clarity and consistency, since it reduces a problematic area to its component parts and shows that it follows the same rules as other genres. It also helps pedagogy by providing an indication about how it can be segmented into subskills: identifying the audience; meeting the latter's needs; acknowledging the conventions and terminology involved; knowing what they are; and knowing how they relate to other aspects such as structure. Recognising, finally, the fundamental complexity of (this) genre is also important.

Her view of why we teach and learn academic writing was equally lucid:

> *I think there are two reasons (...) The first one is to contribute to the body of knowledge in our subject. And the second one is to understand that body*

> *knowledge because I think that writing is a form of engagement with information.*

It is striking that Daisy evokes a *materialist* view of knowledge. It is a "body" with specific disciplinary confines, and as such it can be understood through writing as "engagement with information". Daisy here distinguishes her view of writing from those who prefer to identify the activity with the search for identity redolent of relativistic epistemologies and psychologistic explanations of the phenomenon. The sense of the "otherness" of this engagement is something that Daisy insisted upon by stressing their alterity in her explanation:

> *By writing about something you are expressing ideas, putting some structure and form into your ideas about **other things** and these **other things** come from **somewhere** (original emphasis) so as an example, you read about a topic and it goes around your head until you actually put pen to paper and express your thoughts and that develops an understanding, or at least for me it does (laughs)*

There is no evidence that this materialism results from Daisy's educational experiences. Although initially her attempts to develop her academic writing involved trying to copy the style of the many texts she was reading, ultimately this failed and "doesn't make sense". Her tutor's response to this was to suggest a more personal approach:

> *And so my tutor at the time told me to just write my own, find my own, those were her words, find your own academic voice, what do you sound like in a research a paper and she told me to just write a lot.*

It's unsurprising that this advice gave Daisy more confidence, but here I want to suggest a link between this very common approach and the positivity of xenolexia. While engaging with the productive foreignness of other texts is useful, simply copying them is not because it assumes their static identity and ignores their potential to affect. Writing is productive, not reproductive and is positive and affective in this sense. This is why Daisy, since this episode, has adopted a specific and more productive approach to engaging with text. Instead of taking the tutor's advice as meaning an invitation to write completely freely about anything, Daisy now writes about what she reads in a quasi-pedagogical way:

> *So whenever I read anything, to write about that in my own way, almost explain it to someone else and that really helped me, and things about, reading it out loud, if it doesn't sound good it doesn't read well, and that really, **really** helped me (original emphasis)*

Here, writing text is understood as relational. Relations with the Other, both in terms of the author of the text, one's own developing writing, and the potential understanding of the audience, are constantly in play. But these relations are also fully present to the writer as long as the latter is also in play as xenolexic multiplicity.

Analysis: pedagogical lessons drawn from the perspective of xenolexia.

By implying ideal non-entities, fossilized in the mind of the teacher / student, alienation and deficit ground the reduction of pedagogy to remedial support. They posit the learner as a problem to be fixed and pedagogy as the solution to it. The accounts presented here however offer many pedagogical challenges to this view. This paper categorizes them into two tropes: the material and the affective. Both reflect the positivity of xenolexia and ways of countering the problems that arise when alienation is assumed to undermine academic literacy.

A Material trope

The most confident writers, Elsie and Daisy, describe writing on material terms. **Matter, defined as that which exists in space is opposed to the idea, which exists only in time. Writing is material in that it is also spatial entity with a physical consistency which cannot be reduced, as argued above, to a psychologistic construct or idea. We can, it is true, reduce writing to a set of ideal givens, but if we treat it as material, we grant it the properties that neo-materialism ascribes to all such matter: it is dynamic in that it expresses capacity, as we have seen; it is relational in that it is tool used to explore, invent and develop new ideas; it is emergent in that it creates new possibilities rather than reinforce consensual ideals and existing boundaries. All of these are helpful at every stage of the writing process and should not be foreclosed.**

This has many concrete pedagogical implications. First, it implies that understanding knowledge as "out there" is helpful. Ownership of this "foreign" language, moreover, is not required, because one cannot own what only exists in our relation to it. The common practice of physically putting pen to paper and writing in one's own words are a route to knowledge because they involve creatively engaging with text. The product is never "alien", especially when practised for an Other. However, simply doing it for a putative reader (e.g. an assessor) as display, risks watering down or even negating the xenolexic potential. But doing it for a more authentic occasion – teachers are well provided with advice on the exploitation of authentic resources - is a far better (and, according to these data, underused) approach.

Understanding the writing is part of a creative process makes the activity more meaningful, not less.

Second, it implies that pedagogies which boil down to a series of recipes or "firefighting" techniques cannot provide an appropriate level of pedagogical knowledge. **Those learners who describe academic writing as a quantifiable set of individually commodified skills (as outlined above) need guidance when they encounter the complex writing processes whose excess, inevitably, cannot be contained by such an itemised, idealised approach.** It suggests that a high degree of pedagogical expertise is required from teachers of academic writing. Expertise is also needed to counter the obvious disparity in beliefs about exactly what it is that students are learning to do, why, and how. Moreover, such expertise goes well beyond the knowledge about the systems and processes of learning management, administration or facilitation. Indeed, one cannot improvise sessions of academic writing which rely on peer work, loosely planned "discovery learning" or simply copying other texts because all risk simply recycling the known and undermining the xenolexic potential of the new. At their worst, as Daisy said, these strategies become meaningless. If these pseudo-pedagogies transfer well to "virtual" learning environments, it is because the latter are not designed to respond to the complex and less bounded relationships that effective writing demands.

To counter these issues, academic writing pedagogy, therefore, needs to recognise that it is still, partly at least, content-based, not a question of consensual formalism: writing is realist, not idealist. Examples of the latter, which include the detailed feedback, clear limits and models mentioned approvingly by my interviewees, seem popular. But this does not make them the most effective, merely suggesting that, from a field of eminently forgettable practices, they are the most memorable and easy to articulate in the interview. It is just as likely that process approaches, which focus on the generation of content, have been misinterpreted, misused or maligned. The implications for recruitment and training are significant, since those who teach academic writing should be not just confident but highly *competent* in teaching both the content and form of this complex discipline.

An Affective trope

The second trope concerns the status of affect in pedagogy. Used here in the Spinozist sense of a presubjective mutual alteration which results from contact with other things, it is fundamental to writing as a xenolexic process (Spinoza, 1996; see also Deleuze, 1968b). As an embodied, material process, it is resistant to domestication and "mark[s] the ways in which things become significant and relations are lived" (Zembylas, 2019, 4). Without affect there

would be neither events nor intelligence, and without it learning – *a fortiori* writing - cannot happen (Olkowski, 2011; Author, 2015).

It follows that affective learning about academic writing must be engaging, in the sense outlined by Daisy above, to avoid being immediately forgotten. Teachers know many ways to engage learners, going well beyond facile attempts to simply amuse or involve, and should use them more, even in HE. If we avoid pre-empting their level of interest, many students do in fact enjoy writing used as tools for development, exploration and creation. Perhaps it is the teacher, not the student, who finds text boring?

Certainly, we need to accept that critical exploration can, for some, be synonymous with circular activity of little real value. Academic writing has often been equated with criticality, but as teachers we need to be clear what is meant. If criticality is just another performance of pros and cons leading nowhere, it becomes another form of self-referential repetition and display. Encouraging this simplistic representation of complex information risks encouraging a return of the same: "I have looked at the options and I still think this".

Conclusion

Many of the comments I have made so far will not strike practitioners as new. Those who call for process-oriented pedagogies already recognise the complexity of academic writing and learning more generally (Engeström, and Sannino, 2012; Kempenaar and Murray, 2016; Author 2017b). Their recommendations imply familiar pedagogical techniques such as process writing, task-based learning and problem-based pedagogies (see for example Author, 2015; see also Barell 2006; Willis, 1996; White 1991 *inter alia*).

However, while teachers may be familiar with such concepts, the students interviewed here do not perceive their impact in the HE classroom. To illustrate this, I'd like to return to a comment made by Daisy. Those familiar with process writing paradigms will recognise the technique by which students are frequently referred back to each other for feedback on their progress in developing a text. The advantages of such peer feedback in many teaching and learning contexts may seem self-evident, although it continues to be discussed (e.g. Zahn et al, 2020). But Daisy, whose technical knowledge and experience of writing makes her well placed to give such feedback to others, was extremely sceptical about the idea. Certainly, she is "happy to give her view", when others want guidance, but:

> I don't see myself in that position [of teacher]. I'm not their teacher, I'm a critical
> friend, and I think more friend than critical because who am I to know what you
> are specifically are looking for? It's only another look at it, another view.

It is tempting to see this as a question of identity, but I think the point here is that the reliance on peer feedback is emblematic of a number of drawbacks in the teaching of academic writing. First, it asks learners to adopt a position that they may not like or, more significantly, perhaps, not be qualified for. It is counterproductive to place a learner in a position with which they are not ready, at least potentially, to engage. Second, developing writing certainly requires engagement with alterity, this case another's knowledge. But this is an alterity which must not be confused with opinions, beliefs or truisms about what the best advice is. Xenolexia means engaging with what is different, not with what is already known, and Daisy is suggesting that peer feedback which simply recycles and fossilizes existing consensus risks being unproductive.

This is not to suggest that the classroom must adopt a Taylorist ethos. Daisy certainly suggests that the goal is to meet the teacher's expectations, but given her definition of writing as genre, she is in fact referring to meeting the conventions of the genre itself, not an individual's demands. This is crucial: by definition, the novice academic writer is less familiar with the conventions of the genre and therefore is ill-placed to provide helpful feedback about this particular unknown. They cannot feed the xenolexic drive to relate to the new, confusing instead questions of identity with those of technique. Idealizing both represents an unwanted and unwarranted reinforcement of assumptions about the learners and their desires.

Xenolexia thus provides more than "just" a conceptual tool for understanding students' (dis) engagement. Stressing xenolexia's positivity, the pedagogical conclusions drawn from the views of Monique, Elsie and Daisy provide reminders, insights and perhaps innovations for practice that seeks to make the development of academic writing pedagogies more concrete and more meaningful for all involved.

Acknowledgements

References

Alhadeff-Jones, M. .2008. "*Three Generations of Complexity Theorists: Nuances and ambiguities*" in Educational Philosophy and Theory, 40 (1): 66–82.

Badenhorst, C.; C. Moloney; J. Rosales; J. Dyer; and L. Ru. .2015. *"Beyond deficit: graduate student research-writing pedagogies".* Teaching in Higher Education 20 (1): 1-11

Barad, K. (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning.* Durham, NC. Duke University Press.

Barell, J. F. .2006. *Problem-Based Learning: An Inquiry Approach*, London: Sage

Beighton, C. .2016a. *Expansive learning in professional contexts: A materialist perspective.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beighton, C. 2017a. *Groundhog day? Nietzsche, Deleuze and the eternal return of prosumption in lifelong learning.* Journal of Consumer Culture, 17 (3): 695-712

Beighton, C. 2017b. *Telling Ghost Stories with the Voice of an Ogre: Deleuze, Identity, and Disruptive Pedagogies*, Issues in Teacher Education Special Issue. 26 (3): 111-127

Beighton, C. 2018. *A Transversal University? Criticality, Creativity and Catatonia in the Globalised pursuit of Higher Education Excellence* in Cole, D. R. and Bradley, J.P.N. Principles of Transversality in Globalisation and Education, Singapore: Springer. Pp. 47-66

Beighton, C. .2020. *Beyond alienation: spatial implications of teaching and learning academic writing,* Teaching in Higher Education, 25 (2): 205-222

Bennett, J. 2010. *A Vitalist stopover on the way to a new materialism*, in Coole, D. and Frost, S. (eds) (2010) *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics.* Durham: Duke University Press. 47-69.

Bergson, H. .2013a. Essai sur les Données Immédiates de la Conscience, 13th ed. Paris: PUF.

Bergson, H. .2013b. L'Evolution Créatrice, 12th ed. Paris: PUF.

Brugger, P.; Lenggenhager,B. and Giummarra, M.J. .2013. *Xenomelia: A Social Neuroscience View of Altered Bodily Self-Consciousness.* Frontiers in Psychology. 4: 204.

Bryant, L.; Srnicek, N. and Harman, G. (eds) .2011. The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism, Melbourne: re.Press.

Canton, U.; Govan, M. and Zahn, D. 2018. Rethinking academic literacies. A conceptual development based on teaching practice, Teaching in Higher Education, 23(6): 668-684,

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1972. *L'Anti-OEdipe*, Paris: Editions de Minuit.

Deleuze, G. 1985. *Cinema 2: L'Image-Temps,* Paris: Minuit

Deleuze, G. 1988. *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque*, Paris: Minuit.

Deleuze, G. 1968a. *Différence et Répétition.* Paris : PUF

Deleuze, G. 1968b. *Spinoza et le Problème de l'Expression,* Paris: Minuit.

Douglas, K; Barnett, T; Poletti, A; Seaboyer, J; and Kennedy, R. .2016. "Building reading resilience: re-thinking reading for the literary studies classroom". Higher Education Research 35 (2): 254-266

Engeström, Y. and Sannino, A. 2012. *Whatever happened to process theories of learning*? Learning, Culture and Social Interaction 1. 45–56

Fenwick, T. 2012. "Complexity science and professional learning for collaboration: a critical reconsideration of possibilities and limitations" in *Journal of Education and Work*, 25 (1): 141-162

Flowerdew, L. 2020. *The Academic Literacies approach to scholarly writing: a view through the lens of the ESP/Genre approach*, Studies in Higher Education, 45 (3): 579-591

French, A. 2019. *Academic writing as identity-work in higher education: forming a 'professional writing in higher education habitus,* Studies in Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1572735

Haggis, T. 2006 Pedagogies for diversity: retaining critical challenge amidst fears of 'dumbing down', Studies in Higher Education, 31(5): 521-535,

Hamilton, M. .2014. "Global, regional and local influences on adult literacy policy in England". Globalisation, Societies and Education 12(1): 110-126

Henderson, J. .2018a. 'Styling and being styled in university literacy practices' *Teaching in Higher Education* 25 (1): 1-17

Kahn, P.E. and Misiaszek, L.I. 2019. *Educational mobilities and internationalised higher education: critical perspectives*, Teaching in Higher Education, 24 (5): 587-598,

Kempenaar. L.E and Murray, R. .2016. "Writing by academics: a transactional and systems approach to academic writing behaviours". Higher Education Research & Development 35(5): 940-950

Krafft-Ebing, R. .1894. *Psychopathia Sexualis, with especial reference to the antipathic sexual instinct, a medico-forensic study*. Retrieved 4.3.16 https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1854462W/Psychopathia_sexualis

Kuby C.R and Christ . R.C (2019) Speculative Pedagogies of Qualitative Inquiry, London: Routledge

Macauda, G.; Bekrater-Bodmann, R.; Brugger, P.;Lenggenhager, B. 2017. *When less is more – Implicit preference for incomplete bodies in xenomelia,* Journal of Psychiatric Research 84, 249-255

Masika, R. and J. Jones .2016. *Building student belonging and engagement: insights into higher education students' experiences of participating and learning together*, Teaching in Higher Education 21 (2): 138-150

Masny, D. and D.R. Cole. (eds) .2009. *Multiple Literacies Theory*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Mason, M. (ed.) (2008a) *Complexity theory and the Philosophy of Education,* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

McGrath, L and K. Kaufhold. .2016. *English for Specific Purposes and Academic Literacies: eclecticism in academic writing pedagogy,* Teaching in Higher Education 21 (8): 933-947,

Meillassoux, Q. (2006) *Après la finitude. Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence*, Paris, Seuil

Murray, N and Muller, A. 2019. Developing academic literacy through a decentralised model of English language provision, Journal of Further and Higher Education, 43(10): 1348-1362,

Olkowski, D. (2011) *The Interesting, the remarkable, the Unusual: Deleuze's Grand style, Deleuze Studies,* 5 (1): 118-139.

Richards, K. and Pilcher, N. 2018. *Academic literacies: the word is not enough*, Teaching in Higher Education, 23(2): 162-177

Ritzer, G.2014. *Prosumption: Evolution, revolution, or eternal return of the same*? Journal of Consumer Culture 14: 3-24.

Spinoza, B. 1996. *Ethics*, trans. E. Curley, London: Penguin Classics.

St Pierre, E. (1997) "Nomadic enquiry in the smooth spaces of the field: a preface" in *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1997:10,3, pp. 365-383.

Turner, R.; T. Brown and A. Edwards-Jones. .2014. *Writing my first academic article feels like dancing around naked': research development for higher education lecturers working in further education colleges.* International Journal for Academic Development 19(2): 87-98

Upadhyaya, M.A. . 2018. Xenomelia: Profile of a man with intense desire to amputate a healthy limb, *Current Psychiatry*. 17(8): 34-36

Wellington, J. .2010. "More than a Matter of Cognition: An Exploration of Affective Writing Problems of Post-graduate Students and Their Possible Solutions" Teaching in Higher Education 15 (2): 135–150.

White, R. V. 1991. *Process Writing* Essex, England: Longman

Whitehead, A.N. 1985. *Process and Reality* (corrected edition). New York: Free Press

Willis, J. 1996. *A Framework for Task-Based Learning.* Essex, England: Longman

Wingate, U. .2015. *Academic writing and Student Diversity*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Wingate, U., and C. Tribble. 2012. *The Best of Both Worlds? Towards an English for Academic Purposes/Academic Literacies Writing Pedagogy*. Studies in Higher Education 37: 481–95.

Zahn, D.; a Canton, U.; Boyd, V.; Hamilton, L.; Mamo, J.; McKay, J.; Proudfoot,L.; Telfer, D.; Williams,K.; and Wilson,C. 2020. *The whole is more than the sum of its parts – assessing writing using the consensual assessment technique*, Studies in Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1711044

Zembylas, M. .2019. *The affective dimension of everyday resistance: implications for critical pedagogy in engaging with neoliberalism's educational impact*, Critical Studies in Education, DOI: 10.1080/17508487.2019.1617180