



Developing Writing Skills for Graduate NESBC Students

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ABSTRACT

Students from non English-speaking backgrounds and cultures (NESBC) undertaking postgraduate research degrees are expected to write a major thesis and publish conference and journal articles. As novice researchers, they need mentoring through the process of writing a journal article in their specialized area. Experienced supervisors, who have previously published, have an intuitive grasp of the structure of the research article, and are able to suggest restructure of unsuccessful student drafts. This paper analyses the protocols of re-organization of both a professional journal article and sections of a thesis, which a NESBC postgraduate student and his supervisor went through to arrive at a suitable formula for publication. An interactive student/supervisor protocol was used to record the supervisor's revision of an NESBC student's draft journal article and thesis writing process.

INTRODUCTION

The major written text produced by research engineering Master and PhD students is the thesis. In addition, as part of their research, postgraduate students are also expected to write conference papers (CPs) and journal research articles (RAs). However, all postgraduate students are new to writing in the research culture (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Wang & Li, 2008). They have little experience of writing for an academic audience of reviewers, journal readers, and examiners who have definite expectations of just how an academic text in a particular genre should be presented both structurally and linguistically, especially if their background is from non English-speaking cultures and they are unable to identify with the academic requirements (Cadman, 1997; SUT, 2002). Thus, they begin their study as outsiders in the academic community (Gosden, 1992, 1995), "trying to learn the discipline's rhetoric" and often unaware of the implicit "unwritten rules of the game" of research writing. The publishing of papers has been

described as one of the academic “rites of passage” in an academic career (Swales, 1984) while writing the doctoral thesis itself was regarded as “a passport to an academic or research career” by examiners of graduate theses (Johnston, 1997; Martin, 1999).

Research writing can be particularly daunting for students from non English-speaking backgrounds and cultures and non-native speakers (NESBC). These students often have particular difficulties in adjusting to the expectations and conventions in the alien research environment (SUT, 2002). They must manage both “apprenticeship as newcomers in their fields of academic research” in a different academic culture, and the “challenge of a new genre” when writing academic texts (Gosden, 1995; Woodward-Kron, 2007). If the texts do not conform to the “unwritten rules,” their articles and papers are rejected, and their theses often need time-consuming and frustrating revision.

NESBC students can become familiar with the written genres of the RA and the CP through their own reading and by attending conferences, but this is not enough to help them achieve mastery of the conventions of research writing. If they are to learn the implicit unwritten “rules” of RAs, CPs and the research thesis, there needs to be a successful mentoring interaction between supervisor and student. Successful academic mentoring means providing new research students with the opportunity of becoming active learners through writing in the genres, and being sensitive to the cultural assumptions NESBC students may bring to writing in an academic framework.

This paper describes and analyzes the way in which two postgraduate supervisors (SV1 and SV2) restructured (re-organized) the RAs and CPs of two NESBC postgraduate students (PG1 and PG2) respectively, and how SV1 and PG1 restructured sections of PG1’s thesis. The work is presented from the perspective of the supervisors and concentrates primarily on the revision of the introduction sections of the RAs and CPs, and the chapter overview sections of the thesis. The introduction was chosen because it is the section in RAs and CPs that highlights the difficulties of NESBC students most clearly, and causes them most difficulties (Clerehan & Moodie, 1997; Swales & Feak, 1994).

Using a form of “think-aloud” process, the paper analyzes the protocols involved in a supervisors’ mental processes, what changes were suggested and why, and how the students were mentored through these processes (Hayes & Flower, 1986). A “think aloud” allows student to verbalize their internal thoughts while building an understanding of what they are writing and reading. This is one way of “making explicit what people know about effective texts” (Gosden, 1995, p. 37) and of adding to the study of a field where “we still need micro-level analyses of how such processes work in science, and in other advanced academic contexts, and of what makes them more or less effective” (Blakeslee, 1997, p. 127).

BACKGROUND

Swinburne University of Technology, where this study took place, has a strong technical and industry focus in the engineering and technology disciplines (including Chemical, Civil, Electrical, Mechanical and Manufacturing engineering, and Applied Science). Supervisors of postgraduate research students in these fields are almost uniformly insistent that their students write and publish research articles (RAs) and conference papers (CPs) as part of the process of working towards their research degree and submission of their thesis (SUT, 1997).

There are a number of reasons for this publishing insistence. Firstly, supervisors believe that if work from a thesis has already been published in a refereed journal before it is submitted for examination, the examiners know the research has been, in effect, approved by the expert peer community. As examiners themselves, they acknowledge that if a thesis can show papers already published from the research, this gives them increased confidence in the findings (SUT, 2002). Secondly, supervisors see the writing of RAs and CPs as an essential step in the journey from postgraduate student to independent academic researcher. As noted by SV2, “he wouldn’t have done that before. He wouldn’t have done that twelve months ago. He wouldn’t have done it even six months ago I don’t’ think. However, because he’s been given the confidence of this process of writing out the paper and having it listed as a published paper, he is now confident that he can do that. So it’s a confidence transition.”

A third reason for publishing is to stake “a claim” (Moses, 1985) to an idea or process, which is particularly important in these times of increasing commercial and industry funding of research.

THE PARTICIPANTS

When NESBC postgraduates set out to write articles and conference papers, they face a number of difficulties. Some are language based; the language of journals is different to both the general English and the academic English that is taught in pre-university English courses; the terminology is highly specialized to each discipline. Other difficulties, however, concern the structure of this particular type of written text, and the context in which it is written.

The authors of this paper came from different disciplines and their collaboration resulted from a common concern for improving teaching and learning practices especially clarifying the process of academic research writing for NESBC students. There were two NESBC postgraduate students, PG1 and PG2 who were older students and had worked professionally as engineers in their country of birth. The two academic supervisors, SV1 and SV2, had engineering backgrounds, whilst the language and academic skills adviser, AL, had an applied linguistics background. AL had worked with both students and their supervisors through a number of drafts of all texts. This adviser was thus familiar with the linguistic difficulties experienced by the students, and with the teaching methodology and requirements of the supervisors.

THE METHOD

SV1 and AL had both the first and final versions of PG1’s article and chapters. They sat together and recorded SV1’s comments as he talked through the revisions he had made on PG1’s first draft of these. During the interview, AL asked SV1 to describe in detail the revisions he had suggested to the first drafts and why and how he had made these. They noted on the final draft where PG1 had made structural and thematic changes following SV1’s suggestions. They also noted where PG1 had decided he did not like other suggested revisions, and had not made these. These were explicit implementations of the ‘think aloud’ process.

AL interviewed SV2 asking the same questions. In this case, AL had the first draft of the CP written by PG2, a list of dot points suggested by SV2 as a framework for the CP, and the final paper written by PG2, based on those dot points. The data is interpreted by AL using the framework of systemic functional linguistics.

THE TEXTS

The texts in this study were sections of a thesis, a journal article and a conference paper, written by the two NESBC postgraduate students. The article and paper were based on work undertaken for research degrees. PG1 wrote the thesis and the RA, whilst PG2 wrote the CP. When PG1 was writing up his thesis, he wrote a number of drafts and consulted AL as to their language and structure and SV1 as to scientific content and interpretation. AL would read PG1's draft, marking areas where the meaning appeared to be unclear, and then they would sit together discussing these and, where PG1 thought it appropriate, editing the language. SV1 would go through a similar review process of the science with PG1. AL and SV1 consulted together, as well as with PG1, to ensure consistent editing advice was given. When PG1 wrote the research article, he wrote a draft and gave it to SV1 on disk. SV1 read it, and then he and PG sat down together at the computer and PG rewrote it while they talked through suggested changes. PG2 has also consulted AL for advice about the language and structure of his conference paper before taking it to SV2 for comment. In this case, however, AL and SV2 did not consult each other until after the CP had been written by PG2 and accepted for the conference.

The Texts in Context

The structure of RAs and CPs is often fixed by particular journals and conference editorial committees, and can be quite formulaic. The introduction section, in particular, has been shown to follow a number of set and obligatory "moves" that occur in a set structure (Swales, 1984, 1990a, 1990b; Swales & Feak, 1994). A "predominating structure" of four "moves" in RA introductions was initially described (Swales, 1984) and was later modified to three moves in the CARS model, i.e., Create-A-Research-Space, (Swales & Feak, 1994). Each of the three moves described by Swales contains a number of optional or obligatory sub-moves: *Move 1—Establishing a Research Territory* (sub-moves, establishing centrality of research or reviewing previous research); *Move 2—Establishing a Niche* (sub-move, indicating the 'gap' in or questioning or expanding on previous research); *Move 3—Occupying the Niche* (sub-moves, stating the purpose of the paper, outlining the main research findings or outlining the RA structure).

The model developed by Swales (1984) has been influential in second language teaching practice (see, for example, Weissberg & Baker, 1990). This later study takes the three moves model as typical of RA introductions because it's frequent use "indicates that this strategy is at least tacitly perceived as effective for introducing new ideas" (Paul & Charney, 1995, p. 398). A postgraduate student may have important and exciting results that have not been written about before, but unless the data are presented to the academic audience in a framework that the audience recognizes and accepts, they have little chance of being published. The student thus needs to do two things. The first, and most important, step is to understand who the audience is and what they expect, before putting a single word down on paper (Gosden, 1992). Both supervisors in this study took it as a 'given' that aiming a paper at the appropriate audience was of primary importance.

We know, for instance that people will be interested in road deterioration models; thus, we wrote the papers that go with that particular theme. We also know that everybody who is there has got at least some vague interest in road deterioration models, and that they come with a set of knowledge. There are certain givens in that we assume that those givens are in place

(SV2). In attempting to explain the process of explanation in the writing process, SV1 commented that “I discussed with him what we’re trying to do. We’re talking to an audience, we’re trying to tell them, what’s the process we went through to arrive at these results?” However, neither supervisor specifically told the students to write with this in mind, preferring to ask four questions that guided them towards that realization themselves, that is, “Who are we writing it for? Who’s going to be listening? What do they want to know? What’s the piece of information they want to take away from this paper” (SV2).

The second step for a successful NESBC postgraduate writer is to achieve “mastery of the rhetorical manipulation of discourse explaining what you did, why, what you found out and what you interpret from this” (Gosden, 1992). Again, both supervisors guided their students to understand the importance of the “what” and “why” in science writing by asking questions, not by giving instructions. The questions asked by the supervisors were as follows: “What’ve we got there, what contribution are we making, how are we making it, and why are we making it? (SV2 and similar comments by SV1).

The Texts in Analysis

For a non-engineer, someone with an applied linguistics background, these comments by SV1 and SV2 are not random, but show parameters of the systemic functional theory of language implemented in practice, which is “designed to account for how the language is used” (Halliday, 1994) to make meaning. In the texts analyzed in this paper, the *general field*, what the text is about, is publicizing academic research and the *specific field* is offering, explaining and justifying results of research data in either academic journals or conference papers. The *tenor*, who is talking to whom and the relationship between them, is “a complex status relationship” (Halliday 1994), firstly between the student and the supervisor as expert researcher and novice researcher, as mentor and learner, and secondly between the student as writer and the anticipated audience as readers/listeners. The *mode*, what type of text is being made and how it is organized, is written language, set out in a highly structured and formal framework (Butt, Fahey, Spinks, & Yallop, 1988).

When SV1 says we are talking to an audience and SV 2 says we assume that those givens are in place, they are leading the students to understand the importance of the tenor of this context, that is, the interaction between the writer and the audience (Halliday, 1994). Understanding of the intended audience and its expectations is the essential first step in any writing, as noted “even before you write, you need to consider your audience” (Swales & Feak, 1994). When SV2 talks of the importance of describing “what you did, why, what you found out and what you interpret from this,” he is leading the student to see the importance of both the field and the mode, of structuring “what is being talked about” in the text “into a coherent and linear whole” (Butt, et al., 1988).

AL worked from the premise that Swales’ ‘three moves’ CARS model would be the structure to emerge in the finished texts, after they had been edited and revised by supervisors. This was because AL had found that supervisors, who had published widely, automatically produced an RA or CP following the general form of the CARS model. However, having worked extensively with NESBC postgraduates, AL believed that the Swales model would not be found in the students’ first drafts, but would emerge through the process of restructuring under the guidance of the supervisors.

The scientific research article and conference paper are instances of a particular genre, which can be defined as “a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional community in which it regularly occurs” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 13). A recognizable genre is “most often highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 14).

The genre of the RA and CP are characterized by introduction sections that have a recognized and accepted structure. The supervisors in this study knew that for the students’ texts to be accepted as appropriate examples of the genre by members of the academic discourse community, they had to have introductions that conformed to the expectations of that audience. Both already knew what type of text had to be produced, and how it should look, before they started. As expert academic writers in the academic community, they could produce appropriately structured texts without thinking about the process. All my training has been about looking at the broader picture—finding a piece of the broader picture I wish to deal with, finding a way to deal with that piece of the broader picture (SV2).

But while they themselves instinctively know what the framework of the introduction is, they also understand that the students may not have this knowledge. The supervisor has the framework in his head. The student does not necessarily have the framework in his/her head (SV2). “They’re not used to justifying what they have to do” (SV1). When first presented with Swales’ findings by AL, both supervisors at first said they did not write in this way:

Well, it’s interesting because I’ve never thought in that particular way. (SV2)

Do you automatically write like that, using Swales’ moves? (AL)

No I don’t. (SV1)

However, after discussing the “three moves” theory, both supervisors later said they felt this model did, in fact, describe their writing method, though they did not follow the three moves sequentially. SV1 established that he generally just writes the introduction in the sense of from the broad to the very specific. And somewhere in there he adds the need. He is not sure in what order that comes. As he writes it, he realizes there is a need, so he writes the need part, and then he realigns where that need comes in the introduction. The need described by SV1 is Swales’ move 2, establishing a niche. As SV1 writes from the general information towards the specific, he realizes he has to justify this research within a broader context. SV2 works with a similar understanding of justifying his research within the broader picture.

However, SV2 puts forward that this particular introduction is a bit different in that he does not think there was much work been done by anybody else in the area, “you can’t write a paper saying here’s the data, that’s it, go away. So it’s putting a framework around that data. Explaining to people why it’s important that that data is being talked about” (SV2).

THE RESEARCH ARTICLE FRAMEWORK

Both supervisors understood that research articles and conference papers need a recognizable framework in which to present the results. When SV1 first looked at PG1's text, he saw it did not have such a framework. PG1 started to put results in the introduction. He started with a general statement, and then gave the results, and then told me what he is going to do in the experiment, to find out (SV1). The text of the draft of the Introduction to the research article, as PG1 first wrote it, is produced below in Table 1.

Table 1. Introduction to the Research Article

1. Introduction

Joining materials to achieve high strength and functionality of design is a technique which has been utilized for thousands of years. Adhesive bonding is an alternate method by which materials can be joined to generate assemblies or structures without the use of mechanical fasteners, relying on the properties of the adhesive and the material which it joins (adherend). The use of adhesives as a joining medium has traditionally been used in a very demanding, load-bearing applications, for both metallic and non-metallic materials. Modern polymer technology has brought with it the necessity to join materials without mechanical fasteners yet which have high strengths. A large variety of high-strength polymeric adhesives has been developed since the beginning of the space age in the 1940s, encompassing both thermosetting and thermoplastic adhesives, e.g., anaerobic adhesives, epoxies, hot melt adhesives, cyanoacrylates, silicones and UV cured adhesives. A series of epoxy/polycarbonate joints were exposed to microwave curing at 15, 30 and 45 s, where the input power was varied from 500 to 2250 W. The tensile bond strengths were found to be a maximum at 30 s irrespective of the input power level, for example, with 0.05 g/ml of Vulcan carbon black. Based on these results, the microwave energy exposure for the current work was chosen at an input power of 1000 W for 30 s. This was considered to be a conservative use of microwave power whilst achieving acceptable bond strengths.

The introduction is the most crucial chapter in the report and the one which requires the most careful consideration. The reader is introduced in a step by step fashion, to the purpose of the project, concepts and ideas related to the project and the structure of the following sections of the report. This section should endeavor to treat technical issues in a qualitative manner so that the reader can clearly understand the task at hand, without reference to other texts or periodicals. The text structure utilized in the research article giving results before introducing the macro-theme of the text was also consistently used by PG1 when he wrote the first draft of his thesis, particularly in the overview introductory sections to each thesis chapter. A typical example of PG1's thesis text as an overview is given in Table 2.

Table 2. PG1's Thesis Text: The Overview

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the effect of varying carbon black concentrations in the epoxy adhesive on the tensile bond strengths. Butt joints specimens were prepared using rectangular polycarbonate substrate and the C-245 epoxy adhesive. Two types of carbon black, Sterling and Vulcan, were used for all experiments. Curing of the bonded joint was performed using a single-mode resonant cavity waveguide applicator at a fixed 2.45 GHz frequency and at 1000-Watt incident power level for 30 seconds of microwave exposure at all times. SEM results are presented and analysed to reveal any physical characteristics on the fractured joints. Photostress results are also given to see the thermal stresses, which appear around the bonded areas. The optimum carbon black concentration was determined to obtain the maximum tensile bond strengths.

PG1 wrote his introduction to the PhD thesis in four sections. Sections 1, 2 and 3 provided a background to the work and gave experimental results, while section 4 provided the macro-theme of the chapter, that is, “what he’s going to do in the experiment, to find out what is required.” After discussion, PG1 moved Section 4 to the end of Section 1. He was at first reluctant to do this, explaining to AL that, from his cultural understanding of academic presentation, results must be given first since listeners expected this. Otherwise, listeners would either think the results were not good enough to be presented, or would become bored and stop listening. He also later replaced “results and discussion” in line 1 with the words “analysis and discussion,” as more indicative of the content of the chapter, which was called “Experimental Results and Discussions.” PG1 may be viewing academic text structure from a culturally different rhetorical perspective to SV1 and AL. Contrastive rhetoric findings (Connor, 1996; Prince, Blicblau, & Soesatyo, 1999) may support this as an explanation for PG1s structuring. SV2 noted similar difficulties with text structure in PG2’s text.

The Conference Article Framework

After talking to AL, PG2 took this text to his supervisor. They sat together and SV2 produced a structure, using PG2’s research, but set out as a list of dot points as shown in Table 3. SV2 believed that, given the dot point structure, PG2 would write a paper acceptable to the intended audience because it conformed to “implicitly shared goals and discourse conventions”(Gosden, 1995). The ‘dot point’ page is the outcome of that. SV2 commented that “once you get that, you can then relate the dot points back to this and start to clip bits out of that and hang them on to on to the dot points.”

Table 3. The Conference Article ‘Dot Point’ Framework

- Introduction
- the use of recycled concrete in increasing in Victoria
- RCA is seen to be more porous than concrete made with crushed aggregate
- Purpose of the investigation is to develop a porous & strong concrete that
- may result in a sound absorbing material
- Description of test program
- develop knowledge of structure of conc. using RCA
- mineral composition
- porosity
- Lucas Heights tests
- Colloid
- Test conc. samples for sound absorbency
- impedance test rig.
- not computed
- Test slabs “sound chamber”
- last step
- Results of tests to date
- Colloid
- electron microscope
- corrosion test
- Preliminary conclusions

A Framework for Learning

Both supervisors believed it was an integral part of their job to provide students with a framework they could use as a learning tool to become proficient in structuring academic texts. In particular, SV2 suggested that

As the coordinator of his research, I've shown him the process that gets papers published. And he's said I can do that again. And I'll start through that. What I've given him is a mechanism. I mean there are probably many mechanisms but this is one I know that works. And he's seen it work. Therefore, he can make it work again. The student has to have ownership of the theme, the idea, the structure in the paper, because at the end of the day, as a supervisor, you're going to say 'go away and write the paper.' And they've got to have enough belief in the whole thing to give them that drive to do it. They've got to believe that it's possible. They've got to believe that the paper is relevant and will make a contribution and has a good chance of being published.

The Mentor

Expert members of the academic research community (i.e., supervisors), are the ideal mentors for NESBC postgraduates in this learning process because “active discourse community members tend to have the greatest genre-specific expertise” (Swales, 1990a, (Bhatia, 1993, p. 15). If the supervisor does not act as an active and responsive academic ‘mentor,’ then NESBC research students have little opportunity to learn and practice the accepted academic frameworks. While it is true that this mentoring process, “the cognitive apprenticeship model”, has limitations in that not all supervisors can “provide the needed scaffolding for the apprentice” (Belcher, 1994, p. 24), the supervisors in this study felt they could, and should. SV2 observed that “student’s egos are terrible fragile. I want to build them up make them as confident as possible in their area so they can make a contribution. I want them to feel that they can actually launch themselves once they leave here.” In particular, “they don’t know anything about it and they really don’t have an idea of what they’re talking about. They have a glimmer of it but they have no idea. And then it’s the supervisor’s duty to develop to supervise the development of their knowledge” (SV2).

Neither supervisor told the students how to restructure the articles, preferring to work through the structure with the students, leading them to see where the text needed adjustment. SV1 emphasized that “I sat there with him, at the keyboard, I don’t like pen and paper because I believe that using a red pen on a colleague’s work is detrimental. Rather than change it immediately, I discussed with him what we’re trying to do. I said ‘listen PG1, you’ve missed out all the information telling people what you did before you tell them what the results are.’” Moreover, SV2 highlighted that “I ask the student questions. We worked together. With any of my postgraduate students I try to make that dot point paper one of joint cooperation.”

An analysis of the tenor of these exchanges shows that in the relationship between supervisors and students, supervisors clearly speak with an authoritative voice in all interchanges. This authority is realized in imperatives, ‘listen’ and ‘look,’ ‘has to have’ and ‘go away and write,’ and in declarative statements which are, in fact, statements that do not allow for argument: ‘we’re talking to an audience,’ ‘so they develop.’ However, PG1 is referred to as a

colleague throughout, and the use of ‘we’ by both supervisors shows an inclusive relationship, in which it is the job of the supervisor to initiate the student into the discourse community through a process of mentoring.

When SV1 and PG1 were working through the restructuring of the RA together, PG1 did not at first agree with the suggested changes. SV1 did not apply pressure on PG1. There followed an exchange in which SV1 led PG1 to see that his paper lacked ‘a need’ (SV1’s term) or ‘gap’ (Swales, 1990a, 1990b) justifying the research in a broader context.

SV1 asked, “OK PG1. You tell me, in your own words, what did you do?” SV1 typed out PG1’s exact words and PG1 then altered the structure so that it represented what he had done, in chronological order, “A before B or whatever” to his satisfaction. When PG1 was happy with the experimental process, SV1 could ask, “Now, where’d you get this idea from?”

SV1 reported the following sequence in his own word:

He said, ‘Ah! I read it in the paper so and so.’ ‘Ah! OK. Get the paper.’ So he went to get the paper. Alright, now we’ve got one of the references. So that goes back in the introduction.” Through this elicitation process, references needed in the introduction were either found, or moved from an inappropriate section into the introduction. “I talked to him about what he did. I said, ‘OK, has anybody else done this type of work?’ Then we’d go more into the method and I’d say, ‘OK. Where’d you get this method from? ‘Oh! Jones did it. Or Smith did it.’ ‘How do you know who did it?’ ‘Oh! Cause Joe gave me this paper, or so and so told me, or when I was in the States I found out this information.’

SV1 noted that there was at first only one reference hinted at in the introduction. Others were implied in the methodology section in references to the company where the technology was used and what type of microwave was used (a traveling wave tube generator). All these had to be moved back into the introduction

Establishing a niche by finding a gap in previous research, Swales’ Move 2, (Swales, 1990a, 1990b) is indicated in the RA by the phrase, “In contrast to the single mode fixed frequency microwave system...the VFM oven uses.” PG1 did not have this phrase in his draft. SV1 led him to add this essential step, and to understand why it was essential, by asking questions about why he had used this particular machine. When PG1 replied, ‘Cos’ it was here’ and ‘It was all that we had,’ SV1 kept probing, and finally elicited the response, ‘Well, it’s a different way of doing it.’

Swales’ Move 1 was restructured in the RA as SV1’s decision. For example, SV1 noted that “operating processes are fairly general, and I thought they should go in the introduction part, whereas descriptions of the samples themselves should go into the experimental part... He did not have sufficient knowledge to do that. Most Masters’ students don’t ... Many of them have no history of justifying what they do.” SV2 worked in a similar way with all his postgraduate students. This was considered a backwards way of doing it. Knowing some of the answers but getting that from out from the student.

Given the commitment to developing active learners, the supervisors’ comments on how they persuaded students to follow their advice is of interest. SV1 said quite openly “because I’m his boss,” but then immediately qualified this by adding “he’d seen previous papers had been accepted with that format, without too many comments.” SV2’s approach was to persuade through practice.

Similarly, SV1 discussed that in disagreement, “well let’s say that X and I had a disagreement over an abstract. Then I’d say, ‘fine you write the abstract the way you think and come back and talk to me.’ And I’d keep the other set of documents. Then I’d give X the other set of documents and say ‘now look at the abstract on that and compare the two.’”

CONCLUSION

This study has used discussion of the writing, re-organization and restructuring of research articles, a thesis and conference paper by NESBC postgraduates to present the supervisor’s experience of guiding novice research students through this process. Both supervisors felt that it was NESBC students’ status as new researchers, and a corresponding lack of experience of writing in the obligatory rhetorical structures of the RA and CP, that caused them difficulties. Both believed that NESBC postgraduates need guidance and opportunities to practice writing successfully in these genres in English. Successful academic mentoring requires the supervisor to be aware that this is both a teaching and a learning process, and to work in a relationship where the student moves from being a passive to an active learner and researcher. Analysis of the supervisor-student interaction has shown how NESBC postgraduates become active learners rather than “passive recipients” (Belcher, 1994). These instances of the successful transition from passive to active learning are shown most clearly by the fact that the NESBC postgraduates in this study have successfully completed a major research thesis and further international conference papers and refereed journal articles (Krezel, McManus, & Harding, 2004; Soesatyo, Blicblau, & Siories, 2000).

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