
Academic Writing In Malaysia: An Overview

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ACADEMIC DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

The academic discourse community consists of academic staff in the universities in Malaysia and Institut Teknologi MARA, as well as professionals in research institutions, such as the Rubber Research Institute (RRI), the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), the Standard and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM) and the Palm Oil Research Institute, Malaysia (PORIM)

In the research institutions research papers are written in Malay as well as in English. Writing in Malay serves a national purpose to disseminate information to Malaysians as well as to increase academic literature in the national language. Writing in English serves to disseminate information and to facilitate interaction.

The same purposes apply to the choice of language in the writing of research papers in the academic world. In the universities, the academic staff are required to teach, do research and publish their research results. A successful university lecturer is one who not only teaches, but who also carries out research work and publishes the result of his or her research in the form of papers and books.

The three areas of teaching, research and publication form the main criteria for the evaluation of the achievement of academic staff.

Efficiency in teaching and productivity in research and publication are important for the confirmation of the lecturer in his post and for crossing "efficiency bars" in the salary scheme which entitles him to a pay rise.

PUBLICATION IN ENGLISH

For a lecturer to be promoted to the post of Associate Professor or Professor, it is desirable that he or she has published in international journals in his or her discipline. The application forms for these posts at the University of Malaya have special sections which request for such information

The term "international journals" loosely refers to journals which are widely distributed in different parts of the world and are in general accepted as having a reasonably high academic value. In most cases such journals are written in English and these include journals which are published locally. All this means that the lecturer who is motivated to go up the academic ladder has to produce research papers in the national language as well as in English.

Faculties and institutions in the various universities have their own journals. These journals take the bilingual Malay-English mode, in the sense that contributions may be written in Malay or English. This is also the case with journals published by RRI, etc. (See Appendix (2)).

THESES FOR HIGHER DEGREES

The language policy in Malaysia requires that Malay is used in the teaching of courses at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. If it is found necessary for a course, other than a language course, to be taught in a language other than Malay, the permission of the King has to be sought for before this can be implemented. However, theses for higher degrees (Masters and Ph.D) may be written in Malay or English. The language policy of the University of Malaya as far as the writing of theses is concerned is that candidates may choose to write in Malay or in English. A survey of the theses written in the University of Malaya shows that there is still a high degree of preference for theses to be written in English, especially in the Science-based Faculties.

The Language Centre of the University of Malaya has received requests over the years from higher degree students to assist them in writing in English for the purpose of writing theses. This type of assistance has been given on an informal basis to groups of five or six students at a single time. It has not been feasible to offer something on a more formal basis as the Language Centre has not designed anything in the form of a syllabus or a set of guidelines or methodology to go by

It is for this reason that a project on academic writing has been considered necessary. This project is envisaged to have results which are pedagogic and academic in nature. The former will be used as a package of course materials for practice in academic writing. The second will generate further research in academic writing.

PROFILE OF TARGET GROUP

The target group consists generally of people who:

- (i) have already obtained a basic degree,
- (ii) have undergone several years of learning English at the school and the university,
- (iii) are active in research and publication,
- (iv) have an attainment level in English that enables them to write essays of a general nature in English.

OBJECTIVE OF PROJECT

The objective of the project is to produce a course which will provide the consumers with a set of materials for learning/practising writing for academic purposes.

The course may come in the form of computer diskettes as well as printed materials.

APPROACH TO THE COURSE

The approach will be both product-oriented as well as process-oriented. It will be learner-centred.

PRODUCT-ORIENTED APPROACH

This approach will have to come early on in the course. Models of academic writing are given, showing linguistic features and rhetorical features.

Tasks are given to identify and manipulate these features, and finally to produce parallel texts.

PROCESS-ORIENTED APPROACH

This approach is the obverse of the previous one, and it presupposes the student's familiarity with features of academic text.

Academic Writing Overview

In this approach, the student is given a task, decides on a model, and produces a text.

The production of texts also implies editing.

MATERIALS TO BE PRODUCED FOR THIS COURSE

- (1) A set of student's manuals consisting of models and instructions for the study and manipulation of these models as well as for the end task of producing texts. These may be in the form of computer diskettes
- (2) A pedagogic grammar of academic writing.

ORGANISATION OF THE COURSE

The course will be in two bands

Band 1 Product-Oriented

Band 2 Process-Oriented

APPENDIX (1)

Ph.D. Theses According to Language Medium

	Malay	English
1989	8	11
1990	2	28
1991/1992	8	19

Master's Theses According to Language Medium

	Malay	English
1989	21	102
1990	24	91
1991/1992	47	92

APPENDIX (2)

Journals According to the Languages Chosen by the Various Articles

	Year	Articles in English	Articles in Malay	Total
(1) Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies	1989	13	–	13
	1990	13	–	13
(2) Jurnal Jabatan Sejarah, Universiti Malaya	1988	6	2	8
(3) Bulletin of the Malaysian Mathematics Society	1990	9	–	9
	1991	12	–	12
(4) Jurnal Fizik Malaysia	1987	6	–	6
	1991	14	1	15
(5) Bulletin Komputer (Faculty of Engineering University of Malaya)	1990	15	5	20
	1991	15	5	20
(6) Jurnal Bahasa Moden (Language Centre, University of Malaya)	1988	4	3	7
	1991	7	5	12
(7) Jurnal Pengajian Melayu	1989	1	8	9
	1990	1	7	8