

Humanizing Academic Writing: Empowering the Students

Elena FERRAN LARRAZ
Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Spain
elena.ferran@urv.cat

Teaching students to write the “critical essay” in philology is not an easy job. Firstly, it involves textual competence in both the teacher and the student; secondly, discursive competence and an awareness of the discursive practices in the community; thirdly, critical thinking and reasoning as grounded on intuition, that is, this very personal interpretation the text triggers in the student as an entitled reader during training in a philology degree. And yet, the attention in writing courses is focused on linguistic features, textual conventions of the genre, and discursive markers on a superficial level. In this communication we put forward the need to create a true environment of analysis and interpretation of the text where students find their authentic, natural voice also in academic writing in philology studies. A sequence of tasks have been designed so that students may rely on their own reception of the text as qualified readers, the basic idea of “a sense of style”, or “language choice” at the different levels of study of the language to then plunge into the literature on any of the external conditions of the text which ultimately serve to refine or modify their first intuition about the text. Such conditions are the author, the author’s time and culture and the message of the text as contextualized accordingly. The interaction between the subjective (intuitive) aspect of the students as entitled to read the text and more objective aspects they may have access to in class or through their readings may provide a balance where the students feel the power to find their own personal perspective of analysis, more or less distant from those who preceded them in the task of interpreting the text. A more natural academic discourse ability may arise from such critical thinking empowerment, where the students find their own voice, also in academic writing (John Élbow). Thus, also academic language may benefit from the plain language movement, if the teacher of academic writing humanizes it to allow the interpreter, that is, the student, to find a place in the critical essay by actually saying “I” (See Joan Didion “why I write”).

References

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Bio-data

Elena Ferran teaches writing courses in English Studies at the University Rovira Virgili. In the past, she developed her career in different professional, educational and research environments related to her background in law, English and translation. She has taught at three Catalan Universities (UPF, UAB and, finally, URV). Her research ranges from legal discourse and translation (Common-Law v Civil-Law) to other kinds of discourse and, recently, writing. At the moment she is working on the media and also on the didactics of writing.